

How To Help Horses That Bite

Do you have a horse that you absolutely love, and seem to be fantastic in every area except....HE BITES!

The first thing everyone must understand is that horses are naturally a herd animal and they need and enjoy the outdoors and interacting with other horses. When a horse is raised in a stall or paddock without having a relationship with other horses, or is not provided with activity for them to keep occupied, this is when they tend to resort to the only thing they know, in order to get attention or stay occupied... Biting or Nibbling. This is a habit that's created over time when, the issue hasn't been addressed by the owners, or the horse hasn't been exposed to a domestic life style. They've been living in a herd environment, where this behavior is normal in order to form a pecking order amongst the herd.

Now this scenario doesn't apply to every horse's life style, and how they were raised. But in the majority of these cases I've seen this is the story that the owners have shared with me. When they get finished telling me about the horse's life and what it has been through, a sort of light bulb moment arises with the owners. And they realize that the horse hasn't been provided with the environment needed to feel happy and content, much like a young child, with out toys or games to keep them occupied and out of trouble.

Now having shared that with you, the next question that probably arises is... OK, now what can I do to help my horse overcome this addiction or bad behavior?

First, you need to address your horse's current life style. Where he lives and spends most of his time, how much exercise are they receiving, what does there diet consist of, are they in good health, are there any sensitive areas on there body that seem to irritate them, does there saddle fit properly, check there cinch, the fit of your bridle and bit. And make sure when you're riding that there isn't any thing you are doing unknowingly that may be causing them discomfort.

These are all things to be aware of and write down, so you have it in front of you, and you can see it all clearly, and in its entirety. Its easy to over look a lot of these issues, when you try to think of all the questions in your head at one time, with out laying it all out in front of you.

Second, after you've ruled out any physical problems. Now its time to put together a consistent exercise program that will keep them stimulated, interested and busy, For Example: setting up a trail course, going on trail rides, longing over cavaletti or small jumps. Work on some de-spooking exercises with Tarps, plastic, balloons, umbrellas etc. Remember you don't want to do any one exercise for so long they get board and start looking for trouble.

When you have finished applying your new routine with your horse for the day, your horse should be calmer than when you started. Some signs are standing quietly, there head is lowered to a comfortable position, there licking there lips or cocking a hind leg. These are all signs that your horse is calmer and more content!

If your horse is already involved in a routine like the above, and there still having problems keeping there mouths to them selves. Then its time to apply what I'll call the B-G, the bump and go, This is when you use your body parts like your arms, elbows, knees, feet, and head as your personal defense mechanisms. Which ever body part is closest to your horse's mouth when he goes to bite you becomes your current defense. You bump the horses mouth with any of the parts above, hard enough to redirect there attention to the task at hand, (saddling, grooming, leading or even when riding). It's important that you immediately return to the task at hand right away, as if it never happened, apply more pressure each time. This may take a few times, or he may get it immediately. Give this a good length of trial, so he will have a chance to realize that it's when he bites that it becomes uncomfortable for him.

Or if you prefer a more direct, extreme approach, let's apply what is called the 3 second kill method. This is when your horse goes to bite you and you instantly, with out hesitation take action for 3 Seconds, using or applying any means necessary to instill enough discomfort or fear in your horse, that when the 3 seconds is up, and you return to your task at hand, your horse is thinking O'my god, that was so scary and uncomfortable I thought they were going to kill me.(I'll never do that again.) But don't be so extreme you cause a physical injury to your horse. You must continue as nothing had happened. And you may want to carry a dressage whip with you for a while till you feel comfortable with your horse's progress. This is because you can't waist any time trying to find some thing to discipline your horse when he bites you, because after 3 seconds he won't be able to associate the discipline with the bite. And he won't understand why he's being disciplined. So if you miss your chance, just continue till the next attempt.

Now both of these methods will be effective when used correctly, but it also depends on how extensive your horse's problem is and why there doing it. Just remember this could take Time, Consistency, and Patience, which applies to any exercise you do with your horses.

Sincerely,
Sarah Burnside
(John & Josh Lyons Certified Trainer)

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