

Imprint Training Procedures

The first imprint session takes approximately an hour. Once the umbilical cord has ruptured and the stump is disinfected, dry the foal by rubbing with a towel. When the mare gets up, allow her to smell and lick the foal. The foal will simultaneously bond with the mare and the person handling it.

Desensitization

Start at the poll, rubbing gently but rapidly it until the foal relaxes (as shown by extension of the head and a sleepy expression). Repeat each desensitization procedure until the foal is oblivious to it. The foal will be taught escape behaviour if you stop the procedure while it is struggling. Persist until after calm acceptance occurs. The foal once habituated to the stimulus and will be permanently desensitized to it.

Next, do the outside of the ears followed by inserting a forefinger into the ear canals and desensitizing them. Then do the face, followed by the underside of the upper lip, mouth, tongue and both nostrils. Spend about 10-15 minutes. You can underdo a stimulus but you cannot overdo it. Too many repeats are better than too few. Most foals habituate to about 30-50 stimuli, use more if necessary.

Next should be the eyes, neck and thorax followed by rubbing the saddle area well. All four legs should be done, including repetitiously flexing each joint. The bottom of the feet should be tapped 50-100 times each. Do the rump, the tail and between the hind legs. Include the genitalia and the udder region of the filly and genitals of the colt. Pay special attention to the perineum and using a lubricated glove, insert a finger into the anus. To take a horse's temperature or perform a palpation in the future will not be difficult. It is a good idea at this time to run electric clippers over the foal's body, paying close attention to the face and ears. Use both large and small clippers so they are accustomed to both levels of noise.

Take lots of time rubbing the body with a piece of crackling plastic. Before any stimulus is stopped, watch for habituation, as indicated by relaxation. At this stage, if you desire, you may also desensitize the newborn foal to other things they may encounter such as hissing spray cans, whistles, loud music, flapping flags and whirling ropes.

On the second day the second session is performed while the foal is standing. It is important that the foal does not learn to escape when being worked, so have another person to help with these procedures. To alleviate anxiety, position the foal nose-to-nose with the dam. Test all of the areas done the previous day. Repeat the process if an area is not adequately desensitized. You should be able to insert a finger into the nostril or ear and pick up the feet and tap on them. Encircle the girth area with your arms and rhythmically squeeze the chest until habituation occurs. These sessions with the foal on its feet should not exceed 15 minutes or the foal will become fatigued. So, several short sessions may be necessary on this second day.

A foal can be desensitized to unlimited stimuli, flapping blankets, a stream of water from a garden hose, being led through water or exposed to livestock and dogs. The foal can be loaded in a float with the mare at 4-5 days of age and taken for a ride.