

Aggressive or Fearful? That is the Question of EquiTale #5.

The question above is the one question you should be able to answer BEFORE you start your training program with your horse.

Why? Because the horse's initial needs (as far as training goes) are determined by whether they have an aggressive or a fearful personality.

Most people never think about evaluating their horse as being either fearful or aggressive. Instead they describe their horses as "not willing to load in the trailer", or "not willing to be caught", or "pushing into me to get to their hay or grain", or "turning and biting at me when I'm grooming or saddling them". In other words, they describe the specific problem they are having with their horse but don't realize what is causing the problem. So let's talk about this in more detail.

Each of the specific problems given above is the result of either fear (the first two examples) or aggression (the latter two). After all, a mild stage of fear will show itself as a lack of trust (not willing to go into the trailer or to be caught). Likewise, a mild stage of aggression will show itself as a lack of respect (pushing into me or biting at me). So to solve the problem, you have to go back and ask the question: Is my horse aggressive or fearful? This is why you need to evaluate your horse.

Now aggression comes in two forms. Offensive aggression is when the horse comes at you with the front end (such as when striking out or with flattened ears and barred teeth) to INVADE your space. Defensive aggression is when the horse comes at you with the back end (by kicking out) to DEFEND their space).

Either way, AGGRESSION is UNCONTROLLED approach.

The fearful horse is at the other end of the spectrum. This can be a horse that is so afraid that you can't even get close enough to catch him. Or, if you do get him on the end of a lead line, he will often get away from you.

This is why FEAR is defined as UNCONTROLLED retreat.

We don't want our horses to be either aggressive or fearful. What we want is for them to TRUST and RESPECT us.

TRUST is CONTROLLED approach.

RESPECT is CONTROLLED retreat.

The difference in how you train or teach the aggressive vs. the fearful horse is the ORDER in which you teach respect and trust. The aggressive horse must be taught respect (NOT trust) first and the fearful horse has to be taught trust (NOT respect) first. Why?

If the horse is already "in your face" (meaning he doesn't respect your space) you don't want to start by asking him to trust you by coming closer to you. He has to be taught RESPECT first.

And a horse that is afraid of you shouldn't be taught more respect because he is already staying away from you (out of fear) and to get him to come closer, you need to teach him to TRUST you.

Turn FEAR (uncontrolled retreat) into TRUST (controlled approach).
Turn AGGRESSION (uncontrolled approach) into RESPECT (controlled retreat).

How you go about doing this is demonstrated in detail in our first DVD "Establishing Control of Your Horse" and it's Supplement: "The Aggressive Horse". When you successfully complete the lessons in these DVDs, your horse will be equally willing to TRUST and RESPECT you.

Make sense? Now you know why you need to evaluate your horse.