

Arena Etiquette and Safety

Unless you are lucky enough to own your very own indoor arena (and are the only person who ever rides in it), you spend a portion of your riding time sharing a ring with other riders. Riding a horse does not require the same kinds of regulations as, say, driving a car, but there are still important guidelines that all riders should follow, to ensure that everyone in the ring enjoys a safe, positive riding experience.

General Etiquette — Basic Manners when Sharing an Arena

- **Follow the rules.** Perhaps your barn requests that riders do not school over fences when there are others using the ring, or that no one rides bareback in the arena. If there are posted rules, make sure you follow them at all times.
- **Keep everyone informed.** No one likes to be surprised — horse or human. Tell other riders what you plan to do, so that they have a chance to prepare themselves and their horses. (For example: “Opening the gate,” “passing on your left.”)
- **Share the rail.** Riders working at a slower pace, warming up, cooling off, or doing lateral work should stay well off the rail and use the inside areas of the ring. Allow those riders working in faster gaits to have the rail.
- **Don’t stop on the track.** If you need to stop your horse, pull into the centre of the ring. Do the same when mounting or dismounting.
- **Riding or longeing.** If other people are riding in the arena, don’t assume it’s ok to longe your horse — ask the other riders or wait until the arena is empty. Similarly, if someone is longeing in the arena, hold off riding until they are finished.
- **Lessons take precedence.** It can be difficult to learn with distractions. Try not to ride when there are lessons going on in the arena. If you must ride, check with the instructor, and then stay out of the way. **Instructors have control of the arena.**
- **Keep your voice down.** We all verbally cue our horses from time to time. However, try to keep these cues quiet when other people are riding nearby. You could accidentally cue their horse.
- **Leave no trace.** Clean up after yourself and your horse when you leave the arena. Don’t leave manure, poles, or other items cluttering up the arena for the next person.

Safety Tips — The Rules of the Ring

- **No Smoking.** Never smoke in or around an arena — or anywhere around the barn.
 - **Keep it closed.** Make sure that all gates stay closed when people are riding. You never know when horses could get spooked and bolt out the door, leading to possible injuries.
- **Pass left to left.** Passing left shoulder to left shoulder is the generally accepted rule. When riders are working on the rail in the same direction, **never pass a rider on the outside.** Just like when driving a car, when riding in opposite directions, always keep to the right of someone — though riding in the same direction is preferable.
- **Don’t crowd.** Don’t ride too close to the horse in front of you. You should keep at least a full horse length in between horses, and at least a couple of feet between horses on the inside and outside tracks. A good rule of thumb: make sure you can always see the back hooves of the horse in front of you. When there are riders working in both directions, leave enough room when passing that horses aren’t able to bite or kick each other.
- **Buddy up.** It is always a good idea to ride with a buddy in and out of the arena, so that someone is there in case something happens.

- **Respect others.** While this is always important, you should always be conscientious when someone in the ring is working with a young horse, or is a beginner rider, or if they are having problems with their horse.
- **Be prepared.** Familiarize yourself with where the first aid kit, fire extinguisher, and telephone are so that you are able to access them quickly in case of an emergency.
- **Dress appropriately.** Always wear a helmet with a properly fitting chin strap, and boots with a heel when riding.
- **Announce your entry and exit.** Tell everyone else in the ring when you are entering or exiting the arena; horses can spook at the sudden noise if they and their riders are unprepared.
- **Right of way.** Yes, there are established “right of way” guidelines, but don’t be so strict about them that you put you and your horse or another horse and rider in danger. Understand that other riders may not be aware of the rules – ride defensively.
- **No dogs.** Dogs and horses often seem to go hand in hand, but keep them out of the ring when people are schooling. It is too easy for either animal to get out of hand and cause problems.
- **Winter weather.** Ice and snow can be noisy. If you are riding in snowy conditions, be aware of any melting or cracking noises that could spook your horse.
- **Don’t ride in the dark.** If the lights go off or are not working in the arena, and it is past dusk, do not ride.
- **Spectators stay out.** For the safety of both the riders and spectators, people on foot should watch from outside the ring.