

How To Be A Good Barn Parent

Even Non-Horsey Parents Can Play The

Role Of Coach/Instructor

By Dawn Bellinger



Making short video clips of your child riding, even if it is in the rain, is a very helpful way to add to their riding education. In addition to letting the rider evaluate their own riding, the clips can be shared with an instructor.

Whether your child's ability to take lessons and attend shows was curtailed this year or not, being a good barn parent is crucial. A coach or instructor isn't always going to be there to guide your child, so a parent can become an important ally in their horsemanship and riding education.

The younger the child, the easier it is to be a good barn parent. But even older children can benefit and appreciate their parents' time and energy. And, the best part is that you don't have to have a riding background to be a good barn parent. There are three things you can do right now to enjoy this title.

First, ask your child to teach you something about horses and riding. The best way to ensure you know something is to teach it successfully to someone else. Next time she is headed to the barn, ask her to teach you something you don't know. How should I approach a pony safely? Show me how I can help groom your pony? How to tack up? Why do you use that bit? Why do you always mount on the left? Why do you tighten the girth before you mount and again after you've warmed up a bit? How do you properly warm up your pony? How do you know which direction you can jump an obstacle safely? Your questions can be basic or quite detailed, based on the interest and ability of your child. And, if she doesn't know the answer, that might give you an opportunity to look it up together later.

Second, use your cell phone to take video clips of your child riding. Take short (30-90 second) horizontal video clips of her riding. Later, ask her to evaluate the videos with you, pointing out the things she did well and the things she would like to work on. She can even share the videos with her instructor and ask for feedback over a phone call or zoom session. I'll provide a flat routine and some jumping guidelines for you to use next.

For a flat routine, wait until after the warm up and ask her to let you know when she is ready. Stand in the center of the arena if you can, just like an instructor. Ask your child to perform a 20-meter circle (most arenas are 20 meters wide) around you at a walk on a loose rein. Once you're in position and ready, start filming and ask her to collect her reins and perform a collected walk, wait 5-10 seconds, then ask her to trot, staying on the circle. After two full circles at the trot, ask her to come back to the collected walk, wait 5-10 seconds, and then ask her to halt for 3 full seconds and then take five steps backwards on a straight line. Stop filming. Now, ask her to reverse direction and film the same routine going in the other direction.

If your child has the ability, go ahead and add the trot to canter (two full circles) back to trot (two full circles) to this routine. And, if they know how to perform a walk to canter transition, even better. There may be other transitions and movements that your child can perform and would like you to video. If your child doesn't yet have some of these skills, omit them from the video until she feels ready for you to record it.

Taking video of your child jumping is a bit harder because you're in a fixed location, preferably in the arena, and they are moving faster and further away. Ideally you should stand as close to the center of the arena as possible, near a large set of jump standards or barrels to give you cover. If your child is only jumping at the trot, this exercise will be easier. If at the canter, discuss with her where the best place is for you to stand. If your child is young, 2-4 jumps in a row may be plenty. For the very young, a poll on the ground constitutes a single jump. Older children can create a course of 6-8 jumps. Make sure you and she are clear on her course so that you're not in the way. This is not the time for her to go faster and jump higher than ever before. In fact, this is the time to step down a few inches so that she's successful. And, if she's successful at the lower level, then you can put the jumps up a peg and she can go again. Once you're in position and she's warmed up over a few individual jumps, go ahead and start filming.

Third, help your child find some fun online resources she can use. The internet is full of online resources. The problem is finding ones that are reputable. I can certainly attest to the United States Pony Clubs website, www.ponyclub.org. While full membership gives you the full suite of resources, nonmembers have access to some good information too. Here are a few ideas of things you can learn together to get you started. After you do a few of these, you'll get the idea and start looking for things yourself.

- Parts of the Pony
- Tying a Quick-Release Knot
- Jumping Distances
- Hauling Safety

The most important thing you can do to be a good barn parent is to relax and enjoy spending time with your child. All too soon, he or she will be grown and gone. The connection you will make during this period will buy you years of goodwill.

About The Author: Dawn Bellinger enjoyed her time as a good barn mom to daughter Ann who is now 28 and still riding but not nearby. However, Ann's first call after a good barn day is to her mom. Sharing their riding passion has given them a special bond. Dawn and Ann both grew up in Pony Club and still enjoy learning something new in the barn every day.



Help your young rider find reputable online resources to enhance their knowledge of horses and riding.

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