

What do the vaulting children need?

The vaulters should be dressed in comfortable clothes, similar to those they would wear for a sport session in school. The material should be stretchable (cotton or lycra trousers, no tight jeans) and both trousers and T-shirts or sweat shirts should not be too wide and baggy, so the trainer can recognize incorrect body posture. The vaulter needs gym shoes, with a flexible, non-slip rubber sole. Any shoes which are so solid that the child cannot stretch his toes are unsuitable.

For continuous winter training you might suggest a larger pair of shoes to fit two pairs of socks. Leg warmers like the dancers use are excellent for keeping the joints warm. During waiting periods in the cold times of the year make sure the vaulters keep moving, and use jackets as soon as they are off the horse.

Some things have *no* place in the vaulter's outfit: jewellery should not be permitted, no necklaces, bracelets and long earrings! Even big watches can make the grips during team exercises rather difficult, and torn earlobes are no fun at all, when a 'flyer' gets tangled up in earrings during a high exercise. As a trainer you don't want to have to deal with injuries like that.

If there are several female teenage vaulters on your team, you may have a discussion about beautiful long fingernails as well... You can't force them to cut them off, but mention it to the parents and point out who will get blamed in case of injury! I have seen nasty rips in fellow vaulters' faces caused by such displays of vanity.

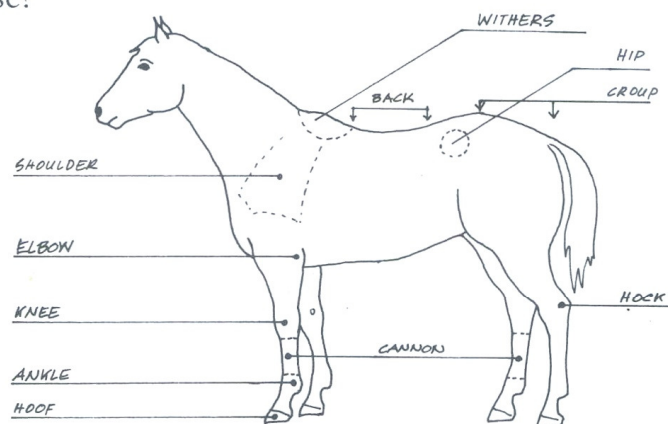
Another thing you will not permit is gum-chewing during training – unless you are *really* up-to-date on your first-aid choking procedures! Anything which might get stuck in a throat during a fall should be forbidden.

What do you need to know to start out?

For 'training' your toddler group you don't need in-depth knowledge about vaulting. But you need to know enough to start them

out with correct instructions and to instill the little ones with confidence – read about how to start them in the chapters about compulsories. You will need your legs more than anything else, because you will walk along, lift them up, steady them, and guide them down. To children aged three, four and five you cannot really *explain* a complicated exercise like the scissors: they will not understand, and if you talk too much (except for words of praise, which will always go down well) they simply get bored, because their attention span is still so short. Of course there *is* danger in just letting them have fun and do whatever they have seen, because without properly understanding the safety rules, the exercise may result in a fall. Here the greatest danger is not that the children will really hurt themselves, because they are so flexible, but they will lose their enjoyment and your club will lose its good reputation. So unless you have a lunger and can devote all of your attention to the toddler on the horse, I do not recommend taking on children so young. ‘Training’ is not the same as ‘playing’ and you know who will get blamed for the falls!

- The **trainer** should have some knowledge of horses, the more the better. How else will you recognize suitability, and how else teach your vaulters what they *have* to know about their horse?



- The trainer should know how to lunge, even if s/he does not have to do it her/himself during training. How else will you

recognize mistakes in the lunging which can become dangerous to the vaulters and also spoil your horse for this sport?

- The trainer should know some basics about coaching — obviously!
- The trainer needs to have completed a first-aid course and should take refresher courses every few years.
- A feeling for choreography is helpful when you start composing your shows or help your vaulters to prepare for competitions.
- Basic knowledge about gymnastics (and spotting) is essential.
- When you train for competitions you must be acquainted with the rules by which your children's performance will be judged.
- And last but not least you must know about the vaulting itself:
 - correct preparation for vaulting
 - correct technique (mechanics)
 - essence, form and scope of exercises
 - degrees of difficulty
 - consideration of the horse (within exercises) etc.
- Ideally you should know enough to 'phase' your corrections during training to the applicable experience and ability of each vaulter.

The vaulting trainer's "insurance"

Vaulting is a sport performed without a hard hat (unlike other equestrian activities) and sooner or later the question of the trainer's insurance will come up. You can find out more about this through your provincial associations (either your Vaulting Association, if in existence, or other horsemen's associations, as applicable. See Appendix A for some tips on insurance).

Your best insurance however is your good training, which

means that you will never be proven negligent. Always ensure that safety rules are followed, train your team with discipline, show and instill respect and confidence and gauge your vaulters' ability correctly, so you know when to urge them on and when to put on the brakes. No matter what your position in the club or stable is, you must make sure you have the right to exclude any member from your team if your safety rules are not followed. Surprisingly often it is a parent who demands that his or her children be 'now put into better exercises' (which means more flashy, more daring): 'surely they are ready for it'. It must always be the trainer's decision whether a child is ready for the next level of difficulty; and showing off must never influence this decision.

Accidents involve either self-inflicted injuries or are caused by other people – or a combination of both. In vaulting they could also be caused by the behaviour of the horse, which in turn is dependent on the environment. You should not agree to train with a horse you deem unsafe – even if that means no vaulting at all. Nothing is worth having a child permanently handicapped after an accident! You must ensure the training or performing space is safe (removal of jumps, avoidance of sudden loud noises etc., correct kind of surface for the horse) and you need and should insist on the necessary cooperation of the people around you (no riders around the circle where you train).

Give your vaulters a proper warm-up, take care of minor injuries quickly and let them heal properly, and check equipment (of horse and children) on a regular basis. Check the correct fit of the surcingle personally before beginning your training session! Everything else involves anticipation of problems – lots more about that throughout this book – and therefore easy prevention.

As long as safe procedures are followed, the sport of vaulting has a very good health record! Skiing is much more dangerous, and in all the years of my vaulting past I have never suffered from more than bruises, and neither have my teams.
