

## Equine Welfare Guidelines

The Pony Club's Equine Welfare guidelines are designed to assist Members, Parents/Guardians, Coaches, Volunteers, Officials, and Staff in caring for horses and ponies as sentient beings, prioritising their welfare, protecting their physical and emotional well-being, and encouraging compassionate, respectful and responsible care.

The guidelines should be read alongside The Pony Club Manual of Horsemanship to ensure all aspects of care and management are covered.

**The Five Domains:** The Five Domains of Animal welfare is the most recent evolution of the well documented five freedoms. The Domains approaches animal welfare in a more holistic way meaning that it's not just the basic needs being met, but now both their physical and mental wellbeing should be considered in decision making about health and welfare.



Structured around the five domains, The Pony Club's Equine Welfare Guidelines aim to:

- Highlight the **Rules and Expectations** of The Pony Club and what you must do to comply with them.
- Explain what **Coaches and Officials should monitor and support with**, so they know what to look out for and how to support Members and supporters.
- Provide **Husbandry and care guidance** on the general care and management of horses, to achieve optimal physical health and mental well-being.

## **Nutrition:**

All horses and ponies should be fed and watered appropriately to ensure good health and well-being.

## **Rules and Expectations:**

- **Water** – All horses and ponies attending all Pony Club Organised events must travel with water. It should be made regularly available throughout the event as well as the journey, if travelling for long periods of time.
- **Feed** - Horse and Ponies must have access to forage during a rally or event where they will be in attendance for more than four hours.
- **Weight** - Failure to address weight issues for horses and ponies breaches The Welfare Policy.

Please refer to individual rule books for further details on Rules.

## **Coaches and Officials should monitor and support with:**

- Signs of ill health that may have a dietary cause, like diarrhoea or a poor coat.
- Watch out for dehydration on very hot days.
- Body condition should be between 2 and 3. If a horse or pony is outside of these scores, support the Member to adjust feeding and management. For further information about condition scoring, please see Appendix 1. [World Horse Welfare - How to know if your horse is the right weight.](#)

## **Husbandry and care guidance:**

- Feed good quality feed that is appropriate to the weight, type, breed and level of exercise of the horse or pony. Both over and under feeding can have a negative effect on welfare.
- Most of the diet should be from forage, which they should have constant access to. This can be grass, hay, haylage, chaff or a hay replacer.
- Grazing on pasture or other forage such as hay or haylage not only provides appropriate nutrition and the pleasure of chewing, foraging, and browsing but is also known to have a positive impact on their physical and mental well-being.

- Horses and ponies like to browse for different plants, so allowing them to have access to safe hedgerows or providing safe small branches from trees such as willow or hazel to chew and enjoy, will improve wellbeing.
- Depending on workload, body condition score, and health conditions, concentrate feed can be fed alongside forage. If forage cannot provide key micronutrients, it is sensible to feed a vitamin and mineral balancer to aid metabolic functions and ensure that they are not deficient.
- Understand and manage the feeding of supplements carefully. Not all supplements are safe and suitable for all types of horses and ponies.
- Make changes to the diet gradually.
- Seek veterinary advice to manage any metabolic conditions.
- Feed from clean, safe bowls, nets and buckets.
- Make sure horses and ponies have a small amount of fibre in their stomach before exercise.
- Clean, fresh water should be always supplied, when in fields, stables and when travelling. It should be checked at least once a day. Take note of your horse/pony's normal intake so you can monitor it at times when intake might be affected, such as very hot or cold conditions.

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## Environment:

Horses and ponies should have a species-appropriate living environment where they feel safe, are free from danger, and offer adequate shelter and gives them the benefit of **forage, freedom and friends**. Horses and ponies are herd animals, and as such need company, which should ideally be from other horses and ponies.

## Rules and Expectations:

- During camps and stay-away competitions, ensure ponies' welfare and wellbeing are prioritised, and address and manage stress and upsets.
- **Always remember to put welfare ahead of competition and personal gain.**

Please refer to individual rule books for further details on Rules.

### **What Coaches and Officials should monitor and support with:**

- Appropriate provision for horses and ponies at all organised events.
- Good quality, safe riding surfaces and equipment that are suitable for the activity.
- Making sure ponies do not become too hot or cold.

### **Husbandry and care guidance:**

- The environment where horses and ponies are kept should provide:
  - A natural environment where they can freely move, graze and forage. If turnout is not available hand grazing or free exercise should be offered.
  - Enrichment.
  - Protection from inclement weather.
  - Be safe and clear of hazards that could injure them.
  - Free from poisonous plants.
  - Be of an appropriate size for the numbers using it.
- Fencing should be species specific, safe and fit for purpose.
- Stables and shelters should be of suitable size with good ventilation, clean, suitable bedding with constant access to forage and water.
- If possible, stables and fields should allow visual access to other horses or ponies. See later for more details.
- Rugs should be used as necessary to give warmth and protection, but care should be taken not to overheat the horse or pony because this can cause unnecessary stress. Rugs should be removed and checked daily.
- Good quality sleep is essential for the body to rest and recuperate. Horses and ponies sleep for several short periods during the day and night. It is important to provide a suitable location and bedding, whether inside or outside where horses feel safe, so they can get good quality sleep.
- When travelling to events, ensure boxes and trailers are safe, properly maintained and have enough space and ventilation.
- Travelling to an event where there is a substantial change to their normal environment, for example being stabled for several days, when they normally live out, could have a

major impact on stress levels, wellbeing, sleep, diet and health. This should be considered when making plans for such events.

- Long journeys should allow regular rest breaks where water should be offered. They should be allowed to recover from a long journey before being exercised or competed.
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## **Health:**

Preventing disease and recognising signs and symptoms of ill health and pain in horses and ponies is key to keeping them happy and healthy.

## **Rules and expectations:**

- All horses and ponies must be vaccinated in accordance with The Pony Club vaccination policy.
- Whips and spurs can be used to enhance your aids, but never as a punishment or in anger.
- Permission is required to use spurs. Riders should be aware of the full welfare implications associated with the use of spurs and be able to demonstrate how to ride correctly whilst wearing them. Please refer to The Pony Club Spur Rule.
- Do not trim the sensory hairs around the mouth, nose, eyes or inner ear.
- A horse or pony used at PC rallies and events must be at least four years of age on 1<sup>st</sup> January.
- Do not ride a horse or pony that is lame due to pain, injury or abnormality.
- Do not use a bit, noseband, whip, spurs or any other piece of tack or equipment in a way that leads to injury, stress, pain or discomfort.
- Do not use any method to intentionally cause pain, discomfort or injury in training or competition.
- The combined weight of the rider and equipment, including tack should not be more than 20% of the horse's weight. For example: A pony that weighs 350kg should not be ridden by someone with a combined weight of more than 70kg including all tack and equipment including riding hat and boots. However, the rider's weight is not the only criteria for a horse/pony to be "suitably mounted". For example, the length of the rider's leg on a small pony or a large horse is also important, as is the condition score of the

horse. The horse or pony should be an optimal weight with a body condition score between 2 and 3. If the score falls above or below this range, the ideal rider weight should be adjusted. A rider with a weight that is 20% of a very obese horse could be a welfare concern. It is important to remember that it is not an observation of the rider's weight, but it's the combination of horse/pony and rider that are not compatible with each other. Please refer to sports rule books for specific weight rules.

- The Pony Club Biosecurity Policy should be observed, and its advice and guidance should be followed.

Please refer to individual rule books for further details on Rules.

### **What Coaches and Officials should monitor and support with:**

- The horse or pony should not be allowed to participate or continue if there are any signs of lameness, discomfort, unusual lethargy, unwillingness to participate, stress or fear.
- The intended workload should not exceed horse/pony's ability, for its age, size, strength and fitness.
- Any signs of illness, dull coat, being tucked up, uninterested behaviour, which is known as learned helplessness or chronic pain, aggression, an adverse reaction to being girthed, or unwillingness to lift a foot when asked are all signs that should not be ignored.
- Unsoundness due to poor farriery or lack of care of the foot should be addressed.
- Any ill-fitting tack or equipment should be highlighted, and a request made for a professional to check it.

### **Husbandry and care guidance:**

- All horses and ponies need routine preventative health care to keep them at optimum health. It is sensible to have a health plan which keeps a record of all routine health care. It is a useful way of ensuring their needs are met. This may include:
  1. Vaccination records
  2. Hoof care
  3. De-worming programmes
  4. Preventive physical care (like Physiotherapy and other professional physical therapies)
  5. Tack checks for both saddle and bridle

6. Dental Care
7. Weight monitoring
8. Temperature and respiratory rate checks
9. Pre-existing conditions
10. Regular medicines
11. Feeding schedules
12. Daily routines
13. Cleaning and disinfecting schedules
14. Pasture Management Plan

It is strongly advised that all professional equine practitioners used are registered with an appropriate professional regulatory body. They will be able to advise you on the frequency of visits required to ensure all preventive measures are put in place to optimise your horse/pony's health and wellbeing.

- Recognising signs of stress, pain and discomfort, and discomfort related behaviours can be very difficult as the cues that horse and ponies give can be very subtle and not always obviously related to the source of their discomfort. These behaviours can range from wrinkled nostrils to bucking and rearing and lots of behaviours in between.
- Remembering to **'listen to the whispers, so they don't need to shout'** is really important. Subtle signs of pain, fear, stress and discomfort can be easily overlooked. Ignoring this can lead to unwelcome behaviours or learned helplessness, where they are apathetic to pain and other stresses around them.
- Know their 'normal' movement patterns, appetite, demeanour.
- Check at least twice daily, if field kept and ensure they are their normal self and have no injuries.
- It is very important for horses and ponies to be able to have daily turnout or exercise, not only for their physical well-being but also for their mental well-being.
- The use of medicines, such as NSAIDS (Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) like phenylbutazone (Bute) or Paracetamol, should be carefully considered and should only be used under veterinary supervision. Its purpose should never be to mask lameness or enable them to carry on ridden work if it causes pain or discomfort. However, if an older pony thrives on having a job and enjoys an occasional trip out to a low-level rally and needs some support to ease some mild soreness to old joints, the use of anti-

inflammatory drugs can be beneficial. This should be done transparently with the involvement of veterinarians and Branch DCs. This advice does not apply to competition or horses and ponies in medium or hard work.

- Effective Biosecurity at home and when out and about is a key component to keeping horses and ponies healthy.

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## **Behavioural Interactions:**

How horses and ponies interact with humans, their environment, and other horses significantly affects their physical and mental well-being. Good Horsemanship extends far beyond its original scope, placing much more emphasis on what is right, whether horses and ponies are happy and content, whether they understand and are willing, rather than acting through habit, pain, or fear of reprimand.

### **Rules and expectations:**

- Tack and equipment must comply with all sports rules.
- Do not ride in a manner that causes pain, fear or suffering.
- Do not allow a horse or pony to remain stressed without intervention.

Please refer to individual rule books for further details on Rules.

### **What Coaches and Officials should monitor and support with:**

- Address signs of stress at rallies and competition.
- Support parents and guardians with new ways of training and working, and sign post them to further training and understanding.
- Make sure rallies and training incorporate the new training syllabuses and try to use any outdated training methods as learning opportunities about why The Pony Club no longer supports them. Understanding and communication is key.

### **Husbandry and care guidance:**

#### **Interactions with humans**

- In order to learn and understand, horses and ponies need clear and consistent training and expectations of their behaviour. If aids and boundaries are inconsistent, it leads to



confusion, frustration and unpredictability. This may lead to a horse or pony trying to escape or fight and finally give up, which is known as learned helplessness.

- Riding and training methods should not include punishment or cause pain or discomfort. It should always be humane. Punishment has been shown to frighten and confuse horses and ponies, weakening the bond between them and their rider. A frightened, confused horse or pony can quickly become dangerous and unpredictable.
- Behave calmly around horses. Don't rush a horse or pony who is unsure or get angry and frustrated with them. Remain calm, gently reinforce the desired behaviour and then repeat.
- The use of outdated terms such a 'lazy', 'naughty', 'stubborn', 'kick them', should not be used to describe unwanted behaviour or the treatment of horses and ponies. If someone uses these terms, they may be outdated in their understanding and knowledge.
- Allow horses and ponies to show interest in things and explore their environment. Give them time to sniff, look, and touch new things, and allow them time to explore and accept them. This will help build a bond of trust and allow them to explore and understand the world around them.
- Regular grooming not only keeps their coat healthy, but it is also a good way to bond with the and get them used to being handled. Scratching places where other horses or ponies would mutually groom further helps with bonding and creates positive experiences.

## **Interactions with the environment**

- Try to keep horses and ponies outside as much as possible, with **friends, forage and freedom**. If there is no alternative, enrichment methods can be used to improve their wellbeing.
- Some alternative ways of housing horses and ponies that are considered to better meet their mental and physical needs such as group housing with group turnout, herd living, or a surfaced track system. While these systems may not suit all horses or ponies or their owners, they can be good alternatives if a horse or pony struggles to cope in a more traditional housing environment.
- Stereotypical behaviours such as weaving, wind-sucking, crib-biting, or box/fence walking may indicate poor or compromised welfare, so try hard to identify the cause and remove or find a remedy. These undesirable behaviour patterns can be developed

from many things, such as stress, boredom, confusion, frustration, fear, isolation, extended confinement, insufficient access to forage, and inappropriate or insufficient and exercise.

### **Interactions with other animals**

- All horses and ponies should be able to interact closely with each other, be turned out together, or at least be able to mutually groom each other over the fence.
- Horses and ponies kept in groups should have sufficient room to move away from potential conflict.

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## **Mental Experiences:**

As Sensitive beings, horses and ponies can experience positive and negative mental effects from the way they are treated and cared for. Understanding the importance of this is key to ensuring their continued welfare and well-being.

### **Rules and Guidance**

- All Pony Club Members, Supporters, Officials and Staff are expected to follow the Welfare Policy and these supporting guidelines. Never has it been more evident that welfare must always be at the forefront of all decisions, training, care, husbandry and horsemanship, taking a 'Pony Centred Approach' to everything we do.

Please refer to individual rule books for further details on Rules.

### **What Coaches and Officials should monitor and support with:**

- Avoid overworking that can lead to stress, a negative mental experience as well as injury and fatigue.
- Behaviour such as bucking, rearing, bolting, or repeated spooking should not be ignored. This type of behaviour is not only unsafe but also a welfare issue.
- Use The Pony Club training syllabuses and guidance notes to assist with training. New concepts and training take time to bed in. Use negative situations as learning

experiences, support Members and supporters to make good choices, and always remember that welfare is at the forefront of everything that we do.

- Stress that verbal and physical abuse from anyone is not acceptable: including shouting and swearing at animals (or children), it is breach of the Codes of Conduct and it can lead to disciplinary action.

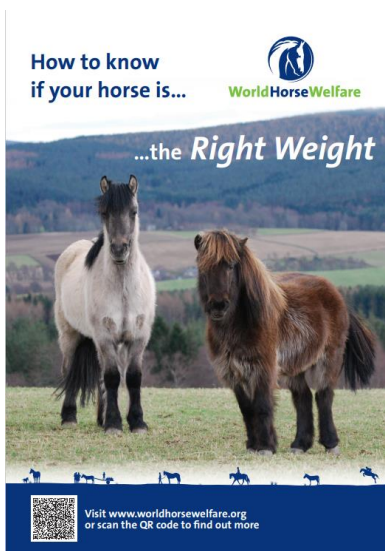
### **Husbandry and care advice:**

- We should always seek to provide positive experiences and give horses and ponies a life worth living.
- Remove physical and mental suffering by minimising negative experiences and resolve them when they arise.
- If negative experiences are not addressed, they will, over time, become chronic and compromise their welfare and well-being.
- The living conditions and treatment of horses and ponies should not impose mental suffering, instead it should give them positive experiences and give them things that matter to them, like:
  - Eating when they are hungry, foraging and browsing; provide an interesting and stimulating diet. Removing the ability to chew can lead to stress, mental harm and stereotypical behaviours.
  - Drinking when they are thirsty.
  - Have space to roam, play and exercise.
  - Have company of their own kind - It important that they can see, touch and mutually groom each other. If they cannot be kept together, grooming over a fence or the company of another animal is beneficial.
  - Feeling safe - a horse or pony that is alone may be more vigilant, meaning, sleep, stress and relaxation will be greatly affected resulting in higher levels of stress. If they are kept alone, consider a companion from another species.
  - Have shade and shelter when needed, and ideally the choice of when to use it.
- Remember, you may only spend a few hours with your horse or pony each day. What are they doing during the rest of the time? Are their physical and mental needs being met during the hours you aren't there?

- Positive experiences lead to a positive state of mental well-being, meaning they are more likely to thrive, but also cope when a negative experience arises.
- Training clearly, consistently, and free from fear and pain will improve mental security and the bond between them and their human. Always end training on a positive note.
- Train them to face everyday stresses, such as loading, standing, lifting their legs, etc., so that handling them does not create any increased stress.

**Always remember to put welfare ahead of competition and personal gain.**

Appendix 1: [World Horse Welfare - How to know if your horse is the right weight.](#)



## **Do you have a concern for the welfare of a horse or pony?**

In the first instance, if the concern is not urgent, and you are happy to do so, contact the Branch District Commissioner or Centre Proprietor to discuss the matter. If this initial approach fails to resolve the concern, then the help of the Area Representative or Centre Co-ordinator should be enlisted.

**If you wish to contact someone outside of your Branch or Centre, please contact [equinewelfare@pcuk.org](mailto:equinewelfare@pcuk.org) where your concern can be dealt with anonymously.**