

Foal Manners

Weaning foals before six months of age should be avoided as the first lessons a foal needs to learn are herd manners. The period from birth to six months of age is a very important time in a foal's life as it is this period where they are socialised.

Mares are generally very tolerant of all new born foals but as they grow they are gradually taught herd manners. Mares normally use a scale of behaviour to first warn and then punish if they are ignored. The first warning sign is usually laid back ears accompanied by a wave of the head in the foal's direction. If a foal ignores the warning, it is usually followed up by a quick nip to enforce the message. Mares will also use the rear end to warn a foal by turning their rump in the direction of the foal and lifting a hind leg. Foals that ignore the message usually get a swift but non serious kick.

Foals play by biting, kicking and rearing at each other and this play is also part of them establishing their place in the pecking order.

You can teach a foal that this behaviour is not acceptable with you using the same style of teaching that a mare uses. Attempts to nip, kick or rear at you should be met with an instantaneous short, sharp verbal warning. If this warning is ignored it should be followed by a poke or pinch to enforce the message.

It is necessary to watch and anticipate the foal's behaviour so you can act quickly or they can turn it into a game of nip and run. The foal is only trying to establish control over you in the same manner as it is working on its place within the herd.

Only use the level of force necessary to get the message across and avoid contact with the head if possible as you don't want to make the foal head shy.

The foal is testing you to see if it is the boss so if you can anticipate naughty behaviour and deal with it immediately, you will end up with a foal with good manners.