

ALL TIED UP

- ☐ *Tie horse safely, using quick-release knot.*

OBJECTIVE: Once students can approach, halter and lead their horses, one step remains: tying the horses safely. **Even if your barn utilizes cross-ties, students should know how to select a safe tie area and how to tie a quick-release knot**—as well as learning how to maneuver around the cross-ties.

Students should be able to identify the best choice of tie posts from a variety of options: **a solid post**, preferably with a **breakaway function**. (Fence boards, doors, unhitched trailers, lawn furniture, and body parts are all bad ideas!) They should tie with an **appropriate length of rope** and **understand the dangers** of tying with a rope too long. They should use safe equipment and be able to explain why tying with loose halters, chain shanks or reins can cause accidents. Their knot should easily release when pulled on by the handler, but not by the horse.

Note that there are many ways of tying a quick-release knot. **Any method is acceptable if it meets the above criteria.** You should always be able to explain the reason for your preference, and encourage your students to think critically about the reasons for their choices as well!



CHECKING IT OFF: Tying goes hand in hand with catching and leading, so you may choose to teach all of this material at once. Students enrolled in regular lessons will have a weekly opportunity to practice tying their knots—unless you have an alternative tie arrangement such as crossties, in which case you will have to schedule regular practice.

Some students are adept at tying knots and pick up the technique in their first lesson. Others will need repetitive practice, and may need to borrow a lead rope to practice the knot on their own. (Have a printable diagram, pages from the **Red HorseSense study guide**, or a video students can reference so they can check their own work.) Make sure they can produce the knot *consistently* before checking it off.

You'll know they've got it: if they can lead a horse to an appropriate tie area and tie with an effective quick-release knot, leaving no more than an arm's length of rope between horse's halter and tie post.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

"A quick-release knot is the safest choice for tying a horse. Why do you think that is?"

"Why is tying a horse to groom, blanket etc. safer than handling him loose in his stall?"

"You want to tie up your horse to groom him, but the only place you can do it is the wooden fence outside his pasture. What part of the fence should you tie to? What can you do to make it safer?"

"How do you think a prey animal feels about being tied? What could happen if their legs got caught in a loop of rope or reins?"

ARM'S
LENGTH
AND EYE
HIGH!

QUICK-RELEASE KNOT

There are **different methods of tying a quick-release knot** and you probably have a favorite. We favor the first two methods shown here, which are commonly used and, in our experience, are the least likely to slip loose or jam. (Daisy chains are recommended as a means of securing a long rope only.) **Your students may find one method easier than another**, however. If they have trouble remembering how to do one knot, you can always try another!

METHOD A: FULL CIRCLE



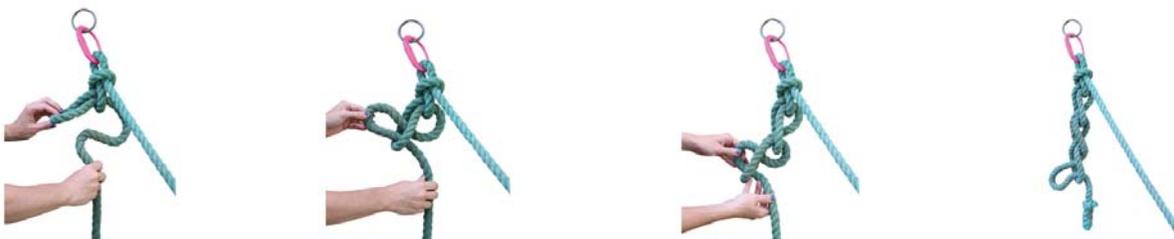
METHOD B: JUMP THROUGH THE HOOP



METHOD C: DONKEY EARS



DAISY CHAIN



TRY BEFORE YOU TIE

While we hope that our students can tie any horse safely, with any halter and rope provided for them, **the choice of equipment can have a surprising impact on their ability to tie...** especially for children with small hands. If you are able to teach the quick-release knot without a horse present first (recommended!), try to rustle up a wide selection of ropes: **short 6' lengths** and **long 10' leads**, thick and thin **cotton, poly, flat** and **braided nylon**, even a **chain shank** for an example of what *not* to use. (If you've been in the horse business for long, you probably have all of these in your barn somewhere!) Make sure you include both **spring snaps** and **bull snaps**. Many children have difficulty operating a bull snap, as well as the swivel attachments favored on the long, soft leads sold by many natural horsemanship trainers. **Panic snaps** are often incomprehensible to beginners, and it is essential for students to learn them if they will be operating crossties or trailer ties in the future.

Allow students to handle all of these ropes before using them to tie the knot. **Ask: what feels best on your hands? Which rope is easiest to tie? Which could get jammed easily?** Pull each rope through their hand, not hard enough to give them an actual burn, but so they get a sense of how it will handle if the horse pulls. Equestrians have to learn how to become educated consumers at some point, so you may as well start the process now!



TIE AND TEST

Before tying an actual horse, if possible, demonstrate and practice the quick-release knot. **Pair students up so that one can play the "horse" while the other ties.** The "horse" must put the knot to the test by shaking and pulling back. A successful knot can be immediately untied by the handler, but not by the "horse"! Kids love this exercise because it gives them an excuse to play naughty pony.

This exercise also gives you a chance to discuss and evaluate the length of rope left between the horse and the knot. **"Arm's length and eye high,"** is an easy rule to remember. Children tend to like using their actual arm to measure out the length of the rope, but if they are very young and their arms very short the horse may feel snubbed to the post. Ask the "horse" in each pairing to shift side to side and forward and back to test their range of motion. **If they lift their leg, would it be possible for them to step over the rope?**

Note that many students tie their knot halfway between horse and tie ring (particularly if they are vertically challenged), which means **the knot will slide upwards to the tie ring** and **the rope will lengthen** until it is stabilized. Encourage them to grab the rope as close to the ring as possible to minimize this drift.

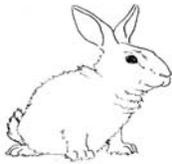
As in all paired exercises, alternate roles so that every student has a chance to play "horse" and tie the knot.



On a rainy day... combine horseless quick-release knots with practice in haltering and leading. Have each student bring their "horse" in from the pasture and tie safely. Once students seem confident, ask them to tie the knot while blindfolded!

RABBIT HOLES

Young children or students who struggle with the mechanics of a quick-release knot may need a mnemonic or memory device to help them remember. We teach the **Rabbit Hole** game:



First, the rabbit jumps up and runs in a circle around the tree.
Next, the rabbit looks for his hole.
The rabbit jumps in the hole, but he leaves his tail sticking out.
Pull the rabbit's tail and the knot is released!

If the student tries to pull through the wrong part of the rope, a common mistake, we can correct this by reminding them "Trees can't jump into holes!" or "Holes can't run around trees!" Have some fun with this around Easter, when you can easily get rabbit ears to wear or award bunny-themed prizes for successful attempts.

Note that these instructions apply to the **Full Circle** method of tying the knot; if you use an alternative method, you'll have to switch up the order of events. If you teach **Jump Through the Hoop**, for example, we start by giving the rabbit the thumbs down, which makes him jump up and create the hole before running around the tree.

To breakaway or not to breakaway? In general, it is safer for the horse to tie to some kind of breakaway device or to use a halter with a breakaway function. Just be on guard for horses that learn to free themselves by pulling back—horses with this tendency may need remedial training and are not a safe choice for beginner lessons!



While baling twine is a barn standby, we like the plastic breakaway rings for teaching quick-release knots, as the rope slides easily through the ring and makes it easier for small children to adjust the size. The rings can also be reused if they are released—but they are expensive and tend to get brittle in the cold, which can cause them to snap at the narrowest point. You might wish to have a couple of plastic breakaways for practice and beginners, and go with plain old baling twine on the rest of your tie rings. **Just make sure the baling twine is made of natural fibers - the newer plastic string favored by many hay producers does not easily break!**

HORROR STORIES

If there's one thing veteran equestrians have in abundance, it's **dramatic stories** of past incidents (aka, those times when *everything* went wrong). While you don't want to terrify new students by bombarding them with horrifying possibilities, a well-chosen anecdote here and there can open their eyes to the importance of safe practice. After all, becoming a safety-conscious horseperson means developing the ability to ask: **what could go wrong here? How could I prevent it?**

Our favorite horror story related to tying involves this petite Arab, who was stung by a wasp while tied with a nylon halter. He pulled the entire fence post out of the ground, concrete and all! Both the panicked horse and the rescue team escaped without injury, but only after *45 minutes of dodging flying broken boards* in an attempt to get close enough to release the halter and rope. **A dangerous situation that could have been prevented with the right equipment!**

