

# Halter Breaking and Gentling

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## Goal (learning objective)

Youth will:

- Learn about different types of halters and appropriate uses
- Learn about one method of haltering and gentling cattle (beef or dairy), a lamb or goat and gentling a swine

## Supplies

- Flipchart paper and markers
- Rope halter
- Show halter
- Lamb rope halter
- Goat collar
- Horse halter
- Plastic calf head
- Stuffed animal (dog, sheep, calf, etc.)
- Handout 1 - "Halter Breaking" (make enough copies for group)
- Handout 2 - "Halters" (make enough copies for group)

## Pre-lesson preparation

- Make photocopies of Handout 1 and Handout 2
- Gather halters and plastic roping calf head
- Read/review handouts, have an understanding of pressure points used with halters
- Review Ohio State University Extension. (2011). Beef resource handbook Breaking and Training, (pages 3-8 and 3-9) and Getting Ready for the Show. (pages 9-2 through 9-3).
- Review Ohio State University Extension. (2011).

Sheep resource handbook for market and breeding projects, Chapter 8, Showing and Selling (pages 91-93).

- Review Ohio State University Extension. (2008). Goat resource handbook, Chapter 15, Preparing Your Animal for Show. (pages 175-176).
- Review Ohio State University Extension. (2000). Swine resource handbook for market and breeding projects, Showing Your 4-H Market Hog. (pages 12-1 through 12-8).

## Lesson directions and outline

Have the youth brainstorm and discuss the steps necessary to help a first time 4-H member gentle and halter break the project animal they plan to show. List the ideas on flip chart paper. When all the ideas are listed, share the following information with the youth. Take time to recognize the ideas the youth listed.

Halter breaking and gentling is very important for your animals' safety and your own. It plays a critical part to the success of your animal project. Your animal needs to be broke to the halter allowing you to tie the animal up and lead it. Using the proper equipment and method will set you up for success by fair time.

Beef – this first step in breaking and gentling a beef animal is to allow it to settle in to new surroundings for a few days before trying to halter break. Make sure you work with the animal in about a 12' X 12' solid pen. A solid pen can be described as one where the panels holding the pen together are secured to posts with one end of the posts buried in the ground. You can use a long handled broom to rub the back (topline) of the animal to get it used to being touched. As the animal calms down you can move slowly closer until you can scratch the topline of the animal with your hand or a brush. This will help the

animal get used to you. It's best if an adult or older youth helps during this process to keep younger members safe. Once the animal is used to standing you can try to corner the animal using a panel or gate or if available, put in a chute with a head catch to place the halter on the head of the animal.

Depending on your situation you can tie the animal up to a solid post or secure panel (make sure one end of the post is buried in the ground). If you are not ready to tie the animal you may want to let it drag the halter lead rope for a few days allowing the animal to get used to the halter before tying it up. Tie the animal up for a few hours at a time making sure not to leave the animal unattended until it learns how to stand quietly. While the animal is tied try to use a comb and brush on it so it will get used to you rubbing and brushing the hair. Most animals will respond positively when they are scratched in a pleasant manner. Repeat this gentling process until you are able to get the animal to respond when you pull on the halter. As you pull on the halter it will tighten, making the animal move forward to release the pressure. This helps the animal learn to lead when you pull.

As you begin to teach the animal to walk in response to the halter, it is important not to let the animal know it is strong enough to go where it wants to. Control the head and the nose with the halter. When leading the animal keep the head up instead of down. When the head is held up it won't have as much leverage to pull away as when it puts its' head down towards the ground.

Sheep – can be trained to respond to a halter in a similar manner as beef. Typically sheep will gentle down quicker and learn to lead faster than a beef animal.

Goats – can be broke to tie as well in a manner similar to sheep. It can be helpful to teach the goats how to tie and lead with a halter. Goats are generally shown in a collar. Make sure the collar is fitted to the goat. Be careful not to choke the goat when teaching it to work on a collar.

Swine – can be gentled as you spend time letting the pig get used to you. Make sure as you come in contact with the pig your movements are slow and

deliberate. Work to get your pig tame enough so that you can put your hands on it. Use a brush or a rag to help your pig get used to being touched. You don't want you animal to become a pet but you want it to respond favorably when you use a brush or rag to groom and clean it. Train your animal to walk or drive in the direction you want it to move. Use a driving device that you will use in the show ring for consistency. Once your pig is trained to drive start taking it out the pen to get it used to new surroundings, provide exercise and increase the stamina of the pig. Some show classes can take 15 to 30 minutes to complete.

All of these processes take time and repeated practice. Make sure you are consistent and patient. Animals learn from the behavior and treatment of the handler.

### Conducting the activity (DO)

1. Demonstrate putting the halter on the plastic calf head or the stuffed animal head.
2. Have members practice putting on the halter on the plastic calf head or stuffed animal model. (It is a common mistake for youth and adults to put halters on wrong - upside down or backwards).
3. Have youth practice putting the coat collar on the stuffed animal.
4. Have a volunteer distribute the handouts to the group.
5. Review with members the parts of the halter:
  - a. Headstall
  - b. Nose piece
  - c. Chin rope or strap
  - d. Lead rope
6. Review proper fitting of the halter on the animal's head. The lead strap should always be on the animal's left side.
7. Discuss with members how pressure is applied at the cheek and show where the pressure is placed when the halter is put on upside down (the pressure is at the ear).

8. Show the difference between a horse halter and a rope halter. Demonstrate how the horse halter does not put pressure at the cheek whereas the rope halter does.
9. Show the difference between a chain strap and a rope strap under the chin, explain how that can cause an animal to move and react differently.
10. Review Handout 1, discuss the method of halter breaking a calf or lamb.

Ohio State University Extension. (2000). Showing Your 4-H Market Hog. *Swine resource handbook for market and breeding projects* (pages 12-1 through 12-8).

### What did we learn? (REFLECT)

- Ask: What are the differences between a horse halter and a beef halter?
- Ask: Where is pressure applied to teach your animal to lead?
- Ask: What are the similarities between a beef halter and a lamb halter?

### Why is that important? (APPLY)

- Ask: Why is it important to practice leading and working with your animal?
- Ask: Why is it important to work with the appropriate equipment? What can happen if you have the wrong equipment?
- Ask: Where else in life is having the right equipment important?

## Resources

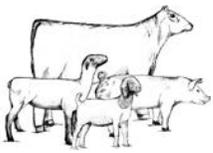
Kinder, C.A. (2016). Halter Breaking. *Champion of Knowledge: 801*. University of Idaho Extension.

Kinder, C.A. (2016). Halters. *Champion of Knowledge: 802*. University of Idaho Extension.

Ohio State University Extension. (2011). Getting Ready for the Show. *Beef resource handbook* (pages 9-2 through 9-3).

Ohio State University Extension. (2008). Preparing Your Animal for Show. *Goat resource handbook* (pages 175-176).

Ohio State University Extension. (2011). Showing and Selling *Sheep resource handbook for market and breeding projects* (pages 91-93).



# Champion of Knowledge

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No.  
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801

## **Halter Breaking**

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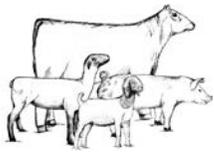
After members have selected their animal they need to halter break it as soon as possible. Some animals are not fit for being a show animal. Their temperament does not allow them to be gentle and worked with in a close manner. Some animals like working only with their owners and do not like crowds or loud noises. Members need to find out as soon as possible what kind of temperament their animal has. It will take about two weeks to properly gentle a calf however, members will be able to tell in 3 or 4 days if their animal will gentle down. There are many ways to halter break your animal. The following has been very successful. Make sure an adult or older member helps younger members during the halter breaking process.

1. Halter and let the calf drag the halter for a couple days, this way the calf understands the rope will stop them, as they step on it.
2. Tie the calf to a secure post. Approximately two feet from the ground leaving about two feet of space between the calf and post.
3. If the calf throws himself, and is not in danger, let him lay and think the situation over. Don't yell at or frighten him.
4. Assuming the calf is not in danger of hurting himself, leave the calf tied up, for several hours, making sure not to leave them unattended.
5. Continue this practice, taking time to comb and brush the animal each time it is tied up. This will get it used to you and help to calm it down because the animal will realize you are there not to hurt it. Pull on the halter as you are working with the animal to determine when it is ready to start trying to get it to lead.
6. Repeat this process until the calf is able to be untied and led around the pen without risk of trying to get away. You can practice leading your animal to and from water when you have had it tied up for several hours. Members will be able to tell when the calf understands and respects them as a safe handler.
7. Members can also start practicing stopping with the calf's head up, when stopping at the post or panel. This is good showmanship practice.

### Tips for success:

- When having calves tied, up be mindful of how long the rope is between the post and the calf. Having it too long will allow the calf to get tangled up in the rope and injured. Also having the rope too high is a problem, if they fall. Some calves will pull back against the post and not release. Make sure your calf learns to release.
- Members and families should have a quite gentle manner around the calves. This reduces the stress of people and animals.
- Understanding animal flight zones is important as the animal becomes tamer those zones get smaller.

This procedure and time schedule can be adjusted to fit the temperament of the calf. Remember, some animals are NOT suitable as project calves. Find out early so there is time to get another calf.



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## *Halter Breaking*

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Halters are a “tool” to use when halter breaking livestock. There are many kinds of halters, using the correct one and using it properly is important.

You should know the parts of the halter, their purpose, and where it is located when placed on the animal. Understanding the relationship of the halter parts and the underlying pressure points is helpful when teaching your calf to be respectful of the halter. Teaching them to lead when they are young or smaller in weight is easier and less stressful on you and the calf and insures success at show time.



**Headstall:** Is used to keep the halter on top of the head; it is set over the poll and behind the ears of your animal. Pressure points under the headstall and behind the ears causes your animal to move forward when leading.

**Nose piece:** Keeps the halter on the face of the animal; goes over the bridge of the animal’s nose approximately one inch below the eyes. Pressure points on top of the nose causes your animal to move backward. Be careful because sore/rub spots can form here.

**Adjustment loop:** Allows the halter to be adjusted smaller or larger and allows the halter to ‘fit’; it should be on the right side of the head. Pressure points under the loop causes the animal to turn.

**Chin rope or strap:** Keeps the halter from coming off the nose; goes under the animal’s chin and cheek area, is made of rope or chain. Pressure points under the chin rope cause the animal to move forward. Chain straps are found on show halters and are used if you need more pressure after the animal has been trained to lead. Jerking on the chain is strongly discouraged because it causes more harm than good.

**Eye Loop:** Holds the lead of the halter and is located on the left side of the head.

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**Lead:** Is used to tie up and hold onto the animal; is located on the left side of the animal's cheek. The lead is used to provide pressure on all pressure points found on the animal's head.

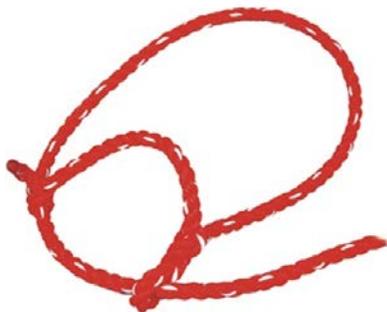
Halter breaking is teaching your animal to respond to pressure. Applying pressure with the halter causes your animal to move so that the pressure is released. The release of constant pressure is the reward that teaches your animal to lead.

There are three main halter types.

Rope type halter: Made with three strand nylon or sisal rope. A rope halter is used for the initial halter breaking because rope does not pinch the animals. Caution should be taken when using the nylon rope because it is slippery and hard to hold onto when tying the animal for the first time. Wearing gloves is recommended when using this rope. Leads can be different lengths. Having a short lead when halter breaking for the first time can make it difficult to tie up. Too long of leads can be dangerous as you or your calf can get tangled in the rope. A good length for the lead for cattle is 12 to 14 feet. For lambs the lead is 4 to 6 feet.

Show type halter: Made of leather or nylon material and has a chain chin strap. One to two weeks before your show you should introduce the show halter and practice with it. Some animals don't like the chain feeling and must get used to it. The chain adds more pressure and with that comes more response from your animal. If your animal cannot absolutely work with the chain strap you could cover it with vet wrap.

Horse type halter: This halter should never be used for cattle because it does not provide the pressure points to aid in the animal learning to walk when pressure is applied to the points.



Rope Halter



Cattle Show Halter



Horse Halter