



Equine Liberty Sports™ Principles & Methods, Overview

Horses will work hard for you when they are tethered to you, but when you take the lines off and ask your horse to work or play with you, he or she may wander off, revealing a truth: Your horse may be doing as you ask because they feel they have no choice, or they've decided that it's easier to get along with you than not.

Leslie Nichols, creator of Equine Liberty Sports, discovered a new truth while developing methods to inspire horses to play at Liberty: Horses can work joyfully if they are given a choice, and if they are inspired to work with the handler. Further, Leslie realized that in order to inspire horses to work and play with you... *when they don't have to*, many widely-accepted ideas about how to relate to horses have to be modified or discarded altogether. Following is an overview of some the principles and methods that are at the heart of Equine Liberty Sports.

The *Experience* of Liberty is the *Reason* to Learn Liberty.

Equine Liberty Sports is not a problem-solving program, it is not a leadership program— it is a lesson plan to show you a new way to experience your horse. Liberty handlers will draw different experiences from the program. Some will enjoy learning a new teaching method and a new activity to enjoy with their horse. The serious student of horsemanship will appreciate the acquisition of new skills, new knowledge, and new growth. Others will savor the deepening of the bond with their horse. Some will appreciate the relaxation that is produced by the program, and others will be exhilarated by playing and dancing with their horse. And many Liberty handlers will enjoy a spiritual experience that naturally arises as you progress through the program. If you just dabble with the ideas and enjoy your horse in the process, you will have fulfilled the program's intention. If you dedicate yourself to the teaching program and experience incredible performance results, and deep satisfaction and meaning with your horse, you will have also fulfilled the program's intention.

Liberty Handler

As Liberty handler, your style and presentation is probably different than anything you've ever done with your horse. In fact, the differences between ground person and Liberty handler is what makes the experience so incredible for *you!* As Liberty handler, you are an active participant in the fun, you are a dance partner. In the Equine Liberty Sports teaching program, you are encouraged to get creative, get physical, let loose, experiment with the ideas... *have fun!*

Positive Reinforcement

Your horse must want to be with you when you take the lines off— it is the only way that Liberty can work! Positive reinforcement is key to inspiring your horse to work and play with you at Liberty. Positive reinforcement in the Equine Liberty Sports teaching program has 3 stages: 1. Using pleasure to motivate (create a connection), 2. The power of silence (interrupt the connection), and 3. Adding intensity without "losing" your horse (expecting more from the connection). For the horse that needs a little more motivation, Equine Liberty Sports teaches how to use food rewards in a safe and effective way.

Liberty is a Social Activity

The connection between horse and Liberty handler models the social connection between bonded herd mates that prefer each other's company and spend most of their time together. As Liberty handler, you are not trying to dominate your horse... you are dancing and playing with your horse! When your horse has made a powerful agreement to stay with you at Liberty and he is showing that staying with you is his new habit— then you can increase your expectations, challenge your horse, ask for more... and you will get it! In Phase II of the program, the exercise level, *Trust, through Confidence* deepens the social connection by challenging both horse and Liberty handler in a series of confidence-building exercises, producing a trust that works both ways. Your horse is inspired to do things for you, even when you raise the bar, because he enjoys you immensely, you have built his confidence in himself, and as a result- he holds you in very high esteem.

No Lines. No Limits.



Equine Liberty Sports™ Principles & Methods, Overview, *continued*

Equine Liberty Sports Blends Art and Science

Equine Liberty Sports merges the intangible elements of feel, style, emotions, creativity, self-expression, energy and suggestion, with the scientific and researched areas of classical conditioning, habituation, reward programs, instincts, neurological and physiological systems, multi-sensory learning techniques, and more, to create deep and permanent learning for you and your horse. The Equine Liberty Sports teaching program reflects strong influences from both worlds.

Horses Have Free Will

Equine Liberty Sports takes the position that horses have free will, opinions, preferences and possess intelligence. When you take the lines off in Liberty training, force, aggression, intimidation, and even the use of pressure to produce movement, does not work well or for very long. And yet horses can be inspired to offer the desired responses and be conditioned (training) to offer the responses and movement over and over again without stress and without resistance. Positive reinforcement and the creation of a social connection, modeled after the behaviors of bonded herd mates, is key to inspiring horses to choose to work and play with the handler. What starts out as a playful relationship, turns into a deep relationship built upon trust and confidence- but it is a gradual evolution that blossoms, slowly and wonderfully.

Celebrate Your Horse!

In the Equine Liberty Sports teaching program, your horse's natural movement and personality is celebrated. When you take the lines off, you cannot directly influence your horse's movement, you can only inspire it. The Liberty handler is encouraged to free their mind from the need to control movement, demand obedience from their horse, or try to change their temperament. You are not asked to shape your horse into an "ideal" that is put forth by a program. Equine Liberty Sports seeks to bring out the very best in your horse and to encourage you to accept and enjoy them for who they are.

On-Line to Teach, Off-Line to Play

While it is tempting to think that playing freely with your horse without lines can be achieved by learning a few new techniques- the reality is that this seldom goes easily or smoothly for either you or your horse. Equine Liberty Sports presents an on-line to off-line lesson plan. This creates a foundation so that when the lines do come off, your horse will be listening to you, enjoying you, and staying with you. However, you will be invited to take the lines off early on in the program to learn *Be with Me* exercises, and in early tutorials, you will be invited to dabble with Liberty. As you progress through the program, more of your time will be spent working and playing at Liberty.

The Linked Learning Method™

The Linked Learning Method, developed by Leslie Nichols, creator of Equine Liberty Sports, is used extensively in the teaching program to help horses learn new communication. It is also key to transferring lessons from on-line to off-line seamlessly! The Linked Learning Method uses locations, situations, obstacles, natural movement, instincts and natural energy to encourage horses to offer the desired response or movement, naturally, because it makes sense to him or her. A cue or signal is "linked" to the response and the horse creates an association (classical conditioning) between the cue and the response or movement. The Linked Learning Method also uses the incredible power of association, both experiential, as well as sensual (sight, taste, smell, touch, sound), to help your horse learn new ideas and to strengthen conditioning.

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