



Frank Bell Horse Whisperer

Aggressive Biting

Mr. Bell,

My husband and I are new to horse ownership. We bought a 5 yr old gelding 5 months ago. After we got him, he started putting his ears back, showing the whites of his eyes, and biting. We have both been bitten several times. He is always aggressive in his stall. Even standing in front of him he will lay those ears back and dare you to get close. Many times when you start to turn away from him that's when he'll catch you by surprise and give you a nice purple welt! It is truly disheartening, when you only want to love him and give him a good life. He bites as a strike...quick, then pull back quick, as he did to me this morning on my back. At first we thought he just needed an adjustment period. But, his behavior hasn't improved. We don't know what to do to correct this behavior.

Can you help?
Lisa and Joe Spena

Dear Joe and Lisa:

Sorry to hear of your situation. The first mistake was buying a young horse. It's best for beginners to start with an older, experienced horse who you can make mistakes with while you learn the ropes, so to speak. The only way to deal with such a young horse will be to find a good trainer. Even then, all horses backslide some after being with a good trainer. Frankly, I'd suggest considering trading in for an older horse. However, there are sure ways to deal with his nasty behavior. I'll make a couple suggestions:

You have to make the wrong thing uncomfortable for him and the right thing comfortable. There has to be a black and white zone. Black isn't nice - white is. And, you have to make these zones abundantly clear. I've created a logical set of exercises that begins with bonding with the animal and culminating with riding a solid and trusted partner. Details about my [7-Step Safety System](#) are available on my site. Author Karen Boush wrote a three part series about my horse training methods for [Western Horseman Magazine](#). Read them over and you'll have a much better idea of my approach to horse training. We have a video, audio book, and a handy Pocketcard on this set of exercises.

In situations like yours I would have my ammunition ready which would include a squirt gun, plastic bag on the end of my extendable wand, and an 8-12' pole. Use a shorter pole in a smaller area so you are able to touch him with it from the center of the area. Then find what he likes. Find the secret places he likes to be scratched with the poll. He'll let you know and you are safe at that distance. If he charges you, GET BIG. Raise your hands in the air or the plastic bag in his face to stop him and kind of blow his mind while



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making a loud *shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh* noise. GET MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN HIM. The second he stops and changes his attitude, you stop, lower your stature and show him there is a nice side and an ugly one. With some luck and time and your timing, you should be able to replace the pole with your hand in that same spot, then move throughout his body. The moment he shows attitude you make that *shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh* noise beginning softly and building to very loud and annoying. Follow with physical which could be a slap under the chin for biting with the underside of your open hand. The force of the slap should be commensurate with the severity of the bite. HE COULD BADLY HURT YOU, SO DON'T SUGAR-COAT YOUR REPRIMAND. If he tries again (and he probably will because your timing and the slap won't be enough), double the force of the slap under his chin. This should get to the point where he doesn't even think about sniffing your hand. DO NOT FEED HIM TREATS WITH YOUR HAND - EVER! I'm guessing that's how it all started. Never hit him in the face, but anywhere else is fair game. I prefer under the chin.

Now get the philosophy down real well. You are loving to him when he's a good boy - the opposite when he's bad. This is exactly like child rearing. Be sure he has room to be a horse he can be outside, graze, move around, etc. When you lead him, know what you're doing and use the right tools. I'm guessing you have a conventional web halter with a 6' lead and are leading him with your hand right under his chin. WRONG. You need a soft rope halter with a 12' lead so you can be away from him and create a bubble around you that he does not enter unless invited. This is all covered in my "[Working With Young Horses](#)" video.

I strongly suggest you also order my '[Getting Started Package](#)' that will give you the tools and information to begin immediately. These two works will give you the information and tools to succeed. Remember Frank Bell's 3-T's: Theory, Technique, Timing.

1. You must understand why you are doing what you are doing - Theory.
2. Do what you do with the horse using the Technique.
3. Improve your Timing.

Now this is the longest response to a problem I've ever written, so please let me hear from you. I genuinely want you and your horse to make it and no one to get hurt in the process.

Happy Trails and Safe Riding,