



How to have FUN on a Confidence Challenge Course!

These new and unique Confidence Challenge Courses are easily set up in any indoor arena or outdoor space such as pastures, round pen, outdoor arena. As Humans, we love the challenge of the new obstacles, but your horse may have different ideas. They will be in an area strange to them, perhaps without their usual

buds to keep them company. These courses have been designed to increase your confidence and your horse's confidence and in addition, your ability to act as a strong leader for your horse. With that in mind please take into consideration the following ideas:

1. Walk your horse on line through the first time. Give them a chance to see the obstacles, wander around with no real focus. Allow them to look around, smell things and get comfortable in the area.
2. Go slow – no reason to rush. Take your time and enjoy this fun space. What's the rush anyway? You are with your horse and your Confidence Challenge Course is set up at your place, so you have all the time in the world to explore, learn, and grow.
3. Play approach and retreat with the obstacles. Only go as close as your horse is comfortable, hang out there, retreat. You'll usually find when you re-approach it; the horse will be more comfortable. Pushing, pulling, forcing usually makes the horse more nervous and causes them to back away.
4. Walk back to the entrance and take your horse out to graze after a few new challenges. Or have a hay net prepared for them to have a few minutes to relax or hang out doing nothing. To compare this adventure to one in human terms, it's like us learning skydiving and rock climbing for hours – our minds would be overwhelmed. Give them a break so they can come back and be fresh for the new obstacles.
5. Reward the attempt! If they try, praise and reward them. It's tough out there. Even one foot on or near an obstacle is progress. Pushing them over the edge will not win you the confidence points you want from your horse partner.
6. Using a lead line and working on the ground will often help horses who are unsure about an obstacle. Be sure to set mounting blocks around the course. Then it's easy to get on and off when your horse needs your extra help.
7. Understand that some obstacles just aren't going to be OK today. AND that's OK! Some things are quite challenging and frankly frightening to the horses. Be understanding and compassionate to your horse if they give you the "I just can't do this" look. You can always come back another time.
8. BE creative on the course. Just because the next obstacle lines up in a certain way or it "seems" that this is how to do it, you can be creative and find another way. If the obstacle is long, cross the short way, side pass along it, back up to it instead of coming forward, circle around it, find a different entrance. Be creative.
9. If you use cookies as rewards, this is a great time to give them a reward for conquering a challenge. Remember it's a reward, not a bribe.
10. Cheer on your horse and your partner's horses! It's fun, its crazy fun! Be happy, smile, laugh! Your horse will take on your emotions and realize it IS fun to be here and enjoying it together!

How and why the Confidence Challenge Courses were designed–

The Confidence Challenge Courses were created because so many people wanted fun new challenges to experience with their horses. It can be expensive and sometimes difficult to bring your horse TO these courses, so why not build your own at home? Use simple objects, many that are already found around the farm, add a touch of creativity and some CCC Magic and you'll have hours of fun to experience with your horse and your friends! Bonus points in the winter if you have an indoor – lots of fun things to do!

The specific obstacles and challenges have many aspects to enhance your partnership with your horse. These are not just randomly designed, crazy, or scary obstacles. **THE POINT IS NOT TO SCARE YOUR HORSE!** The point is to help your horse gain confidence in you as a leader and for your horse to build his or her own confidence. Each challenge and obstacle was planned out to develop different qualities and skills.

You will find designed into the challenges

- Things play with online and things to play with while riding
- Things to go over and under, around and through
- Things set up so the horse must manage their feet – up, down, sideways and backward
- Things that encourage the rider to be more athletic, agile and coordinated
- Things that the horse would encounter in real life, on the roads, in the woods, at parades, etc.
- Things that cause a horse to THINK through a puzzle
- Things that ask our horse to act like a partner to help us manage the obstacle
- Things that challenge us to figure out the best way to, through and over
- Things that are FUN!! Things that make us smile, laugh and praise our horses!
- Things that might be scary, but since we are careful with how we expose the horse, they build confidence.

You'll experience ways to ask your horse to go forward and backward, sideways and around. Every challenge and each obstacle has multiple ways to interact with it. For each Challenge think about these aspects and ideas to make them more complex or challenging:

Can the horse stand quietly on or near the obstacle? Can the horse walk over it? Can the horse back up over it? Can the horse go sideways alongside it or over it? Can the horse place ONE foot on the obstacle? Can the horse do a pattern including the obstacle, like a figure 8 incorporating the obstacle, or a showmanship pattern around it? Can the horse learn a new task, like touching obstacles with their nose (in the case of Tub Thumping, the drumming stops when horse touches it with their nose? They quickly learn that they have created an "off button" and they employ it with glee!) Can the horse practice yields, forehand or hindquarter around or over the obstacle? Riding or online, changing gaits and directions all around the course.

Troubleshooting –

1. "My horse is not comfortable, he's very nervous." Bring a buddy horse, preferably a confident one. Allow your horse to stand and watch. Ease the horse into the concepts and challenges slowly. Only build one or two of them at a time such that your horse doesn't see "Crazy Carnival" instead of Fun Challenge Course.
2. "My horse did fine at first, but is getting more nervous." Give them a break after a few challenges. Let them soak in the new information and relax a bit.
3. "My horse is bored with these." I doubt it. As the leader, you need to add some fun new elements to the "ho hum" way you are interacting with the obstacles. **See above.
4. My horse won't get near the (bubbles, cowboy curtain, mirror, etc.) Maybe not now, not yet, but remember it's not a race; you have all the time in the world. Allow them to get used to things, they'll surprise you how they will change when allowed to explore and learn following their own timeline.

The Nuts of Bolts of creating the Confidence Challenge Course obstacles....You may need a drill or saw, a hammer for sure. Lots of rope and scissors comes in handy. Tape, step ladder, tacks, zip ties and nails.

Where to find it and what to look for –

Check out all around the farm for great opportunities for obstacles – fence poles and even tree branches, the leaf blower you use to sweep the aisle, tarps of all shapes and sizes, PVC poles, rocks, buckets, old hose, empty feed bags, tires.

Become a trash picker! Seriously! You'll find old carpet, boards, an old mattress or cushions from a couch, tires, and barrels, buckets. (You'll be putting these things on the ground and stepping on them, they can be not-so-nice.)

Dollar Store – blow up items, baskets and buckets, fake flowers, table cloths, noise makers, balloons, pool noodles, holiday decorations

Steal your kids' toys! – Ha! Stuffed animals or blow up toys, bubbles, cap guns, things that fly, float or make noises.

Hardware store – PVC of all sizes and shapes, wood that they will cut for you, rope, tarps, Halloween decorations (cheap after the season), check the clearance bins for pieces of linoleum, carpet, wood pieces.

Thrift Store – stuffed animals, cloth pieces or drapes or tablecloths, small tables for sturdy mounting blocks, kids' toys that make noise, crazy random things people drop off at the thrift store. Garage sales are good too.

Be creative! Soon you'll be scouring the area looking for the craziest of things to make into your own cool obstacles.

The Obstacles and Challenges –

Tiny Bubbles – bubble machine - \$10 at Meijer. This obstacle creates several different challenges, the bubble machine whirrs and hums, the bubbles float up and out as much as 10 feet. It's constantly moving. The bubbles touching the horse will "pop" creating an interesting sensation for the horse.

Tub Thumping – Cardio Drumming –Exercise Ball, Muck bucket, barrel, or water bucket – bring some drum sticks, or thick branches and allow someone to channel their inner Rock Star, beating on the drums. One caveat – if the horse gets bold enough to touch the drums, the drummer must stop. It not only rewards the horse it shows they have confidence to approach the crazy noisy thing.

Smoke Monster – smoke bombs – this is an advanced challenge. Light a smoke bomb in a safe area!! Placing it in a bucket of sand is a good idea – if you need to remove it from the area, you can easily carry it away or douse it with more sand to put it out. Allow the horses to approach on their own time, as their curiosity kicks in.

The Man Behind the Curtain – Cowboy curtain – Cardboard cutout – lots of ways to create a cowboy curtain. This obstacle incorporates many sensations for the horse. Things that touch them on the top and sides and even their feet, things that move, a "blind spot" they need to approach and successfully maneuver through, setting a cardboard cutout or blow up animal on the other side adds to the complexity.

Nap Time – bed mattresses! These are great for so many things. Find one on the side of the road on trash day. Place the mattress in a spot where the horse is allowed to go all around it. You can toss a few cookies in the middle to encourage the braver horses to step up on it or they can leap over it; step on with one foot, circle it or stop and rest on it. You can add a tarp on top of the mattress to make a different feel and sound. Or add small rocks underneath it for lumps and bumps to traverse.

Pixie Stix – jumble of cavaletti, or logs or pvc poles. By putting them in all directions, crossing them over and allowing them to teeter and move it will help your horse to learn to manage his feet.

Something touched my foot – pool noodles – I have a unique and effective way to manage pool noodles. If you cut 2" PVC pipe into 4" sections and screw them to a board or two boards it will hold up the pool noodles so you horse can walk through them (or jump them as the case may be) If you place the boards sideways and brace them, it becomes Dragon's teeth to brush through their legs . You can move them farther apart or closer together as your horses get braver.

Blow me Down Charlie – turn on the leaf blower in corner and allow horses to get used to the loud sound. Eventually begin approach and retreat toward the flow of air. You can position in on a crate or box such that the air blows low or high. The addition of shredded cloth to flap and blow can crank this obstacle up to another level.

Mirror Mirror – mirror to visit – purchase a flexible (NOT GLASS) mirror. The large 4 x 8 sheet of mirrored material works great. It's movable and can be used high or low, long or short. It really brings up the horse's curiosity to check out the horse in the mirror.

Pole Dancing – Garrocha Pole – purchase an 8 or 10 foot PVC pole from Home Depot. 1 ½ inch works well. You may want to start with a shorter pole at first. This is a great obstacle to pull, drag, flip, spin, twirl and more. Check out YouTube for some advanced moves with a Garrocha pole, it's amazing what a great rider can do with one. It can be used on line or riding, and you are only limited by your imagination with the things you can do with it!

Crunch and Munch – plastic bottles to step on - gather plastic water bottles and remove the caps (if you leave the caps on it is an added challenge as you will get a POP to go along with the crunch sounds.) It's best to corral the bottles between poles as they horse's will kick them around.

Monsters under the Bed – Tarp with squeaky toys underneath. Bumps and lumps that squeal when stepped on.

Momma Zeeb and Baby Rah! Blow up toys, especially ones that have 4 legs and look similar to horses will really intrigue your horse. You can get a 5' Zebra (Momma Zeeb) from Amazon for around \$30 or a smaller one (baby Rah) for around \$12. Some obstacles, like this one, are interesting to place outside the pasture fence and allow the herd to get acquainted with them from a safe distance. Be aware – Zeeb and Rah have both been bitten and kicked by horses. Pay attention to your horse's energy when they are around these "strange animals".

Tectonic Plates – Buy a stack of Styrofoam plates. Toss them around in a random pattern. As your horse walks on them they will crunch and crack. Interesting to make a pattern with them and see if you can get your horse to step on specific ones and avoid specific ones.

Tarpe Diem – a piece of tarp or cloth can do so many things. If your horse is fearful of it, have someone else drag it and allow your horse to follow. They are much braver "chasing" things. The tarp can be used to step on, you can drag it, flap it, cover your horse with it.

High Roller – Place a ball or 2 liter bottle filled with some rocks on top of a barrel. Allow the horse to smell and eventually knock it off. This will create sound and movement and maybe even the horse getting touched by the ball or bottle.

Hoola Hoopin' It – Kids hula-hoop with the shaky rocks inside. It's amazing how this little thing can cause problems for the horses. Take your time to expose your horse to the rattle. If they step on the edge of the hoop it will flip up and hit them on legs. Be aware that this is more frightening for them than you can imagine. Take it slow and easy on this one. Once they become confident you can use it like a stick to move the horse's forehead and hindquarter, put it around their neck, ride with it like a neck rope. But be sure they are OK, WITH THIS ONE!

Coat of Arms – Pick up a huge coat from the thrift store. Hang it on the wall and take your horse over to it while you put it on and off, flap it up and down, standing in all zones of your horse. It's a great desensitizer for all riders. (You can pick up a trench coat from SalVal for about \$10)

Whiney Barrel – It's easy to cut a PVC barrel in half the long way using a hand saw or saber saw. It makes a short, wide obstacle. Great for small jumps, side passing over or alongside, or using it as a small mounting block, or flip it over and fill with rocks or water or stuffed animals.

Mani-Pedi – small heavy box filled with water. Get your horse to place one foot in the box of water. Front and hind feet, one at a time. A wooden box works great; you can spray it with sealer or just allow the water to slowly trickle out. Be aware, horses often pull their legs back without lifting their feet, so the box can tip and spill the water. The heavier the box the better or you can screw it down to a board so that it is more stable.

Bow and Arrows – a cheap kid's set of bow and suction cup arrows will cost around \$25. I recommend a compound bow, it's smaller and easier to handle. Fill a feed bag with straw to use as a target. Begin this one on line; allow the horse to get used to the movement and sound of the arrow and the bow string snapping and the arrow hitting the target. I have a whole program mapped out for riding and shooting, I'll include that at the end.

Flapping Flag - Cut material or use a fee bag on a stick for your flag. Walk next to your horse flapping it and allowing it to touch the horse all over. The nosier the material the better, so plastic tarps work well too. Once they are comfortable and confident on the ground, mount up and Flap the Flag!

Balloon Bopper – Fill several balloons partially with sand, and then blow them up. They will stay in place better on the ground being weighted. Now, walk through your Balloon Forest and allow your horse to kick and move the balloons. They will weeble and wobble but they won't fall down. An added "adventure" is to sharpen a stick and spear and poke the balloons so they POP! Careful with this one, it's the random things that are the most frightening to your horse.

Sneaky Snakes – cut old hose in 4-5 foot sections. Pile the snakes up in a snake pile. Walk your horse around and through the snakes. Be aware of how they handle the sensations.

Hawaiian Hoola – buy "grass" hoola skirts from the Dollar store and tie them between fence posts or jump standards in a long strip. Allow them to flap and sway in the wind. If you are using the Leaf Blower you can place them such that they are in the stream of the breeze. Walk your horse near enough for them to touch, and then get closer until they are practically WEARING the skirts.

Rope a Dope – lariat – you can buy "used" lariats online or at a tack swap for around \$10. This is fun to practice with throwing a loop or just flapping and slapping the rope. Set up a cone or chair to throw the rope at and whether your loop ropes it or not, it's a good exercise for your horse. Start on the ground, then when the horse is calm, mount up and try throwing from the saddle.

Cow Flagger – This is another piece of equipment that I will post directions for at the end. It's an easily made flag for your horse to practice cutting cows. It flows along easily on a rope back and forth between walls of the arena or fence posts. It does require a handler to move the "cow" it's not electric.

Crazy Spooky Sounds – download MP3 music from YouTube of things like shotguns, sirens, kids screaming, train whistles, show sounds, announcers and clapping, parade music, band music, drums! Play these while you experiment with the obstacles.

Duck Pond – buy a heavy duty tarp. Drape it over 4 cavaletti set in a square and tuck the ends in or put dirt over the edges so that it holds in place. Fill with water, even an inch or two will be sufficient to play with your horse. Added fun is to buy some rubber duckys or other floaty things like plastic balls or even bottles, float them on your "pond".

Joust Do It – find some 3-4" rings – you can cut them from a 2 liter bottle or pipe or cardboard tube. Gently place them around the area at different heights. Use a handy stick/carrot stick or dressage whip to pick the rings off the walls like jousting of old. One way to "gently" hang them is to cut a small slit in a water bottle and place the ring in there. Then tie the bottles to the walls or fence. Practice this one until you can trot the course and capture all the rings.

Water Bucket Brigade – This obstacle requires 2 large buckets, like the size of a muck bucket and a smaller bucket on a rope. You will walk or ride to the big bucket, toss the smaller bucket in the water, let it fill up and then walk or ride to the other big bucket and dump out the water. One good thing is you never run out of water, just keep moving it back and forth.

Shoot Out – water pistols and the big water shotguns – set up targets along the wall (paper plates, empty water bottles, small rubber balls, little plastic trucks or animals) to shoot the water at and knock them down. Keep a barrel close by filled with water for recharging the "guns" between shootouts.

Bell Ringers – Find a bunch of different kinds of bells, sleigh bells, cow bells, wind chimes, any kind of noise maker – hang them in different areas, at different heights and hit them with your stick or dressage whip to make beautiful music. Get a whole chorus going with each horse/rider playing a different set of bells.

Bear Bag – This is a good one! In the wild you have to suspend your food in the trees so the bears don't eat it or you. This obstacle requires a feed bag, a few rocks and a rope. You'll need the trusses of an indoor or a tree branch for this one. Put a few rocks in the feed bag and tie it up with the rope. Throw the end of the rope over the ceiling truss. Start out on line then go to riding. Your challenge is to lift the bag up and down in the air by walking your horse forward or backward. Don't make it too heavy. You can pull it up with your horse facing it or pull it up while your horse is walking away from it.

Spin Cycle – This obstacle requires a few cavaletti or tree branches. You will make a 5 or 6 sided polygon, with something in the center like a piece of carpet or rubber matt or even flour or different colored sand. Push dirt or sand against the edges of the boards or branches, to help keep them in place. NOW, your challenge is to enter the spin cycle, stand on the middle, perform a turn on the forehand or hindquarter while staying inside the polygon. This obstacle has lots of ways to play.....

Cap Gun – buy a kids cap gun and get all the horses used to the sound by lining them up at one end of the arena together in a herd, and someone at the other end shoots off the cap gun. Slowly ask the horses to approach the noisy cap gun, and when they can stand calmly by it, reward and walk away. This is an important game to play approach and retreat. Only bring your horse as close as they are comfortable, and then wait for them to signal they are ready to approach again.

Straddle Snake – This is a deceptively simple game. Get your horse to put both right front and right hind on one side of a pole and (therefore) left front and left hind are on the other side of the pole. Some hints are to walk the horse up to the straddle and along the length of it. One foot at a time, is another good hint.

Hang 'Em High Bucket Tie – use a bucket with a few rocks and a rope. Sling the rope high up in a tree limb or over the roof trusses in the indoor. The object is to lift the bucket up and down – stationary at first – but then ride and pull so that the bucket goes up in front of the horse while they back up or behind the horse while they walk forward.

Log Zipper – Branches and logs are great for this obstacle. You'll need 2 longish logs for the sides and then many different lengths and sizes for the "zipper" part.

Horse Balls – find an old tennis or racket ball racket (everyone seems to have one in the basement). String a rope up high and tie a tennis ball to the rope. You need to drill a hole through the tennis ball and thread the rope through it. Try to have a long distance for the rope to span. Then you can ride along and hit the ball as it flies along the rope back and forth like a tennis match. This is a great partnership game, to see if your horse can follow your direction while you are working on hitting the ball.

Bucket O' Rocks – 2 buckets and a bunch of rocks! Take an empty bucket and walk or ride to the bucket full of rocks. Toss the rocks into the empty bucket or pour them out. Be sure to have lots of sizes and shapes so it makes crazy noises. If mounted, put the full bucket on a barrel so the rider can bend over and take out all the rocks. Ride a simple figure 8 pattern carrying the rocks, the ride back to the other bucket and dump out the rocks.

It's Alive – kids electronic toys that move, whirr, flash or bounce. Think tickle me Elmo, or the baby doll that cries or RC cars that zoom and move.

Droning ON and On.... fly a drone around, bonus if you can take pictures of your horses from High Up!

Bounce and Hopper – kid's trampoline – buy a used one on Marketplace for around \$20. Get really physical on the tramp! Jumping on and off, bouncing things on it, having other people bounce, bounce alongside your horse and the ultimate, bounce-bounce-bounce big jump and mount your horse!

And the Beat Goes On – drumming! Great for parade prep or extreme desensitizing - Set up buckets, barrels, boxes, etc. Get a set of drum sticks or 2 branches and pound out the beat.

What a Drag – use a small log or kid's snow sled to pull behind your horse. If working on the ground, lead your horse and pull the object along side. When they are comfortable to ride with it, be VERY careful to not allow the rope under the tail or wrapped around the horse's legs!

I'm with the Band – get your kids out with their band instruments to play Three Blind Mice or Oh Susannah while you ride around them. Bonus points for anyone who plays brass – Trumpets, Trombones and Tubas!

Water you Waiting For? – Carry plastic glasses of water while weaving through the obstacles. Challenge a friend to see how well you can walk, trot, canter without spilling your water. (Hint: gaited horses usually win – LOL)

Carnival Shoot Out – Water pistols and the big water shotguns – line up bottles and cans on a shelf and practice shooting them off. Bonus points for shooting at the walk trot and canter.

Last but not Least – Trade horses with a friend – it's a whole different Ballgame when you are working with a horse you don't know!!

There you have it! 50 Obstacles and Challenges for every level and style of riding! Good for you and your horse.

Have fun with it! Happy Challenge Course Riding Folks!