



## The Basics of Centered Riding

The “Basics” of Centered Riding are fundamental concepts and personal tools for every rider. When we are able to apply these basics in our riding and use of self, they help us use our mind and body well and improve our balance, security, freedom, “feel” and communication with our horse. Each of the basics interacts with all the others; if you improve one basic, the others are all affected.

One of the first things taught in Centered Riding is the concept and practical application of “the Basics.” We each discover our own personal experience of how we feel when each basic is working well for us. But riders should continue to explore deeper understanding and further discovery of each of the basics and new ways to apply them, as long as they are riding and learning.

### Centered Riding’s original “Four Basics” are:

**Soft Eyes:** use of eyes that are relaxed and open, with wide-angle vision rather than narrowly focused on one spot. Soft eyes allows you to see more and be aware of more around you because you use your peripheral vision, and also opens up your other senses awareness to increase your ability to feel your horse.

The opposite of soft eyes is “**hard eyes,**” which are over-focused and fixed on a point, often looking downward. Hard eyes give the effect of trying too hard; they cause stiffness and inhibit “feel” and free movement. While a horse cannot see his rider’s hard or soft eyes, he can feel the resulting stiffness or lack of it in the rider’s body and reacts accordingly. Over-concentrating on the horse in a negative way (forcing and “fixing”) or obsessing about some aspect of the rider’s body can cause a similar effect, sometimes called “**hard eyes inward.**”

**Breathing:** deep, full and natural breathing, using the diaphragm rather than breathing high & tight in the chest.

Good breathing affects the whole body and the horse as well, helping centering, relaxation and “feel” and releasing excess tension. Breathing can also enhance energy, rhythm, freedom and comfort, and also improves communication with the horse.

**Centering:** becoming aware of your center of balance, movement and control, which is located in the lower body below and behind the navel. Centering can be described as internal balance, both in the body and in the mind. Centering enhances balance, security and a coordinated, effortless use of the body as a whole; it can also calm and direct the mind.

**Balance:** finding the balance of the body and all its parts. Balance is sometimes described as “building blocks,” referring to “stacking up” the parts of the body vertically, so it is balanced with the feet underneath the center. When a rider rides in a forward balance or jumping seat, the angles of the body are balanced. Only when the rider’s body is in balance can the joints be free to allow the body to absorb and follow the horse’s motion; if the rider’s body is out of balance, it will have to stiffen as it resists the effect of gravity.

### Two additional basic Centered Riding concepts are:

**Grounding:** experiencing your connection to the earth and gravity, which gives you balance, security and the ability to engage your joints as springs. The two major points in the body where we experience grounding are the seat bones (when seated) and the feet, especially at the natural balance point of the foot (sometimes called the “bubbling spring”).

**Clear Intent:** making a clear mental decision organizes the body and mind and enables you to communicate clearly with your horse, your body and with others. It uses “**ideokinesis**” (a word meaning “the idea you hold in your mind affects the way your body moves”) to give direction to the body and to the horse without having to consciously apply muscular effort. Clear intent is essential for control and clarity in riding and handling horses. The easiest way to begin to use clear intent is to ride your horse in a specific direction.