

Kids & Horses

Most adults can remember clear as day the first time they sat on a horse. Being on a horse is a memorable experience because it is remarkably different than, well, anything. Horses are big and they offer a whole new view of the world. A kid all of a sudden gets a lot taller when their hoisted onto a horse's back. This feeling, along with the feeling of going faster than they could on their own two legs, is very addictive.

Once a child gets a taste of riding, they are likely to want more. If you're a parent reading this, I strongly suggest you to consider riding lessons. I can almost guarantee you won't regret it. The first reason is simple- confidence. When your child can get on an animal that outweighs them ten times, make the animal walk, trot and canter quietly, and maybe even convince it to run around a barrel, all the while making it look effortless, they will really have accomplished something! Horseback riding, like most athletic activities, is much harder than it looks. What you don't see as the observer is how much muscle control, strength and balance goes into even the simplest of manouvers. Horses don't naturally move in straight lines and perfect circles. They don't naturally lower their heads and trot prettily around an arena. Your kid is making all of that happen. As your child continues to advance as a rider, you will see their confidence grow. Riding is HARD and your kid can do it!

I have seen many a timid and shy children blossom into a confident, outspoken and capable little person simply by hanging out with horses and learning to ride. When a child rides, they may be able to get away with being a passenger at first, but soon they will have to take charge. There are many naughty ponies to thank for timid little children learning to quite literally take the reins and take control. In the horse/human relationship, the rider is dominant and has to be for her own safety. Riding teaches kids to lead, to make quick decisions and to trust their instincts. Your kid may think they are taking a riding lesson, but really she's taking a lesson in life.

Horses also teach responsibility. If you haven't noticed, they're alive and have numerous needs. Horses require hard labor- mucking stalls, hauling water buckets, unloading hay, cleaning tack, repairing fences, cleaning the barn, and the list goes on. All of these chores have to be done on a daily basis. Kids who are involved with horses learn to work hard and take pride in their work- another valuable lesson for life! Believe me, my children have both done a full circle when it comes to taking care of their horse. Getting them to clean their room is one thing, but taking care of their horse is a main priority for them!

In a society where kids are taught that their value lies in how they LOOK, horses teach kids to place value on what they can DO. Would you rather your pre-teen spend her afternoon wandering around the mall or master an automatic release on horseback? Which do you think will instill tenacity, perseverance and confidence in their ability to set goals and reach them?

Horses will also turn your child into a tough cookie. Horses are big, and when you fall off them, it hurts. The important thing is to get right back on. Undoubtedly, everyone who rides will fall off at some point and if they love the sport, they will haul themselves right back on and give it another try. There is little time for tears and pity parties. The only way to get better is to get back on.

Children grow into teenagers, having horses around can be especially helpful. Your teenager can't get caught at her friend's party because they have to be up early in the morning to trailer to a show. If her boyfriend or girlfriend dumps them, so what? Their horse is cuter anyway. Horses give teenagers something to think about beside boys or girls, parties and all the myriad superficial things our consumer society is selling.

I am convinced that horses give back far more than they cost in ways that are immeasurable and priceless. Many families have made sacrifices so that their kids could ride, show or own horses. The time and money spent on these endeavors has a return that will stretch into the child's teen and adult years. Simply put, horses are good for kids.