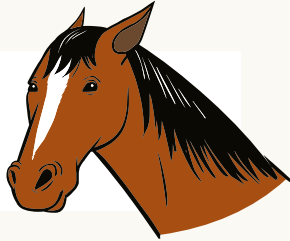


An angry or very unhappy horse

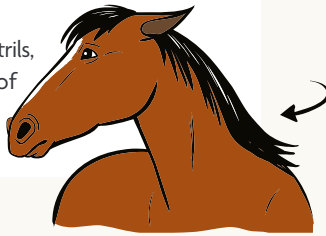
This horse is not happy and wants you to stay away or go away. A horse may give a series of warnings if they are angry and want you to stay away or go away. If you ignore these they may bite.

1 Mildly annoyed horse: wrinkled, elongated nostrils, ears held slightly back.



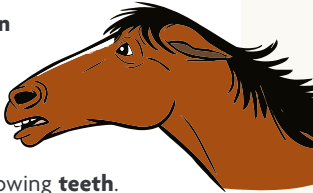
If you do not go away

2 Mid-scale threat: wrinkled, elongated nostrils, ears back towards top of neck, head raised and turned towards target.



If you still do not go away

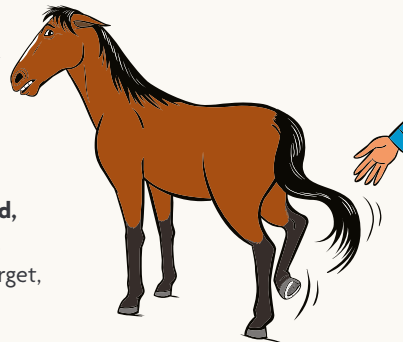
3 Severe threat: wrinkled, elongated open nostrils, ears laid flat against neck, head raised and horse may lunge at target, whites of eyes showing, mouth open showing teeth.



Kick threat:

You should avoid approaching a horse from behind. If you do they may warn you if they are angry and want you to stay away or go away. If you ignore this, they may kick.

Horse is **lifting** a hind leg and may **wave** it, tail may be **clamped** down or **swishing**, wrinkled, elongated open nostrils, ears laid flat against neck, head raised, whites of eyes showing, head turned towards target, horse may **squeal**.



What to do if you are worried about your horse's behaviour

As well as recognising and understanding your horse's body language, it is also important to be aware of any changes in their behaviour.

To spot any changes it's important to spend time watching and interacting with them and learning about how they usually behave. If your horse's behaviour changes, it could mean they are distressed, bored, ill or injured. Some other signs that your horse may be suffering include aggression, avoiding people or other horses (e.g. standing or lying apart from other horses in a field), loss of appetite, excessive rolling which may indicate colic (a veterinary emergency), or performing repetitive patterns of movements called stereotypies (crib-biting, wind-sucking, weaving, box-walking).

If you have any concerns about your horse's behaviour and how they are feeling always speak to your vet first and, if necessary, they can refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist. For further information about finding a vet and/or clinical animal behaviourist, visit the RSPCA website at: www.rspca.org.uk/findabehaviourist or www.rspca.org.uk/findavet

Photos: nigelbl0/i-stock, Joe Murphy/RSPCA/Photolibrary



Understanding your horse's behaviour



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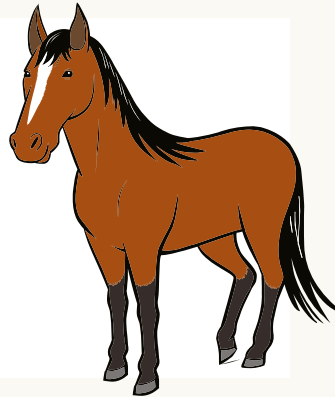
Illustrations: Lili Chin, Joe Murphy/RSPCA, Photolibary

RECOGNISE AND UNDERSTAND YOUR HORSE'S BODY LANGUAGE

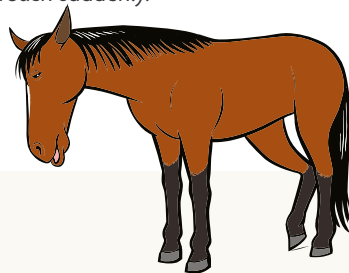
A happy horse

This horse is relaxed and happy.

1 **Alert, relaxed horse**
Horse is **standing** with a **relaxed** body posture, **resting** one hind leg, **alert** with ears **up** and facing **forward**, eyes **open** showing **no white**, muzzle is **relaxed** with **oval** nostrils and **closed** mouth.



2 **Dozing, resting horse**
Horse is **standing** with a **relaxed, long and low** head, neck and body posture, **resting** one hind leg, ears held **low** and pointing **sideways**, eyes **open, half-closed or closed**, muzzle **relaxed** with **oval** nostrils, lower lip may be **hanging low**. Horse is **dozing or resting** and may be **startled** if you approach suddenly.



How is your horse feeling?

Just like you, your horse can experience a range of emotions including happiness, anxiety, fearfulness and anger. It's important to understand which emotions your horse is feeling so that you can take any action necessary to make sure they are happy and healthy.

Your horse's body language can give you signals about how they are feeling. All horses are individuals and they will all have differences in their behaviour, so it's really important to spend time watching your horse, in order to learn what is normal behaviour for them.

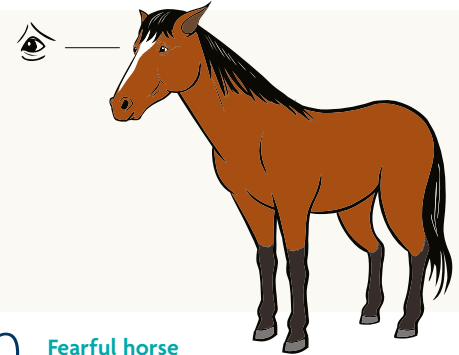


A horse which does not react on being approached when awake or which shows little interest in their surroundings may be showing learned helplessness – a response to long-term poor welfare.

A worried horse

This horse is telling you they are uncomfortable and don't want you near them.

1 **Anxious, in pain horse**
Horse is **standing** with **raised** head, ears held **back** or pointing in **different** directions, eyes **open** with **tense muscles** above eye making an **upside-down v-shape** (see inset), **tense** muzzle with **square** nostrils, **tense** cheek muscles. Horse may be **anxious** or in **pain**.



2 **Fearful horse**
Horse is **leaning back** with head **raised** and turned to **face** alarming object, ready to **flee**, ears held **back**, **whites** of eyes showing with **tense muscles** above, **tense** muzzle with **square** nostrils. Horse is about to **run away**.

