

# Why should your child learn to ride horses?

## 1. It'll keep them fit and physically active.

Horses, like most sports, will keep your son or daughter active. Riding, grooming, tacking up and untacking all are activities that require them to be moving around and outside in all kinds of weather (even if riding in an indoor arena, you get the gist). And if they are doing more around the barn like cleaning stalls, feeding, grooming retired horses— all of these actively burn calories and build muscle. Think kids are too sedentary these days? Get them riding.

## 2. It builds confidence.

Really. It's true. Most riding is an independent sport (he or she does it alone, versus on a team). However, they are not really alone, they are in a partnership, where he or she is expected to be the leader. And they'll have coaches teaching them how to lead in the most effective way. Nothing builds self confidence better than "leadership training" on a horse. Another thought to ponder on: your son or daughter is going to tell this 1,000 pound animal to move to the left. And then to the right. And then to follow them. And when the horse does something out of line, he or she will be responsible for administering the proper discipline. It shows them self control as well, that's a form of empowerment that's only found working with large animals.

## 3. It will help them meet new friends.

If they are in a lesson program, it's likely that they're going to meet many friends their age. Most horse people will attest to meeting their best, life-long friends at the barn. Friends at school will only get to know half of his or her life. Their horse friends will get to know all of them, including the after-school horse loving, hard-working side that the others won't see. Best of all, these other students will have the same passion and devotion in them too. That connection creates a stronger bond just in itself.

## 4. It introduces them to a good variety of role models of many ages.

Having regular riding lessons at an organized barn creates interaction for your child with people of all ages. When you drop him or her off, they will have the opportunity to freely connect with other riders, without feeling the pressure of mom or dad standing by. Instead of just interacting with one age group in school or in sports, your child will talk many other riders in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. This is especially important for girls, they can find an adult "sounding board" for some of their home or school issues and learn how to interact with women who are not their parents or teachers. If they get close enough, they'll start to seek support from these people, which is key— they'll normally offer the same advice you might want to as a parent, and they may be more apt to listen to someone outside of the family. Better than getting advise from their friends at school? Maybe so. Many kids end up acting "more mature for their age" because of this daily influence.

## 5. It keeps them humble.

Horses are going to teach your child that they're wrong much the time. He didn't ride that move quite right. Her legs slipped back and that's why the horse didn't turn correctly (and no, it's never the horses fault). Or, his instructor is saying (again) that his hands need to be quieter. That he or she's getting there, but hasn't got it yet.

In every situation with horses, the child will always be able to get better and will never be done learning. Every rider understands this very quickly.

## 6. It challenges them.

Riding a horse means that they'll have to work through a lot of the regular training challenges that come up when learning to handle a horse. It will force them to think creatively about how to communicate with their horse and how to solve a particular problem. If something worked in the last lesson, but it's not working now, what else can they try? How else can he or she solve this issue? Being in a lesson program provides necessary guidance, and it can create a mental discipline and toughness not often found in other sports.

All of this active participation in learning how to ride, how to train and what to do when a challenge emerges will help them in high school, in college and in every job from there on out.

## 7. It shows them how to be active listeners.

Everyone learns differently, and learning from different instructors will teach your child how to recognize when he or she understands something and when they don't. When the student has that "ah-ha" moment, they can break down to recognize how it was explained and ask for that kind of teaching in the future. The student can also apply it to the other learning that they have to do in school and later in life, in a career. It's all about self awareness.

In short horses help children grow into empathic, engaged, and responsible young men and women

Adapted from a blog written by Hannah Broaddus