

## Aggressive Horses Part 2

By Marie Hoffman

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In the first half of this article I talked about how to handle horses that were aggressive because they were afraid of their human handlers. I called these horses Type A. The horses in this article I called Type B. They are the horses that have learned some time in their life that they are dominant over humans. They do not respect their human handlers and will bite, kick, and chase them out of their pastures or space. They treat humans like a submissive horse in their herd.

I caution all who are retraining this type of behavior to be very good at reading the horse's body language. Horses can be very dangerous when they perceive that they are cornered or feel the need to fight to protect their order of dominance. They should be retrained without a battle and reading the body language will enable the handler to back off at the first subtle signals from the horse that he is becoming respectful of the handler. Keep in mind that there are few Type B horses; most are Type A.

Type B horses are handled with a different attitude than Type A. The handler must reestablish respect with Type B. When I retrain Type B horses, I will go into the stall being very attentive to the horse's ears going back and or him turning to kick me. Horses that are afraid (Type A) may also turn their rumps toward you but their body language will be slightly different. Type A horses will be tense in their neck and body. They will usually not pin their ears flat back. Type B horses will usually display their aggressiveness with their head first, pinning their ears, barring their teeth and/or biting. Some horses that are aggressive will also turn their rumps toward you to kick but they will not have as tense a look about them as Type A. Type B horses' eyes will have a determined look in them instead of an afraid look. When the horse's eyes look afraid they will be wide open and often the whites around the edge of the eye will show. There will be worry wrinkles above the eye.

Watch your horses in the pasture or lot, become familiar with what the dominant horse's body language looks like when he is telling another horse to move away from a pile of hay. The Type B horse will use the same body language to tell you to move away as he uses with the other horses. Type B horses are often top or close to top on their herds pecking order. This will give the handler a chance to observe what body language that particular horse uses to express his dominance.

Once I know what body language the horse uses I set it up so I have the best chance to be easily successful in retraining the behavior. If the horse is stall aggressive I will move him to a new stall and work him there. The horse is often not possessive of a new territory right away. This will make my job a bit easier by being on neutral territory. I will approach the horse and touch him with TT.E.A.M. circles.

The use of TT.E.A.M. touches on the horse gives the horse a different sense of his body and usually improves his relationship with his handler. As I use the TTTouch on the horse, I will find if there are any sore or tender places. I will note them and see if they are the cause of the horse's aggressiveness. If the horse is ticklish or sore he will show aggressive like body language to tell you to stay away from that spot. This is different than either Type A or B aggressive behavior. It should be recognized as the horse communicating with you that what you are doing is unpleasant for the horse. This should be treated like a Type A behavior, but if the handler acts timid the horse could soon become a Type B. The confident handler should use different touches to train the horse to accept being touched on his body all over. If the horse is sore the soreness should be relieved before you should expect the horse to stand while you touch him all over.

If the horse is not sore or ticklish or when I approach him, he shows any aggressive body language I start by verbally scolding the horse. I tell the horse No sharply. If I get no positive body language change, I then use a whip to signal on the horse's body, never the head, for the horse to move away from me. I signal with the whip only as hard as necessary to make the horse move away from me. I want to use the whip as little as possible. I am not spanking the horse; I only want him to move away when I ask. As soon as he moves away and puts his ears anywhere but back, I stop and praise him in a toning kind of voice. By moving away, he is in his body language, showing me respect. I release all pressure of my body language by relaxing and like nothing changed I go back to doing TT.E.A.M. touches doing the TTTouches the horse likes. The horse will want me near him because I am doing something pleasant for the him.

If the horse is aggressive in the pasture, I would never go into the pasture unless I carried a lunging whip and sometimes a four foot whip too, to defend myself if necessary. I would put food down. When the horse came up I would ask the horse move away. I would lead the horse back to the food once he showed me respect by staying away. While he was eating I would stroke him and/or do TT.E.A.M. circles on his neck and shoulder. If he became aggressive toward me then I would move him away again and then lead him back. Sometimes I will let the horse come back to the grain if they put their ears

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forward and using their body language ask me for the grain. Watch the horses in the lot and you will see this body language if a submissive horse sneaks (asks for) a bite of hay from a dominant horse. This body language is non-threatening to the dominant horse. It is this non-threatening body language I am looking for. One horse I worked with was a bay mare that would bite you any opportunity she could so you would go away. She would also kick at any opportunity. When you walked into her stall she would pin her ears and if you did not leave she would enforce it with a bite. If she was tied she would pin her ears and kick you if she felt you were in her way.

This mare learned this behavior. Many handled foals or young horses have at one time or another challenged their handlers in some way. They would strike, kick, bite to be able to get you to move away from their friend or food. The owners of this mare had been kicked by her when she was a young foal and started to act timid around her. This is understandable because little hooves hurt. By the owners acting timid the foal learned early that she could control the human handlers with her hooves. This young mare then learned she could chase them out of her space with her teeth. She continued this behavior until she was brought to me to train.

When asked, she would not walk on black top, over a board, or any surface than ground and grass. Her training of learning to lead properly and move forward from a tap with the whip on her croup also helped her with her control issue with humans along with her saddle training. She learned that she was safe and successful when she responded to the cues her handler gave. It was interesting that she had no fear of the tack or me on her back. In two months she was well started under saddle. She would walk over any surface asked. Her aggressive behavior in the stall and lot had disappeared in that two months time. I cautioned her owner to be consistent in his handling for a long time so her aggressiveness won't reappear. Her dam was also very aggressive as a young horse though she is fine now. I have often found that foals that are extra aggressive often have dams that either were or are still aggressive toward humans.

All the aggressive horses I have worked with at some time or another have challenged their handlers and won. This is a learned behavior. Often this is when the horses were foals. Most of the time the owners are so shocked by the foal becoming aggressive that they back off and leave them alone. A foal's fast flying hooves and biting teeth are not fun or safe to be around. Some horses go through a very mild form of this behavior while others can be very aggressive even as early as 3 or 4 months of age. If the dam is the dominant mare of the pasture or pen, the foal is more likely to have learned the behavior necessary to be the boss of the pasture from his dam. That foal will likely try that behavior out on his human handlers.

In retraining Type B horses, I always addressed their behavior by firmly making the young horse move away from me then leading them back to their food or friend and have them stand there while I petted them. I make sure they work their jaw, if they won't, by rubbing my fingers on the roof of their mouth. Moving them away from their food tells them that they can not challenge me and by letting them eat their grain or stand by their friend tells them I am not a threat. So there is no need to challenge me.

Every time I am with the horse I pay close attention to him. Every time the horse shows aggressive behavior I address it using the minimum amount of correction needed. Horses in the herd use subtle body language to tell the other horses where they are on the pecking order. They enforce their position only if the submissive horse challenges their position. The human handlers should also do the same. Once the horse is comfortable in his position of the pecking order he will not challenge the lead horse at all. Although we are not in their herd, the horse can learn to respect and not fear his human handlers without continually challenging them for dominance.

To retrain the horse that has learned to show aggressive behavior to humans must be handled by a competent person who will not be intimidated by the horse's actions. This person also must be able to read the horse's body language well enough not to be hurt. Most horses bluff first and the handler must change their mind at this stage of the behavior before the horse actually bites or kicks. The handler must also know when to back off and not make the horse afraid or feel cornered or get hurt themselves. I also make sure the horse is not hurting in his body that could cause him to behave aggressively. If you have a back ache, would you like the person that made you put on a pack and go hiking? Once pain is eliminated I assume it is a learned behavior that needs to be retrained.

The responsibility of the human handlers is to gain the respect of the horse but not train the horse to fear their handlers. The key to this is to watch the body language of the horse. The handler must discipline the aggressive behavior and praise the

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correct behavior. The handlers must be consistent and fair in their retraining. The use of T.T.E.A.M. touches on the horse gives the aggressive horse a different sense of his body and often improves his relationship with his handler. Retraining aggressive horses is often a difficult task for even a very experienced horse person.

It can take months to retrain a Type B horse. All handlers must be consistent in what behavior they expect from the horse. The horse will often settle and become quieter in nature once he accepts the human handlers as his leaders and accepts his position of the follower of the dance. The goal is to get beyond working with your horse on an instinctive level of dominant and submissive, and working toward the goal of a partnership. If the horse is acting dominant this must be addressed first before the human horse relationship can be truly a dance and partnership.

When retraining a Type B horse, he will at first respect only the persons that he is unable to dominate. This means every person that handles the horse must be able to achieve the correct behavior from the horse. In time as the horse learns trust and accepts his position of being submissive to his human handlers he will not show his aggressive behavior toward all humans. The time this takes is different for each horse.

Set your situation up to be successful and both you and your horse will be safer and happier too.