



The Intuitive Connection

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Predator vs Prey: How to Approach



Ever wonder why horses, deer, alpacas or other herd animals shy away when approached? That's because they are prey animals, and we are the predator. It never occurred to me to approach these types of animals differently until I adopted a wild mustang. We are so accustomed to approaching dogs or cats (both predators). We make direct eye contact, and in most cases, we walk directly up to them, extending our hand towards them. These are all predator behaviors. When I adopted my wild mustang, I had to completely change my way of thinking and my behavior, if I wanted to earn her trust and acceptance.

The first thing I had to change was my eyes. Direct eye contact with prey animals is a threat. It is as if you are saying you are the target and I'm locked onto you. I had to learn how to soften my eyes, and look down, not directly at her.

The next thing I had to change was my approach. If you walk directly towards a prey animal, their fight or flight instinct will kick in. Walking directly at them is a predator move, and they will likely run in the opposite direction. So once my eyes were softened and looking down, I learned I had to approach indirectly. I would walk around in a large circle, inching ever so slightly closer. Once I was within a few feet, I would turn my body sideways so that I was not directly facing her, showing her that I was no threat. From there, I would take small steps to the side in order to get closer. I made sure not to approach her head, but my goal was to get closer to her shoulder area. This was all done very slowly. If she got nervous, I would back away to show that I meant her no harm. This was a long and drawn out process that was repeated over and over.

Once I was able to maneuver close enough to her, I would slowly reach my arm out with closed fingers, and gently touch her shoulder, then walk away. Every move I made was intentional, with very slow and non-threatening body language. I later learned about Monte Roberts (world renowned horse trainer) and his method of approaching horses using their own language, which I highly recommend. One thing I'll point out is prey animals are experts in reading body language as their survival depends on it.

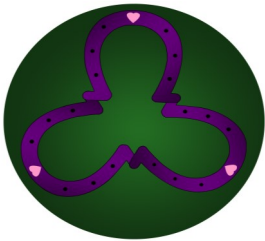
The point is that it takes time, patience and lots of trust building with prey animals. Because we naturally use predator body language, it is much easier for us to gain the trust of dogs and cats. There are exceptions to every rule, some dogs or cats might take longer to trust depending on their history with people, and some prey animals might bond with you immediately. Although with prey animals the process might take longer, the reward is worth it. I cannot begin to explain the bond that I have with my wild mustang. Instead of our relationship being leader and subordinate, it is more akin to a partnership, with each of us playing a role in the other's safety. I'm so grateful for the lessons she's taught me and how my world has expanded because I had to learn how to change my approach.



Check out our alpaca inspired lip balm flavor of the month featuring Jasper!

“Trick or Treat? Bring candy here or monster Jasper will appear!”

Chocolate Mandarin



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