BASIC BEHAVIORS PROFILE

Developed by the ASPCA® Right Horse Program

WHAT IS THE BASIC BEHAVIORS PROFILE?

The Basic Behaviors Profile is an assessment tool for programs, trainers, and individual horse owners that describes 14 common interactions between horses and humans on the ground. These are typical skills that owners expect a horse to have such as catching, haltering, leading, and tying.

WHY WAS IT CREATED?

Bringing home a new horse is an exciting time – and a big decision. The key to a successful new home for a horse in transition is matching the right horse with the right person. Horses may fill a wide range of roles like companionship, recreational riding, or competition in a variety of disciplines, but all owners need to know their horses have certain ground manners and basic handling skills.

WHO SHOULD USE THE BASIC BEHAVIORS PROFILE?

Adoption organizations should use the Basic Behaviors Profile to benefit horses in transition in their care. Evaluating a horse upon intake can help identify areas where a horse might need more training. When a horse is ready to be considered for adoption, use it to provide a thorough, easy-to-understand profile for potential adopters. Adopters should carefully read and consider the completed Basic Behaviors Profile along with other information available such as photos, videos, written descriptions, conversations, and in-person visits to determine whether a horse may be a good fit based on their needs and experience level.

WHAT DOES IT DO?

- The Basic Behaviors Profile helps standardize and streamline the search and match process for adopters and adoption organizations.
- It inspires trust and transparency for adopters, enabling them to feel informed and confident about adoption prospects.
- It provides trainers and shelter staff a starting point from which to develop a training program for horses in transition.

WHAT DOES IT NOT DO?

- The Basic Behaviors Profile does not prescribe training techniques. There are many humane and compassionate training styles that can successfully teach the assessed skills and behaviors.
- It does not predict a horse's future ability or trainability, or describe personality.
- It does not attempt to determine for which activities, disciplines, or events a horse is physically or mentally suited.
- It is not a complete description of a horse in transition. It is simply one of many parts of the evaluation and matching process.

READ ON FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS AND RESULTS SHEET.

BASIC BEHAVIORS PROFILE

Developed by the ASPCA® Right Horse Program

INSTRUCTIONS AND RESULTS SHEET

To be completed by the evaluator during assessment

The Basic Behaviors Profile is a tool for programs, trainers, and individual horse owners that describes 14 common interactions between horses and humans on the ground. The items represent horse behaviors that help reduce risk between horses and humans and which most horses can learn through training. In addition to helping identify horses that can safely take part in these interactions without stress, the assessment can help guide training goals for trainers, programs, and owners.

When an evaluator assesses a horse using the Basic Behaviors Profile, the evaluator is attesting that the horse was observed to perform the behaviors described at the time of assessment. There are no guarantees for future behavior. The horse's performance during the assessment may not represent how it will behave in the future or in other situations.

Some horses will successfully complete all 14 items at the time of assessment; other horses will complete some but not all items. Profile items that receive an "incomplete" provide information about the horse's behavior in specific interactions, which might be valued differently depending on the horse's intended role. The items that are incomplete also indicate areas where a horse might need more training.

INSTRUCTIONS

Each assessment item lists the procedure to follow. The evaluator is encouraged to read the steps and time out loud to the handler before and during the assessment item, as needed.

SCORING

Scoring is done through assigning either a 'complete' or an 'incomplete' for each item. Each item lists criteria for what the horse needs to do to complete the item successfully. If the horse does not meet the criteria for completing an item, it is important to note on the profile results sheet the reasons the horse received an incomplete.

ORDER

The order of the items is suggested, but not required; items may be carried out in any order agreed upon by the evaluator and handler. An order that is efficient and maximizes continuity across items has worked best to date. Revisiting items: If the horse receives an incomplete on an assessment item for reasons other than displaying behaviors listed as a general incomplete (see below), the horse can be assessed again on up to two (2) items at the end of the assessment. When a second attempt is made, include the result and any comments in the designated space on the results sheet.

REVISITING ITEMS

Safety of the horse and handler is a priority. Equipment must be in good condition and properly used. In addition, either the evaluator or handler may end the assessment at any time if the horse behaves in a manner considered to pose a safety risk.

RESTRICTIONS

The use of sedatives is prohibited within 12 hours prior to the assessment.

DEFINITION OF CALM AND CALMLY

The horse is asked to display behaviors in each item in a calm manner. “Calm” and “calmly” are defined in this tool as follows:

- Relaxed without excessive or unusual tension in the neck and body. Free from expression of strong emotions; not agitated.
- Some movement of the horse’s feet during the assessment as part of weight distribution and natural orienting behavior is allowed. The horse should not move more than a few steps total during each item and should not move rapidly.

GUIDELINE FOR TYING THE HORSE

When items require tying, the horse must be tied with a lead rope by using a safety/quick release knot or cross ties equipped with safety release buckles, at a length that allows movement of the head and no tension on the halter when the horse is stationary. Posts, tie rings, and cross-ties must be strong and secure. Ground tying is allowed for some items (see assessment item instructions); however, to insure safety the horse must be in an enclosed space if ground tied.

GENERAL INCOMPLETE BEHAVIORS

If the horse displays the following behaviors at any point during assessment, it cannot be continued at that time:

- flight and fear behaviors (such as barging, spinning, rearing, pulling back, pushing into human or backing up quickly while held or tied);
- aggressive behaviors (such as kicks, strikes or bites toward human or other horse, or threatening behaviors such as repeated or persistent flattening ears, turning hindquarters toward human or other horse);
- repeated, persistent, or animated behavior that interferes with or delays the procedure, such as movement of the body or head.

CORRECTION OF THE HORSE

Harsh corrections of the horse during the assessment are not permitted and may result in the handler being replaced. The purpose of this assessment is to determine whether the horse is able, at the time of assessment, to display behaviors set forth in the items, not to evaluate the handler’s skill. To this end, the handler should guide the horse, without controlling, masking, or interfering with the horse’s behavior. Handlers are, however, encouraged to communicate verbally with the horse during assessment for guidance, reassurance and encouragement, and may also gently stroke them.

PARTICIPANTS, MATERIALS, AND LOCATION REQUIREMENTS

LOCATION REQUIREMENTS

Variation in equipment, enclosure type, footing, fencing, gates, and trailer style are expected and allowed. As much as possible, an effort should be made to minimize potential distractions in the environment that could affect the horse's performance during the assessment.

- ◯ Paddock or turnout area where horse can be loose that is a minimum of 2,000 square feet in size
- ◯ Area for tying horse safely
- ◯ Safe area for hosing horse's legs with water
- ◯ Area where horse can be led in a straight line for 50 feet
- ◯ Gate appropriate for horses that horse and handler can pass through
- ◯ Area appropriate for trailer loading

PARTICIPANTS

- ◯ **Evaluator:** Person who is scoring and taking notes about the horse's behavior. The evaluator should be an individual with horse handling experience. He or she should feel comfortable observing and interpreting horse behavior as it relates to safe handling.
- ◯ **Horse:** Horse that is being assessed.
- ◯ **Handler:** Primary handler during assessment.
- ◯ **Assistant Handler:** Person who might assist the primary handler by passing items or holding horse in hand. An assistant handler is optional for conducting the assessment.

MATERIALS

- ◯ Stopwatch or timer
- ◯ Measuring device (for distances ranging 10-50 feet)
- ◯ Halter and lead rope (leather or flat nylon halter recommended)
- ◯ Medium soft body brush
- ◯ Appropriately sized blanket with front strap that can be opened, a minimum of one belly strap and leg straps
- ◯ Bottle of fly spray (insecticide)
- ◯ Water hose
- ◯ Digital rectal thermometer
- ◯ 20-60 cc plastic oral dosing syringe (without needle) or tube with nozzle filled with 20-30 cc of water or flavored syrup
- ◯ Horse trailer hitched to tow vehicle

BASIC BEHAVIORS PROFILE

RESULTS SHEET

HORSE NAME | BREED | AGE

ITEM 1

CAN BE APPROACHED WHEN LOOSE IN TURNOUT

The horse is placed loose in a space 2,000 square feet in size or larger for a minimum of 5 minutes, so that the horse can become familiar with the space. Handler exits turnout area; no other horses or people should be in the space with the horse during the 5 minute period. Handler walks up toward the horse until next to the horse. The horse may approach the handler or take a few steps in either direction. (*Note: Immediately proceed to item 2, haltering the horse.*)

HANDLER

After 5 minute acclimation, handler reenters turnout and approaches the horse in a typical manner. Walks, and does not rush or move erratically.

HORSE

The horse should only move a few steps, if any, away from handler. Can approach handler at any time.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM 2

CALM WHEN HALTERED

Handler stands next to the horse on the left side and positions halter on the horse. The handler may loosely place lead rope across horse's neck. The horse should not evade the halter by raising their head high or quickly moving away from handler.

HANDLER

Stands to the left side of the horse, between the horse's head and shoulder. Positions a halter on the horse. The handler may place rope across the horse's neck but not tightly grip around horse's neck.

HORSE

The horse remains standing with only some movement while being haltered. The horse cannot raise their head high or forcefully/quickly move their head or feet away.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM 3

LEADING, TURNING, STOPPING, BACKING

The handler leads the horse at a walk and performs turning left and right, stopping, and backing up. The horse should remain approximately an arm's length away from handler when walking on a straight line.

The horse and handler must perform the following:

- ◯ walking on a straight line for a minimum of 50 feet;
- ◯ turning left;
- ◯ turning right;
- ◯ stopping;
- ◯ backing up a minimum of 4 steps.

Handler may modify their position when cueing the horse to back up. The horse must respond to light pressure and/or verbal cues for all tasks.

HANDLER

Positioned near or slightly in ont of the horse's shoulder on either side. The horse remains approximately an arm's length om handler with a loose lead when walking. The handler cues horse verbally or with light pressure. The handler may modify their position when cueing the horse to back up.

HORSE

Performs leading tasks without pushing, pulling, barging or resisting. When walking in a straight line and turning, horse maintains gait and distance to handler. Responds to light pressure and/or verbal cues for all tasks.

RESULT	DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ **Complete**

◯ **Incomplete**

ITEM 4

CAN BE LED THROUGH A GATE

The handler leads the horse to the gate and cues horse to stop from light pressure and/or verbal cues. The horse stands calmly while handler unlatches gate and waits for cue to walk through the gate. The horse may not walk through before the handler or rush through the gate. After walking through the gate the handler turns the horse and cues the horse to stand calmly while closing the gate.

HANDLER

Approaches gate and cues the horse to stop from light pressure and/or verbal cue. Unlatches and opens gate. Cues the horse to walk through the gate either parallel with handler or slightly behind handler. After passing through the gate, handler turns the horse and closes gate.

HORSE

Stands calmly while handler unlatches and opens gate. Waits for cue to pass through the gate with handler. Turns and stands calmly while handler closes gate. Does not pass through the gate before handler or rush through the gate.

RESULT	DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ **Complete**

◯ **Incomplete**

ITEM
5

STANDS CALMLY TIED

The handler ties the horse at a length that ensures no tension on the halter and with safety/quick release knots or buckles in an appropriate location for tying the horse. The handler moves a minimum of 20 feet away from the horse for a total of 60 seconds. The horse may move feet while tied but should remain calm. The horse should not repeatedly swing hindquarters side to side, persistently paw at the ground, or pull back forcefully.

HANDLER

Ties the horse with lead rope by a safety/quick release knot or in cross ties equipped with safety release buckles at a length that allows movement of the head and no tension on the halter when stationary. Handler moves a minimum of 20 feet away for 60 seconds.

HORSE

May move a few steps but should not exhibit repeated swinging of hindquarters, persistent pawing, or pull back while tied.

RESULT	DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM
6

MOVES HINDQUARTERS AWAY FROM PRESSURE ON HIND

The handler stands beside the horse and applies light pressure with a hand on the hindquarters or barrel of the horse. The horse may take one or several steps away and handler should remove the pressure when the horse does so. The horse should step calmly and not swing hind end around rapidly or forcefully. This is repeated on the opposite side. Horse may be tied or held in hand. *(Note: The handler should not push the horse off balance.)*

HANDLER

Stands on right or left side of the horse and applies pressure with a hand on the hindquarters or barrel of the horse. When the horse steps away the pressure is removed. This is repeated on both sides. Horse may be tied or held in hand.

HORSE

Takes one or several steps away when pressure is applied by handler's hand. Should step calmly and not swing the hind end around rapidly or forcefully. If the horse does not move, an incomplete should be scored.

RESULT	DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM

7

STANDS CALMLY WHILE BODY IS BRUSHED

The horse is tied. Handler uses a medium soft body brush to brush the neck, legs, barrel and hindquarters of each side of the horse. The horse stands calmly while brushed.

HANDLER

Brushes neck, legs, barrel and hindquarters of each side of the horse with a medium soft brush.

HORSE

The horse is tied and stands calmly for brushing.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM

8

ALLOWS ALL FEET TO BE PICKED UP, STANDS CALMLY WHILE FOOT IS HELD

The horse is tied. The handler faces toward the rear of the horse, and bends over while giving the signal the horse is used to for picking up its foot. The horse should lift the foot within 5 seconds of being prompted. When the horse lifts the foot, the handler should move its hand around to support the hoof and pastern. Each hoof is held for 10 seconds. The horse should not pull their foot away from the hold. The horse may shift its feet for balance, but may not step away from the handler. The horse should not lean its weight on the handler. The handler may readjust the horse's stance between lifting each foot. (Note: The cue—such as a strong squeeze or pinch of the pastern—should not create discomfort or pain.)

HANDLER

Faces toward rear of the horse, bends over and gives the horse a signal that horse is used to for picking up feet. When the horse lifts its foot, handler moves their hand around to support hoof and pastern. Each foot is held for 10 seconds. The handler may readjust the horse's stance between lifting each foot.

HORSE

The horse is tied. The horse lifts its foot within 5 seconds of being prompted. Should not pull their foot away from the 10 second hold. May shift its feet for balance, but may not step away from the handler or lean its weight on the handler.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM 9

STANDS CALMLY FOR BLANKET/FLY SHEET

The horse is tied or ground tied. The handler stands on the left side of the horse and allows horse to sniff blanket if interested. The handler places blanket on the horse's back and fastens blanket starting with the front, then belly strap(s), then leg straps. Handler then unfastens leg straps, then belly strap(s) and finally front, and removes blanket. The horse stands calmly throughout. *(Note: blanket should have front strap that can be opened, a minimum of one belly strap, and leg straps. Blanket should be appropriately sized for the horse.)*

HANDLER

Stands on the left side of the horse, allows the horse to sniff blanket if interested, places blanket on the horse's back. Blanket is fastened first in front, then by belly, finally by leg straps. Blanket is then removed by unfastening leg straps, belly strap(s) and finally front and taken off the horse.

HORSE

The horse is tied. Stands calmly while blanket is placed, fastened, and removed.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM 10

STANDS CALMLY FOR ORAL ADMINISTRATION OF FLUID FROM SYRINGE OR TUBE

The horse is held in hand or ground tied, with handler positioned to the side of the horse's head. The handler deposits water from syringe (without needle) or tube into the horse's mouth from the side. The horse may move their head but not forcefully pull, shake, or dip their head in a way that makes depositing fluid impossible. The horse's feet must remain on the ground. (*Note: The handler may hold one hand over the horse's nose while administering oral fluid, but the restraint should not prevent the horse from moving their head.*)

HANDLER

Inserts a large water-filled plastic syringe or tube with nozzle into the side of the horse's mouth oriented toward its throat, depositing fluid.

HORSE

The horse is held in hand and stands calmly while fluid is deposited. The horse may move its head but may not forcefully pull, shake, or dip its head in a manner that makes depositing fluid impossible. Front feet should not leave the ground.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM
11

STANDS CALMLY FOR RECTAL TEMPERATURE

The handler is positioned next to the horse's hindquarters, gently moves tail to the side and inserts digital thermometer. The thermometer should remain inserted and held by handler until reading is done (maximum 30 seconds). The horse stands calmly while temperature is taken and can be tied or held in hand.

HANDLER

Stands next to the horse's hindquarters, gently moves tail to the side and inserts digital thermometer. The thermometer should remain inserted and held until reading is done (maximum 30 seconds).

HORSE

The horse is tied or held in hand. Stands calmly while temperature is taken.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM
12

STANDS CALMLY FOR FLY SPRAY (SPRAY ON INSECTICIDE)

The horse stands calmly while being sprayed with fly spray (insecticide) on their neck, chest, legs, barrel, belly and hind on both sides. The horse can be tied or held in hand.

HANDLER

Sprays fly spray (insecticide) on the horse's neck, chest, legs, barrel, belly and hind on both sides.

HORSE

The horse is tied or held in hand. Stands calmly while sprayed.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM 13

STANDS CALMLY WHILE LEGS HOSED WITH WATER

The handler applies water coming out of a hose (sprayer is optional) onto the horse's legs on both sides. Water pressure should be moderate. Front legs are watered from knee down, hind legs from hock down. The horse can be tied or held in hand. The horse should not move excessively and repeatedly to avoid or interfere with having its legs hosed. (*Note: care should be taken to prevent horse from becoming entangled in hose.*)

HANDLER

Applies water coming out of a hose (sprayer optional) onto the horse's front leg (from knee down) and hind leg (from hock down). This is repeated on both sides.

HORSE

The horse is tied or held in hand. Stands calmly throughout. The horse should not move excessively and repeatedly to avoid or interfere with having its legs hosed.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

ITEM 14

CALMLY TRAILER LOADS AND UNLOADS

The horse is loaded alone, with no other horses inside or tied to trailer. The handler leads horse to position at 15-20 feet from the trailer with door(s) open. Starting from here, the horse must be loaded into the trailer in 3 minutes. The horse should enter calmly without excessive movement that interferes with or delays loading. The horse may stop and look at the trailer. When inside the trailer, the horse will be tied for 60 seconds with the trailer door closed and without the handler present. The horse should remain calm without excessive vocalizing or movement, such as pawing or swinging hindquarters to the side. The horse may take steps to find balance and explore the interior of the trailer. After 60 seconds the handler opens door, enters trailer and unloads the horse by backing or turning horse, returning to starting position. Unloading may not take longer than 60 seconds. The horse must exit trailer calmly.

HANDLER

Leads the horse to position at 15-20 feet in front of the open trailer. From here leads the horse into the trailer (may not take longer than 3 minutes). The handler ties the horse in trailer and then exits and closes trailer door. The horse remains in trailer without the handler present. After 60 seconds handler reenters trailer and unloads the horse by backing or turning horse, returning to starting position. Unloading may not take longer than 60 seconds.

HORSE

Remains calm during loading, standing, and unloading. May not turn hindquarters to the side in a manner that interferes or delays loading, or otherwise refuse to enter trailer. May stop and look at trailer. Once loaded onto trailer, must not vocalize repeatedly or move excessively. The horse is allowed to take steps to balance themselves and to explore interior of trailer. When exiting trailer horse must remain calm.

RESULT

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

REASSESSED ITEMS

If the horse receives an incomplete on an assessed item for reasons other than displaying behaviors listed as a general incomplete, the horse can be reassessed on up to two (2) items at the end of the assessment sequence. When a second attempt is made, include the item number, the result (Complete/Incomplete) and any comments in the space below.

REASSESSED ITEM

Item Number ◯

RESULT

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

REASSESSED ITEM

Item Number ◯

RESULT

◯ Complete

◯ Incomplete

DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS THAT LED TO AN INCOMPLETE

BASIC BEHAVIORS PROFILE

HORSE NAME _____ **BREED** _____ **AGE** _____

LOCATION _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPLETED ITEMS _____

C (Complete): Horse completed on first attempt or when reassessed.
N (Incomplete): Horse did not complete item.

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	C	N
1	Can be approached when loose in turnout	◯	◯
2	Calm when haltered	◯	◯
3	Leading, turning, stopping, backing	◯	◯
4	Can be led through a gate	◯	◯
5	Stands calmly tied	◯	◯
6	Moves hindquarters away from pressure on hind	◯	◯
7	Stands calmly while body is brushed	◯	◯
8	Allows feet to be picked up, stands calmly while foot is held	◯	◯
9	Stands calmly for blanket/fly sheet	◯	◯
10	Stands calmly for oral administration of fluid	◯	◯
11	Stands calmly for rectal temperature	◯	◯
12	Stands calmly for fly spray	◯	◯
13	Stands calmly while legs hosed with water	◯	◯
14	Calmly trailer loads and unloads	◯	◯

14 ITEMS COMPLETED
Excellent. The horse completed all items calmly and safely.

12-13 ITEMS COMPLETED
Very Good. The horse may need training and/or experience on a few items, but is calm and safe in most routine situations.

10-11 ITEMS COMPLETED
Good. The horse needs additional training and experience in some routine situations.

< 10 ITEMS COMPLETED
Needs Improvement. The horse generally needs more training and experience in a number of routine situations.

◯ Assessment was discontinued because of general incomplete behaviors (described in the instructions).

DESCRIBE OBSERVED BEHAVIORS

OTHER COMMENTS

EVALUATOR PRINTED NAME _____ **DATE** _____

EVALUATOR SIGNATURE _____

This Basic Behaviors Profile is provided as a convenience and is not a warranty or guaranty of any particular results from any animal purchased or adopted. This Basic Behaviors Profile is created from information provided by the evaluator noted above. The ASPCA is not an agent or broker for the evaluator or the seller or adoption agency of the horse evaluated and disclaims any and all representations and warranties concerning the accuracy and completeness of any information in this Basic Behaviors Profile. You are solely responsible for independently verifying whether the animal referenced in this Basic Behaviors Profile will meet your specific needs and preferences.

Download and print the Basic Behaviors Profile at aspca.org/equineBBP