

Grooming Meditation

From <https://sharingthenow-horsemindfulness.com/mindfulness-exercise-grooming-your-horse/>

Phase 1: Take a few moments to notice your breathing, how your body feels, and any thoughts or emotions you are experiencing right now. Then, intentionally and gently turn your attention fully to your horse. Notice where your horse is right now. Stand beside your horse, watching them with soft eyes and adjust your body so you are relaxed and alert. Continue to pay mindful attention to your breathing as you stand next to your horse. Does your horse appear relaxed? If your energy appears calm and your horse is accepting of your presence, initiate touching your horse. If your horse does not seem relaxed, take a few minutes longer to breathe deeply and then initiate touch again when the animal seems relaxed. You can try other strategies to calm your energy, thereby affecting your horse. These can include deep breathing, intentionally relaxing your body, and speaking in a calm, soft voice.

Now, prepare to start grooming your horse with mindful awareness. Tune in to your senses during the exercise. Use your VISION to notice specific tools inside the grooming kit. Are there curry combs? What about stiff-bristled brushes, body brushes, combs, and hoof picks? Notice the colour of each grooming tool. Watch the patterns and whorls on your horse's coat created by the tools, and any dirt rising through the process.

LISTEN to sounds in the environment as you are grooming, either inside the barn or outside. Listen to the sounds of each grooming tool as it makes contact with your horse's coat. Also pay attention to the sights and sounds of your horse. Notice their body language while you groom them. Notice if they are making eye contact, sighing, smacking their lips, or showing other signs of relaxation. In contrast, notice whether your horse appears tense or sore in other parts of their body as they are being groomed. Does the horse lean into you, move away, or stand still during grooming?

Watching your horse in this way allows you to make conscious decisions in each moment. For example, if the horse is pushing into you, you can assert your space by backing them up. If you detect distress, you may use the calming strategies mentioned earlier and continue grooming. You may decide to continue grooming at the same area (provided it is safe and your horse is not distressed). If your horse remains distressed or it feels unsafe to you, try another body region and re-approach that area later in your grooming process. If your horse engages in dangerous behaviours, remember the safety rules and back away if alone, or ask your mentor for guidance. Are you talking to your horse through this activity? Listen to the sound of your voice, and the sounds the horse makes while moving, inhaling, neighing, and so forth. Is your horse attentive or distracted? What about you?

As you inhale, notice what it feels like to SMELL your horse. Notice other smells in the air and surroundings. Pay attention to TOUCH as you groom your horse. Feel the texture of the grooming tools in your hands. Notice physical sensations in your hands as you rest them on your horse's shoulder, withers, or shoulder. Notice other physical sensations as you touch your horse while grooming. Rest in awareness of your horse's body during this exercise. Is there tension or

relaxation in your horse's body? Can you adjust your breathing, voice, and touch to help your horse relax as you continue the grooming?

Phase 2: Just as you take care of your horse, you can also take care of yourself during this exercise. Notice how it feels inside your own body as well. What is your breathing like? Are you moving your hands in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction? Are there painful spots in your body as you move around your horse? Notice how your lower back and pelvis are positioned when you stand and when you bend. See if you can soften your posture so you feel less tension in the small of your back and your pelvis. If you notice tense areas, decide whether to continue grooming despite feeling discomfort, adjust your posture, take breaks, or move to other parts of your horse's body that are less uncomfortable for you to groom.

As you groom, pay attention now to judgments, worries, or emotions arising inside you. Is there impatience? Is something else coming up? After noticing these things mindfully, release them from your awareness and shift focus back to the activity of grooming your horse. In this way, you can OBSERVE, DESCRIBE, and PARTICIPATE fully in the activity of grooming your horse. As you approach the end of the grooming session, notice if you are eager or reluctant to complete the grooming session. When you are ready, step away and focus on something else.