

An Introduction To *Equine Hanna Somatics*®

There is a fabulous series of gentle specialized movements for horse and rider which allows each to feel less stiff as they both age. What is this technique? First developed by Thomas Hanna, Hanna Somatic Education®, has been a discipline since the 1990's.

Story By Patricia Hechter

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These movements were developed to improve movement, flexibility and health in humans, equines and canines. Bodies are pulled out of shape by contractions we all have due to events ranging from a small injury, to a major accident. Many of us have childhood injuries, we never thought much of. Well, they can come back to bite us as we age! From being playful frolicking foals, horses can have the same issues. Their human caretakers might not always be aware that anything may have happened.

These "injuries" can create "Sensory Motor Amnesia". SMA is what happens to the muscles of the body that are contracted and cannot lengthen; with less freedom to move the body gets tight with less range of motion and can lose strength. Hanna Somatic Educators for both humans and horses can assist in teaching how to re-train the body to eliminate those chronic contractions. This allows more flexibility to return, making us feel more supple and able to move more fluidly.

Those who are in the know, understand that horses mirror the weaknesses and balance issues in the bodies of their riders, and, to some degree, those who handle them on the ground. We can learn how to re-educate our own bodies and begin the path to correct those stiff and crooked patterns. We can also do the same for our horses.

While this is not easy work, it is gentle. Somatics doesn't follow the "No pain, No gain" theory. In Somatics you need to move slowly and gently without pain or discomfort, and release slowly with control until you are at rest. This re-sets the movement patterns allowing more mobility and strength. As the areas of restriction become more mobile, the movements can become larger. All of this happens for the human and the equine.

Another wonderful part of to Equine Hanna Somatics[EHS] is that you can learn how to do much of the basic work for yourself and your horse. To get your toes wet with EHS, here is a simple and effective movement to do with your horse. You will see how your horse's posture improves and how he demonstrates he is feeling better. Start by taking 4 photos of your horse standing naturally, not posed: front, back and each side.

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*Equine Hanna Somatics Educator,
Patricia Hechter.*

For the Initial Pickup of a Front Limb invite the horse to lift his foot from the ground with your closest hand by the knee. As the hoof lifts away from the ground prepare to catch it with your other hand. If the horse only wants to lift his foot from the ground while the toe remains resting on the ground, this is acceptable. Encourage the horse to take his time returning the foot to being fully weighted upon the ground. The muscle groups involved with this lift are at the scapula, and those that flex the shoulder joint, elbow, carpus and pastern, a total of 15 muscles.



A safe stance is being demonstrated for the Hind Limb Initial Pickup. There is one hand supporting the hoof and the other hand is supporting the ankle. Breathe comfortably as you are gently supporting the limb and begin to slowly allow the horse to lower his leg and hoof to the ground. The horse uses 19 muscles to accomplish this lift.



This is an example of Sensory Motor Amnesia, in the muscle groups relating to the hip, stifle, hock and/or pastern. There is a series of contractions that are in the process of lengthening. (The horse is pulling his leg away from the movement.) Maintain a soft feel of the ankle and hoof allowing the horse to know he is supported not corrected.



As the leg returns to the ground, allow the hand that is closest to the horse to slide from the hock to the ankle, if it is not already there. The hand that had been supporting the hoof softens and moves from the center of the hoof toward the pastern.

The horse is invited to participate in his healing experience.

One of the basic movements in EHS is called "Initial Pick-Ups". To make this a somatic movement, invite the limb to be lifted from the ground as if cleaning the hoof. Choose the leg to be lifted by gently placing your hand above the knee of the forelimb, [and by the hock on the hindlimb]. As the horse lifts, allow your hand(s) to slide to the front of the leg/ankle area. Pause slightly, then slowly allow the horse to lower the leg back to the ground. Be sure to have the horse fully weight the foot once it reaches the ground, not resting the toe of the foot, to complete the movement. Repeat 2 more times. Continue with the remaining three legs.

Things to be aware of: The horse may slap his foot back to the floor. He may experience some pulls, jerks, or a handful of other movements during the descent. Allow the movements to occur, while maintaining light contact, doing as

little as possible, guiding the horse's limb to gently reach the ground. The jerks, pulls and other movements your horse may exhibit while completing the movements, are examples of SMA. He is not being mean or difficult. He is working through a contraction to find a way to have his foot where you are asking for it to be located.

To observe a before and after of your horse, take 4 more photos after the session. Then compare the images side by side.

EHS is particularly special and effective because the horse is invited to participate in his healing experience. The specialized movements work within the horse's comfort zone whether very limited or not. He will feel better, and his posture will convey that.

Trish Hechter grew up riding and working with her mother in Maryland who was renowned for working with "problem" horses. In the mid 90's Trish earned her Reiki 1 and 2 certificates becoming a Reiki Master in 2020. After meeting Ryan Moschell, a certified Hanna Somatics Educator® based in Annapolis, MD, at a horse show event "Ride for Life" in MD 2015, Trish turned her focus to Hanna Somatics and began incorporating Equine Hanna Somatics® in her work. She will be EHS fully certified in 2023. Trish has studied and, also, uses the Masterson Method®, Holistic Horseworks®, Tellington Touch®. Further, her healing techniques include sound vibration with tuning forks and a Tibetan Singing bowl. Trish is an avid believer of Tad Coffin's Thera-Tree®. Additionally, she safely implements essential oils and Bach Flower Essences when beneficial. Trish Hechter and Ryan Moschell, BA, LMT, CHSE have created a partnership to work with equestrians and their horses. They have dates available for workshops and clinics in 2022.

For more information about Trish's work, please visit, Hechterequinebodyworks.com.

To learn more about Hanna Somatics® for humans and to find an educator in your area, please visit <http://hannasomatics.com/>.

To learn more about Equine Hanna Somatics®, and to find an equine educator near you, please visit <http://equinehannasomatics.org/>

To contact Ryan Moschell and learn more about his work, please visit, <http://www.getoutofshape.com/>.