

How to Help Your Child Set Goals at Horse Shows

One of my favorite teachable moments for parenting and horse showing is helping kids learn to set goals. Horse showing provides a great opportunity for young children to watch you set and achieve goals, for older children to participate with you in goal setting, and for teens to set their own goals in conjunction with you. Much of horse showing is all about setting and achieving a goal. The goal can be one that you set for the season, like riding well enough to move up a class or jump height, qualifying for end-of-year finals, or braving the chaos in the schooling ring. Or, it can be as simple as setting a goal for the day, like to ride your best, improve on your hands or shoulders for an EQ class or improve your attitude with your horse or trainer. With young children, horse showing is a great opportunity to role model goal setting. You may discuss a goal with them or share a goal that has been discussed by the trainer. As a parent, you can share what it will take to achieve the goal and what the costs of hard work and time it might take. You can help set milestones along the way and show how to amend or change the goal if it becomes unrealistic. With an adolescent child, it is the perfect time to work together. The best approach is to have a prior conversation with a trainer and set some parameters or expectations. As a next step, set up a three-way meeting with your child and the trainer to establish some goals for training and showing. Again, share some milestones and try to be clear about what it will take to achieve the goal. With an older teen, your role may change to the active listener, with the teen and the trainer setting the goals and then involving you in the discussion. It is important to help teens fully understand the link between a goal, hard work, determination and follow-through as well as failure, disappointment and barriers that may crop up. Winter Circuit is a great time to work on goals. Many families go somewhere out of town, usually for a two- or three-week time frame. Even though you may only go for a long weekend, time seems to flow much more slowly at these shows. Winter Circuit shows are less intense for many trainers, which provides an opportunity to have some longer conversations with trainers and children. I've discovered that there is often more bonding time at Winter Circuit shows. For example, those long times of waiting for the next class can be a great time to pick up the conversation on an important topic. And, trainers seem more relaxed at Winter Circuit shows because horses are usually purchased, the trainer is in a nice warm place, and no one is earnestly chasing points or qualifying for medals. What are your show goals for the year? What can you role model for your children and what can you use as a teachable moment? How can you help them learn how to set a goal, manage both the achievement and the disappointment, and then learn an important life lesson as preparation for adulthood?

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