



The Seven Games

Parelli Natural Horse.Man.Ship

The Seven Games will forever change your relationship with your horse. They will teach you the language that horses use amongst themselves, and the games they play with each other, as well as the rules of the games. When you will be good enough that your horse will think you have won the games and become the 'better horse', he will start looking at you differently; you will start to earn his respect and attention. You will then become his leader, the 'Alpha' of the herd.

Game #1 – The Friendly Game is the most important game. This is the first game you must play with your horse, before any other, and you keep playing it before, during and after each of the other six games. It can be played with your lead rope, your savvy string, your carrot stick, a plastic bag at the end of your stick, a saddle pad, your bare hands – use your imagination. Play the Friendly Game on all parts of the horse, from the tip of his ear, inside his mouth, to the tip of his legs and his tail.

Hold your horse in a friendly relaxed manner and give him enough rope to allow him to move his feet if he needs to when you start whirling the rope. Once your horse makes a mental change and starts to look at you differently, lowers his head and relaxes his muscles, at that moment only can you ask permission to get on his back. To ride a horse requires another level of Friendly Game and of desensitization.

Be persistent, but not pushy. Horses adapt very quickly and are very quick to change. Once your horse starts trusting you, he will be ready for a new challenge.

Game #2 – The Porcupine Game teaches your horse to yield from a very light pressure from your fingers. The easier he yields from pressure, the easier he will be to handle – on the ground and in the saddle. Each time you take contact with the halter, the rope, the bit, the leg, your seat or your hands, your horse should respond willingly and respectfully. Moving your horse should be as easy as moving a floating toy in your bathtub – no resistance.

Your intent must clearly come through your determined look, you must demonstrate the appropriate body language and a level of energy corresponding to your intent. Start with a light pressure, the lightest touch. The horse determines how firm the pressure needs to be, which is when he will decide to move. It might be 4 ounces or 4 pounds of pressure.

Each time you prepare your horse for the Porcupine Game, you must start with a rub. Once you have applied pressure and your horse has responded, that is, has moved away from the pressure, rub him again where you touched him. This is really important during the teaching phase of the game.

Game #3 – The Driving Game teaches your horse to yield to a suggestion without physical contact. When you are first starting out, the driving game is done very close to the horse, but as you advance, you can start driving or suggesting to your horse that he moves at greater and greater distances. This ability to communicate becomes very useful when you are asking your horse to get away from you, to direct him around obstacles, to keep him out of your personal space or simply to ask him to do a task without having to touch him. Becoming an expert on the ground at this game is the key to riding bridle less. When your horse learns to respond to the slightest suggestion on the ground, he becomes apt to understand your suggestions in the saddle. Sensitizing your horse this way will allow you to use invisible aids.

Game #4 – The Yo-Yo Game balances your horse between 'go' and 'whoa' such that he will seem to respond only to your thoughts of going forward or doing a great stop. Your horse develops his balance, his lightness and his suspension because he learns to be just as ready to back up as he is to go forward.

Teaching your horse to think about backing can help him become more balanced mentally, emotionally and physically.

Start with the horse's nose and put it at the end of your arm, while holding the end of the rope in your hand. Look at your horse as another horse would look at him with ears back. Lift the hand holding the end of the rope and wiggle only your finger. If the horse does not move, wiggle your wrist, which will vibrate the rope side to side, until your horse moves. Start with a light vibration and progressively increase it until your horse takes a step back. As soon as he does, immediately release and stand with a relaxed attitude. This is how your horse will know that he did the right thing. Start over and keep asking until he steps

back again. Keep going until your horse is at the end of the rope and let him dwell there at least 1 or 2 minutes before asking him to come back to you. Once you are ready to bring him back to you, smile and look at him with a friendly expression. Keep smiling and comb the rope softly with open fingers, allowing the rope to slide on your palms. Increase the pressure on the rope by gradually closing your fingers until your horse responds by taking a step forward. As soon as he steps forward, open your hands and ask very lightly again. Continue until your horse is back with you.

Game #5 – The Circling Game is used to help your horse understand that he is responsible for maintaining gait, maintain direction and look where he is going while keeping his attention on you. The Circling Game stimulates the horse mentally, emotionally and physically, while still teaching him to stay connected to you.

The Send teaches your horse to follow your direction and your suggestion. Lead, lift, swing, touch. Direct him with a light feel on the rope in the direction you want him to go. Lift the carrot stick or the end of your lead rope in the other hand to support your horse in the direction you are asking for. Swing the carrot stick or the rope if the horse still has not left in the direction that you want. Touch him on the neck with the carrot stick or the rope if he still has not gone and is looking at you. If the horse still is not going, start your phases again. This time, add some energy and have a more determined look on your face.

Ask your horse to come back only once he has done at least two complete circles around you (maximum four), no matter which gait. When you bring the horse back to you, direct him by sliding your hand on the rope and bringing it back to your belly button. Lift your carrot stick or the end of your lead rope and look at your horse's hindquarters. Swing the carrot stick or the rope in the direction of the hindquarters so the horse will turn and face you.

Game #6 – The Sideways Game helps you set a solid foundation for lateral manoeuvres, to develop more suspension, to do flying lead changes, spins, pirouettes, counter arcs, cattle work and cutting.

With only the halter and the rope, ask your horse to stay facing the fence or wall to keep him from moving forward. Stand facing the middle of his body and ask him to move one end, then the other, only one or two steps at first. Start with the Driving Game to move first the forehead, then the hindquarters, then the forehead, etc. If you are using the carrot stick, move it like a windshield wiper from left to right, directing his hindquarters and forequarters, until the whole horse is moving evenly and you are starting to get a sideways movement. Then check how much pressure is required to get this result, by using the Porcupine Game.

Game #7 – The Squeeze Game teaches your horse to be calmer, smarter, and braver and to pass through narrow spaces without worrying. When you play this game, you allow your horse to face his innate fears in a safe environment. Start slowly with minimum pressure, to help your horse who is naturally claustrophobic, and help him become more trusting and calmer – he will then become more willing to try new things.

Start the Squeeze Game by standing six to eight feet from a fence with your horse. If your horse is worried, get farther from the wall or direct him between you and a barrel in an open area. Direct him to the squeeze by leading his nose in the direction you want him to go and encourage him to go forward by driving his hind end with the carrot stick or the rope. Once your horse enters the squeeze, simply allow him to cross it confidently. Stay with him by turning your body and once he is on the other side, ask him to come back by bring the hand holding the rope to your belly button, which will bring the nose back towards you, and by driving the hindquarter.

Once you have your horse's two eyes on you, ask him to go in the other direction. Keep asking him to squeeze in the narrow space in both directions, allowing him to dwell at each end, until your horse is no longer worried or afraid.

If you would like to learn more about horse psychology and Parelli, clinics and training is being offered all over Canada. For more information, contact us at the following:

Geneviève Benoit

Licensed Parelli 3-Star Instructor

(514) 953-3485

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