

BETTER BEGINNINGS:

the lifelong impact of weaning practices



AVOID
WEANING
TRAUMA
AT ALL COSTS!



WEANING AFFECTS ALL HORSES and all horse owners



the way we
raise
and
wean
horses
will impact them for the
rest of
their lives











studies on weaning



is weaning inherently stressful?



WILD HORSE MODEL



FOALS NEED THEIR MAMAS FOR SURVIVAL, OF COURSE



- Being with Mama equals feel good chemicals in the brain
- Leaving Mom (at first) causes stress chemicals
- Coming back equals happy chemicals again (aka: reinforcement)

Photo credit: Wanderlust Wild Horses by Hollyn



Larger spaces + larger herd sizes encourage the foal to practice leaving mom. Separating and then coming back helps with nervous system regulation and resilience to stress. Before weaning happens, they are practicing mini-weanings.





“Auntie” Rose







Sand
Wash
Basin
Mustangs



Dr. Stephen Peters

“We often speak of weaning as though it were simply a management event, a feeding transition, a practical milestone. But from the foal’s side, it may be something far more consequential: the abrupt loss of a regulatory partner. The mare is not merely providing nutrition. She is also a stabilizing presence around which the young nervous system has been organizing itself. To remove her early may be to disrupt far more than feeding. It may alter predictability, regulation, and social learning at a time when these systems are still under construction.”





WORST: barn raised, limited social group, soft environment



“Uncle” Feather :9







Create:

Obstacles

Playdates

Excursions

Relationships

Opportunities

Adventures

Confidence
building
experiences

Learning





THE ONLY TRUE FIX IS SAFETY & CONNECTION

“All the connection work leads to: when you walk somewhere, they’ll come with you. Willingly. Not because they have to or they’ve been asked to but because they’re connected to you”.

~ Warwick Schiller

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every place is a place to train
or play - anywhere they feel safe





friends =
confidence



ASK FOR
A LITTLE

GIVE
THEM
TIME TO
RESET
THEIR
NERVOUS
SYSTEM

GET THE
“CREDIT”
FOR
HELPING
THEM
FEEL
SAFE





partnership + connection = **FUN**

REFERENCE ARTICLES

- [I Want My Mama - Dr. Stephen Peters](#)
- [MRI Scans Reveal How Early Weaning Rewires a Foal's Brain For the Worse](#)
- [Ending Weaning Trauma](#)
- [Weaning: When and How has Lifelong Implications - Lynn Acton](#)
- [Weaning Strategy: The Best Time May Be Never](#)
- [Separation Anxiety Webinar – Warwick Schiller](#)

