

# SO YOUR KID (OR YOU) -WANTS TO GO TO A HORSE SHOW...

## A GUIDE TO YOUR KID'S (OR YOUR) FIRST HORSE SHOW

Your kid has been loving their horseback riding lessons, and they've finally said it - "I want to go to a horse show." Ok, so now what? If you haven't been around or ridden horses yourself, you might have no idea what to expect. We created this guide to help inform you what attire your little one will need for their first show, along with some general horse show information. We totally understand that entering the world of horse showing can be overwhelming, confusing, and expensive - but don't worry, we're here to help.

First off, let's clarify what a class is. Classes are not an educational thing in the horse world, but what we call one of the groups of performances wherein a group of horses or ponies compete against one another. For example, if your kid is entered in the .80m jumper class, they will be competing with others over fences of the same height, .80m., over the same prescribed course. Each individual class will generally have awards. Each class is also usually part of a division, which includes multiple classes over the duration of the show - in this case, it would be the .80m division. Over the course of a multi-day show, if one competes in the same division and accumulates enough points by winning or placing in enough eligible classes, they can qualify for an overall division championship for that show.

All riding attire can vary greatly in price depending on the brand, fabric, and a variety of other things. Fit is the most important factor when buying show clothes, and each trainer has individual guidelines to what their riders should wear, so always check in with them to see what their preferences are before shopping. Below is a general list of attire your kid will need at their first show, along with some information about the disciplines they may be riding in.

## **DISCIPLINES**

At hunter/jumper shows, there are a 3 disciplines: Hunters, Jumpers, and Equitation.

### **HUNTERS**

This discipline is judged on the horse/pony. Things that are taken into account are the horse or pony's movement, jumping style, attitude, striding, etc. It's the rider's job to make the horse look and perform their best. The fences used in hunter classes are more organic and natural-looking in form.

In hunters, kids will need to wear a show shirt with a dark, conservative show jacket. Depending on their size and age, girls will either wear jods in tan with garter straps and paddock boots (short boots), or breeches in tan with tall boots. The general rule of thumb for paddock boots versus tall boots is if your child is riding a pony and under 13 years of age they will wear jods, garters and their hair in two braids with show bows. Girls on horses and older than 13 years, wear breeches and their hair up in a hairnet inside their helmet. For more tips and info on braiding + show bows, click here. For how to put hair into a hairnet & helmet, click here.

Below are some examples of appropriate attire:



*Girl in paddock boots, garters and show bows.*



*Girl in tall boots with hair up in a hairnet inside her helmet.*



*Girl in paddock boots, garters and show bows.*



*Girl in tall boots with hair up in a hairnet inside her helmet.*

## **JUMPERS**

Jumper classes are generally the most easy to understand because they're not subjective. Show jumping is about having clear rounds (jumping all of the fences and not knocking any of the rails down), and time. There are different formats jumper classes that you can read about [here](#). Fences in the jumper ring tend to be bright in color.

In jumpers, the attire does not have to be as formal, but is always welcome. If your little one will be competing in both rings, they can wear their hunter attire in the jumper ring. If your child is only doing the jumpers or would like an additional jacket, there are fun "jumper jackets" that have color and/or bling on them.

They can wear a polo, sun shirt, or show shirt, and again tan breeches/tall boots or jods/paddock boots depending on their age. Occasionally, white breeches are worn for special classes - your trainer will let you know when white breeches are needed! Hair should be tucked neatly into a hairnet under their helmet. This is a great video on how to put hair up into a helmet!



Below are some examples of appropriate attire:



## ***EQUITATION***

In equitation classes, the rider is the one being judged. The goal is to demonstrate effective, thoughtful riding in these classes with smooth and seemingly effortless rounds. Judges will take note of the rider's position, decision making, boldness, quietness, and even their personal riding style. The basic attire is the same as in hunters, and the fences typically look like those seen in hunter classes as well. The course may have more challenging elements to it, such as tight turns, that test the rider's ability to effectively communicate with the horse.

## ***MEDAL CLASSES***

Medal classes are judged like an equitation class but are typically qualifiers for a special year-end class called a Medal Final. Many medal classes will consist of a first round followed by a work off where the top 4 individuals are brought back to complete a test the judge designs before he/she finalizes their placings for the class. Rules vary from Medal class to Medal class in regards to what you need to qualify for the year end Medal Final, but are defined on the website of the association the class held under. One common structure to

qualify, defines a point value to each placing and the final may require 10 points to qualify. For example, SCHSA medal finals award as follows: 1st/10, 2nd/6, 3rd/4, 4th/2, 5th/1. The rider would qualify if they placed 1st, if they did the class 3 times and placed third each time, or any other combination that adds or exceeds 10 points. Typical etiquette is that once you have qualified, you do not enter that class anymore until the year end Medal Final.\_\_\_\_\_

In all disciplines, we suggest a simple black belt as it will go with everything. The rule of thumb is, if there are belt loops, it needs a belt! Gloves are also a good idea for added grip and comfort. Choose ones black in color and meant for showing like [these](#) or [these](#).

Any show also requires helmets with a certain standard of safety testing (ASTM/SEI Certified). Helmets can range greatly in price, but we usually recommend [this helmet](#) for those just starting out. We also highly recommend getting fitted for a helmet in person, as the fit is a big part of the helmet working properly.

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## ***SHOW RATINGS***

There are many of different competitions your child can enter. They range from schooling shows to top shows around the country with the most elite athletes in the sport. Schooling shows are usually the least expensive and give your child a great experience in the world of showing! Rated shows, highest to lowest - 'AA', 'A', 'B', and 'C', require your child be entered into specific associations (explained below) for the points they accumulate at each show throughout the year to be tallied toward year-end cumulative awards. 'AA' and 'A' rated shows will require your horse or pony is braided for hunters & equitation, typically have a larger competition field for each class, will have the top riders at every level for your child to compete against, and will host large height classes for prize money such as Grand Prix's (like what you would see during the Olympics). 'B' and 'C' rated shows generally don't require your horse be braided, will not have as many of the larger jump height classes offered, and are typically less expensive.

### ***ASSOCIATIONS***

Every rated show will require your child be a member of some yearly associations. These associations will keep track of your child's points throughout the year and year Championships will be determined. They also allow your child to be involved with special year end classes, and some may offer other benefits that would be outlined on their website. The main to associations in the United States are United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) and, specifically for the hunter/jumpers, United States Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA). Both of these associations are required at any rated horse show. Regionally and locally, there are hundreds of associations throughout the United States. Your trainer will know what associations you need to join for each show you are attending.

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# ***TERMS & ETIQUETTE***

Here are some terms you might hear at a horse show (via [Equinest](#)):

**Round:** The riders turn to jump a course.

**Course:** The prescribed order of the jumps in a specific class. Courses are posted in advance so the riders can learn them prior to riding their round.

**Class:** A set course that is ridden by all riders that have signed up to be in it. Classes are generally awarded 1st-6th or 1st-8th place.

**Flat Class:** Either a hunter or equitation round judged without fences. The rider is asked to show the walk, trot and canter in both directions.

**Division:** The combination of multiple classes. Judged classes will define a numerical point value to each ribbon given. The rider with the highest points would receive a Champion and the rider with the second highest points would receive Reserve Champion.

**Standard:** The upright structure that holds the rails of fences.

**Stride:** The amount of ground a horse covers in one canter step.

**Line:** Two jumps in a row with a defined number of strides in between.

**Refusal:** Horse stops in front of a jump and rider must circle to try the obstacle again.

**Fault:** A penalty incurred during a jumper class, includes downed rails, fence refusals or going over time limits.

**Green:** A young horse, green hunters are in their first or second year of showing.

**Handy Hunter:** A horse or pony that is very easy to maneuver around a course.

## **General Horse Show Etiquette**

Horses are flight animals! Sudden movements and noises can distract and/or spook horses, and seemingly normal objects like strollers, umbrellas, and bags can be super scary to them.

You can clap and cheer (minimally) once someone has finished their round, just be aware of your surroundings. If a horse is acting up or seems like it's getting frightened by something, be calm, quiet, and still.

When around horses, it is best to not pet, walk up to, or feed any horses you do not know. Every horse has a different personality and can bite, kick or just upset the rider. If a horse has a red ribbon in its tail, that signifies that the horse is a kicker, so be sure to give them plenty of space.

Overall, have fun and enjoy the day! It's a sport that is incredibly unique but offers valuable life lessons on a level of its own...and remember, when you fall off, always get back on!