

Develop the Squeeze Game

You can develop your horse's Respect by teaching him the Squeeze Game.

Horses are naturally claustrophobic, since one of their primary survival mechanisms is flight. Yet, we humans expect them to walk happily into a small, dark trailer, forgetting completely that from their perspective this is a life or death decision. But if we develop a relationship based on trust, respect and partnership, your horse will walk into the trailer with confidence. You can develop your horse's Respect by teaching him the Squeeze Game (Game No. 7). The Squeeze Game is actually a category of games wherein you ask your horse to pass between you and something else, pass through a narrow space, pass between two barrels, pass across a platform – anything where you send your horse to and through a tight space. How tight the space can be depends upon how strong your Squeeze Game is! To develop your Squeeze Game, you need to have your "Send" working – which means that your horse will move off in a given direction when you simply lift your arm and extend your hand. (See Respond to a Send >>). Start with your horse in halter and lead line—a minimum 12-foot line is best to start. Stand facing a fence with your horse standing to one side of you. Send him past you and between you and the fence. Stay far enough from the fence at first so that your horse doesn't feel the pressure of the squeeze and so that you are safe. As his hindquarters pass in front of you, focus your energy on his hind end and get him to stop, Turn and Face you. If he passes between you and the fence at a confident walk, stops, turns and faces, you can decrease the distance between you and the fence a step or two. Send him again. You can send him between two cones on the ground – starting with the cones about 10 feet apart and decreasing the distance between them as his response improves. Then use your imagination – can you send your horse between two trees, a small gate, over a barrel (yes, that's the Squeeze Game, too!). Developing your Squeeze Game is going to give your horse confidence about being in tight spaces. It will also give you the language to "squeeze" your horse into that trailer!