



Horse behaviour

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He calls to his friends

Q My horse calls if he's left out in the field by himself. Do you have any tips for keeping him calm?

Gemma Plumb, Lincolnshire

A As horses are prey animals they instinctively look to a herd for protection. They're extremely sociable and they form strong bonds. Horses will tolerate 'alone time' differently depending on their character and life experience, but being alone, even for a very short time, can cause some to become fearful.

Keeping him chilled

If your horse calling is a recent thing it could be that he's struck up a new bond with another horse, and is nervous about losing this 'best friend' status when the other horse leaves. Depending on the severity and nature of the calling, it may also signify that your horse is suffering some separation anxiety. This happens when a particularly strong bond is formed with another, often more self-confident horse with whom they feel secure.

Try feeding your horse enough hay, or a simple chaff feed, to keep him occupied while you're on the yard and he's alone in his field. Food needs to be given once his buddy is out of the field but still within sight. If he eats happily, then gradually lead his friend away just a few steps and back again, before your horse starts to fret.

Repeat this many times, slowly getting further and further away with his friend. It could take many attempts before he accepts his fieldmate leaving. Associating the arrival of the food with the removal of his friend can become a positive thing, if the behaviour isn't too severe.

Have a talk with the other people on your yard too. Is there another horse who would be happy to be brought in from the field last instead? Or can two people be around so your horse and his friend are brought in together? Avoiding alone time with others out of sight is key.

Visit: www.societyofequinebehaviourconsultants.org.uk for more advice or to find a professional Equine Behaviour Consultant near you.



It's natural for horses to fret when left alone, as they're a sociable animal



Your horse's rug might take a battering when he's playing with his fieldmates

Rug vandal!

Q Every time I turn my horse out his rug comes back in tatters. I think another horse in the field is destroying it. How do I deal with this?

Bethany Webb, North Yorkshire

A If we're assuming there isn't a pesky nail head on a favourite scratching post, or a barbed wire fence that could be catching your horse's rug, then it could well be another horse in the field doing the damage. The good news is that the tattered rug is unlikely to be the result of any

dominant behaviour. If there are no playful youngsters about and your horse isn't harmed, it may be down to mutual grooming.

Mutual grooming occurs when horses have an established relationship. It's very relaxing and can lower their heart rates too. Therefore consider the possibility that an overzealous 'friend' may be attempting to groom your horse and the rug is getting in the way.

Rugs and masks can hinder a horse's body language, which is how they communicate 99% of the time and mutual grooming is a natural instinct that can't be changed. But it's also not feasible for all horses to go rug-free,

especially during winter. Instead, you can try to change your field set up. If you find out rug vandalism is due to mutual grooming, try to discover the identity of the other horse too.

Stop rug wreckers

Step 1 If there's the option to, try turning your horse out in a different herd, without his 'grooming buddy'.

Step 2 If space and safety permits, use good electric fencing to separate the field into two parts with a channel of a few feet between. As long as there's still shared grazing that allows social interactions for welfare, this will prevent your horse's rugs being ripped.

GOOD TO KNOW

Take the time to quietly observe your horse in his field to watch how he interacts with other horses. Is he happy and relaxed, or is he being bullied?