To reduce the potential for undesirable behaviors developing in hand-reared foals, McDonnell said. Handlers have also expressed concern about the foals developing "Jekyll and Hyde" characteristics, such as unexpected overreactions to cues or corrections. To minimize these issues, she recommends providing as much equine companionship as possible, starting from birth, to familiarize foals with normal horse behavior. McDonnell noted the topic of providing companion animals to equine orphanages has been a recent focus for researchers, who have found that providing appropriate equine companionship can significantly reduce behavior problems in orphans.

The best option, and the one that typically yields the fewest behavioral problems, is providing the foal with a foster mare, McDonnell said. If a foster mare isn't available, owners can hand-rear the foal. Even though it might be tempting, avoid "mothering" or playing with the foal (which can cause some of the aforementioned undesirable behaviors). Disconnect feeding time from human interaction, and associate hand-rearing tasks with other tasks that aren't feeding, she added.

Misunderstood maternal protectiveness

"If (the mare) is afraid of the foal, she'll run away from it; if she's overprotective, you'll clearly see she's a very protected baby," McDonnell said. For these cases she recommended providing mares and foals with enough space to minimize the need for her to protect her foal. This can resolve over time, McDonnell said, and in some cases it can take as long as 18 to 36 hours for the mare to accept the foal.

Savage attack

Owners might need to bottle feed foals until mares accept them to nurse. In these cases mares act appropriately to protect their foals, but handlers might misconstrue this as maternal abuse or mistreatment. Use this as an opportunity to acclimatize mares to having foals by their side, the prognosis for eventual acceptance generally is good.

Simple ambivalence

"If the previous options aren't feasible, owners can hand-rear the foal," McDonnell suggested. If the foal is still stressed than before, consider all options when raising an orphan. The mare might need to be treated with care medications, and the foal might need to be treated with stress medications. She warned against "mothering" or playing with the foal, which can cause some of the aforementioned undesirable behaviors.

Provide as much equine companionship as possible, starting from birth, to familiarize foals with normal horse behavior. McDonnell explained that in some cases reared horses grow, some handlers have reported they can be disrespectful or difficult to train. Some have been reported to have short attention spans, she said.

Points to Consider

- Before the foal is placed in any setting the mother is treated with care medications, and the foal is treated with stress medications.
- The foal is evaluated for any behavioral anomalies with a stallion or other stallions.
- The foal is examined for any behavioral anomalies, such as unusual heart rate or blood pressure.
- The foal is monitored for any behavioral anomalies, such as unusual head and neck movements.
- The foal is examined for any behavioral anomalies, such as unusual behavior patterns.
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