

Catch me if you can!



Horses avoid being caught for many reasons, but whatever has happened in the past, horse can learn to catch their humans and find it a rewarding experience!

Step 1. Avoid is the operative word. The horse won't be caught because they don't want to be caught. Teach them that keeping still, instead of moving away will make you leave the field (it's what they want most and we need motivation!). Approach almost as far as your horse's 'escape' threshold, and before he goes to leave, you leave first. Practise until his confidence increases and he allows you to come closer.



Step 2. Once your horse is staying closer, longer, and their negative emotion has begun to turn to curiosity, you're ready to reward their attitude change. Allow your horse to approach as far as he can, then reinforce this behaviour by stepping away, giving him some more personal space. If it's safe to do so, leave some food on the floor and retreat far enough for him to enjoy eating it - without fearing it's a trick. Practise until your horse is more positive than negative about your appearance in the field.



Step 3. When your horse is readily stepping towards you for the food, start feeding from your hand. Then build to stroking his neck while you are feeding the treat. If your horse tries to step away at this point, just remove the food, relax, and wait until he approaches again. Reward the next approach by giving the food treat, and then with a second treat, try again to stroke your horse. The new deal is that your horse gets a treat when and only when you stroke him (you may need an in between step of simply moving your hand as if to stroke - then withdrawing it before feeding the treat). When your horse gets good at this you can then substitute stroking with putting the lead rope around your horse's neck, then gradually building up to fitting the head collar. Again - you may need a number of in-between steps.

Do I have to use food? No. The aims are for your horse to relax about your approach, and then to actively enjoy it. As long as approach happens at a pace he can handle, and you back off when your horse is doing the behaviour you want, as opposed to the behaviour you don't, touch in the form of rubbing and scratching will also be reinforcing.