

Banish Anxiety – Horsemanship and Beyond



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What is Anxiety?

2 legs or 4, anxiety is a natural biological response to a real or perceived threat. Anxiety is a description of feelings of being tense, worried, stressed, and it can feel like fear. Some anxiety can be good for you. Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. It is when it becomes misplaced it can disrupt our lives and stop us enjoying activities. Left unchecked it can lead to loss of confidence, depression and damage health. It is both emotional and physical. Anxiety is hardwired in every living creature and is related to the fight, flight and freeze response.

What is the Fight, Flight or Freeze Response?

Anxiety and the fight, flight or freeze response is embedded deeply in our and our horse's evolution. It is there to protect from dangerous situations. When there is a real or perceived threat your body and your horse's body releases hormones, such as adrenalin and cortisol, which prepare bodies to react. It happens automatically. Thankfully today horses and humans face very few real dangerous situations. However our hardwired biological response to feeling threatened is always ready to act. It can be triggered by a range of situations, some we may not even be aware of. The bodily response is very similar for all animals, as it prepares the body for a sudden burst of energy for action.

Bodily Response to Anxiety

The brain sends messages of the perceived or actual threat to the body and adrenalin is pumped into the blood stream. The heart beats faster and the lungs need to take in more oxygen. This can make some people feel a little dizzy or heady. The body needs to cool down so sweat is produced and the blood capillaries come to the skin surface. Clammy sweaty palms and feeling flushed or experiencing hot flushes are not usual. The body will prepare to run by becoming lighter, so feeling sick, or butterflies in the stomach, or a tight stomach is common along with the urge to go to the toilet. These are very natural physical symptoms in relation to flight, fight or freeze. It is unpleasant and this is why you avoid what makes you feel anxious. This reaction often happens at an inappropriate moment as our mind has perceived a situation to be threatening or very scary.

There are three parts to the anxiety feeling for both horse and human they are:-

- 1) **The physical bodily response:** Energy comes up (sometimes very quickly); faster heart rate, irregular breathing, churning stomach / sick feeling, sweating, trembling, and the need to go to the toilet etc....
- 2) **Behaviour:** This is about the response to the anxiety. This includes avoiding the situation, horse and human don't allow themselves to experience what causes them to feel anxious or by getting out of the situation as soon as possible.
- 3) **Thinking:** This about the cycle of thinking about what may happen to you in a given situation. Look at the sections on negative inner dialogue and fear and what ifs.

Both horse and human can be caught up in a cycle of feeling anxious that makes them physically feel terrible. Then they avoid the situations that cause them to feel anxious. Or they try to face their anxiety but then have to get out the situation as soon as possible. Or their thinking creates an image in their mind that things are far worse than the reality. This compounds their lack of confidence that then feeds into them becoming more anxious. You can take back control by breaking this cycle by learning how to cope better with the feelings of anxiety. It is essential when building confidence that you work to a realistic plan with easy to achieve graded exposure small steps. Each of these graded exposure small challenges will help you and or your horse gain confidence. Yes you will feel anxious, but you will learn it will pass and each time you expose yourself to the anxiety situation it will get less intense, it will fade and eventually disappear. Getting the right help in this situation is important as over face yourself and you will make things worse. The balance needs to be there, enough of a challenge to push you safely out your comfort zone.

The Cycle of Anxiety and Confidence

It is essential to explore anxiety as confidence and anxiety are very closely interlinked with often blurred boundaries. Anxiety reduces our confidence levels, making doing tasks we once found easy hard. The cycle of anxiety and loss confidence feed into each other and it becomes a vicious cycle that is hard to break free from.

2 legs or 4 the most common reaction to anxiety is avoidance. It provides a short term relief from the anxiety. However the next time you are faced with the situation that causes the anxiety the anxiety often returns. Sadly avoidance has the psychological impact of reinforcing the message that the situation is dangerous. Plus it erodes your confidence making it appear even more of a difficult challenge to overcome.

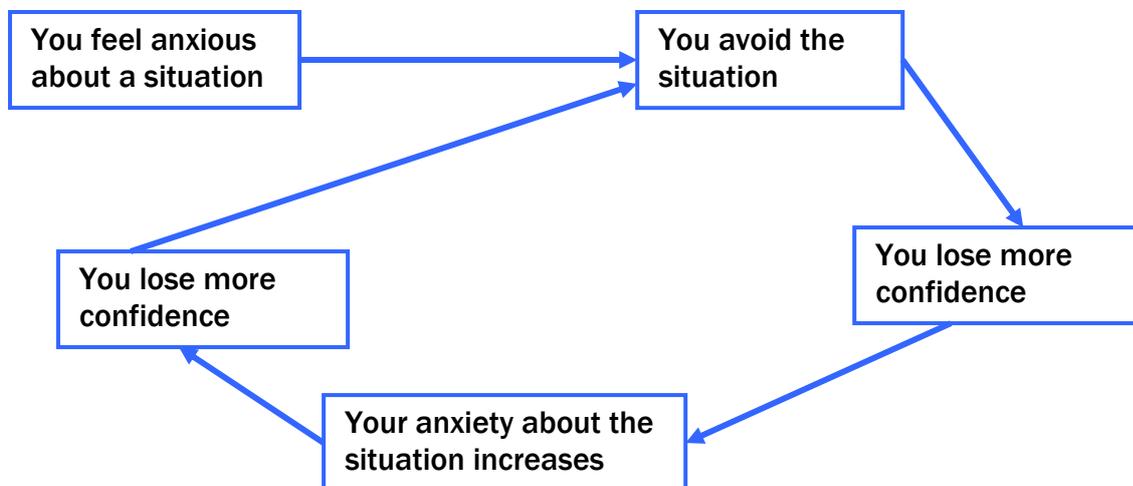
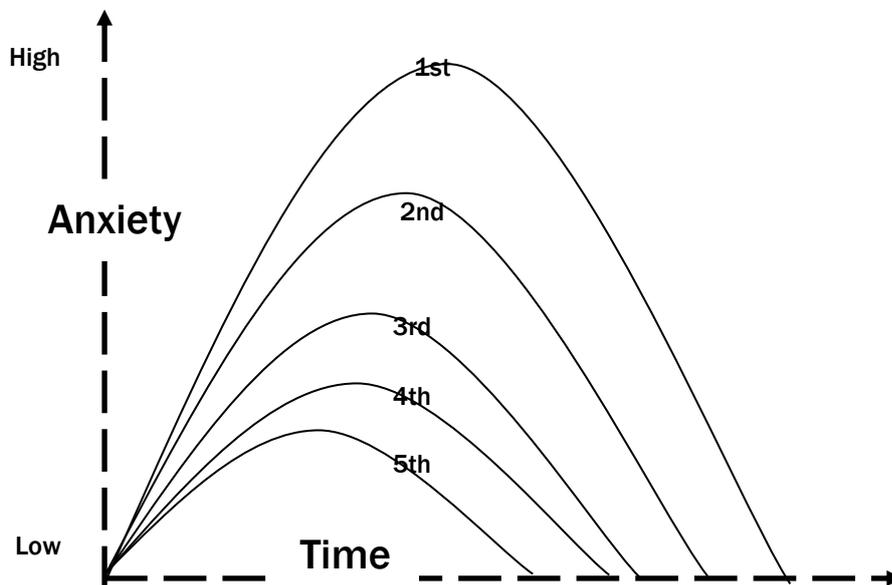


Diagram above - The Cycle of Anxiety and Confidence

Techniques for Banishing Anxiety

Flooding

Flooding is when we are forced to face what causes us anxiety. I often give the example of the fear of spiders. Many people can relate to this and how it may make someone anxious being faced with overcoming this fear. Flooding would be to shut someone in a room with spiders until they stop freaking out. And repeating until there is no longer any anxiety or fear. It is being thrown in at the deep end. Some horsemanship practices use flooding, as the theory behind flooding is that a phobia is a learned fear, and needs to be unlearned by exposure to the thing that you fear. Anxiety and fear are a time limited response. What you see with flooding is the horse or person will go into an extreme anxiety state, even panic, but eventually exhaustion sets in and the anxiety level begins to go down. Horses and humans behaviour to fear / anxiety can be different. Fearful / anxious / horses panic and become un-predictable and very dangerous. Therefore it is essential if you decide to use flooding for an anxious horse you get professional help. You need to have a safe environment, a range of horsemanship techniques and built a strong bond with your horse to be able to step up to take the calm assertive leadership role your horse needs to help your horse overcome anxiety and fear using flooding. The first time using flooding you or your horse faces a fearful situation the anxiety levels will be very high and will take a longer time to subside. The second time in the same situation the anxiety will be less severe and fall in a shorter time. The diagram below shows how the anxiety gets less and will take a shorter length of time to subside each time. Given enough time and exposure it will smooth right out and there will be no anxiety response. It is just the same for us. The huge question re flooding is safety. So if it is safe to use flooding go ahead. It is about feeling the fear and doing it anyway. Knowing if your fear is real or perceived is essential beforehand. Both feel exactly the same. More about fear later on.



There is the real danger using flooding that it can go drastically wrong. When it goes wrong has the potential to actually increase anxiety and fear. Personally I have issues with flooding when it involves force. As there will always be something a horse fears more than the methods you use. If you choose a flooding method I highlight the importance of ensuring there is no force used. Along ensuring your and your horse's safety always make sure it is under professional supervision.

Graded Exposure

Humans can use cognitive behavioural techniques to help us deal with anxiety. These are very similar to natural horsemanship. Horsemanship should be about getting your horse to think, change his thinking, learn new things about the world and to build confidence. A lot of showman horsemanship uses flooding, it makes great viewing. However it is not the only method. You can use a graded exposure technique alongside relaxation techniques to banish anxiety. As being relaxed is the polar opposite of being anxious. It is impossible to be relaxed at the same time as anxious.

First, I teach both horse and human how to relax, using the language of the herd. I will go into detail about different relaxation techniques later on. Teaching someone how to relax is so important as it is the opposite state to tension, fear and anxiety. Once horse and human can tap into relaxation they have a tool they can call upon when dealing with anxious situations.

Second, I work with my client and their horse to identify what causes the anxiety. Then put in place a plan starting with building strong foundations to build upon. We cannot build success on weak foundations. Next we break the anxiety down into bite size chunks. Starting with a step that creates the least the least anxiety. We then use the relaxation and horsemanship tools to be confident in tackling this step. This builds confidence and people and horses start to believe in their ability to overcome the barriers that had stopped them. Then we go on in stages until we arrive at tackled what was originally causing the most anxiety. Success is not just for the gifted and talented, nor is overcoming anxiety just for the brave. It is the outcome of setting ourselves up for success. More about this later.

Third, to work your way up the anxiety hierarchy you need to use a graded approach and retreat method. It is perfectly ok to go back a step for a while when need be. All the time reminding yourself the value of practising relaxation technique. If the horse or human becomes upset they must return to an earlier stage and regain their relaxed state. Progress is never a smooth uphill curve. It is more than likely to be a spikey profile. More about this later.

This is a method of overcoming anxiety and or loss of confidence is by tackling your or your horse's fears one step at a time in easy to achieve stages. Not by forcing you or your horse using flooding to face a situation that would cause a high level of anxiety or a full blown panic attack. By using a graded exposure technique which helps to gradually desensitize you or your horse. The aim is not to push yourself or your horse into a high level of anxiety to cause full panic as this is counterproductive. As facing a fear to an extreme when working with horses can be very dangerous and can have very negative outcomes. Never work at a level that pushes you or your horse's anxiety levels beyond unmanageable limits. For horses we need to encourage him / her to think rather than react, by using graded exposure and desensitization. By confronting anxiety in small steps, time and time again the anxiety will reduce and confidence will grow. This approach removes the fear response and substitutes it with relaxation response to the situation that causes anxiety. It is gradual counter conditioning. Replacing anxiety with relaxation is effective as they are polar opposite states. It is impossible to be relaxed and anxious at the same time. This technique is a long game, it doesn't have the showmanship of flooding. This is why you will see so little of this approach showcased at clinics and demonstrations of horsemanship. It can take time, many sessions, industrial patience and above all can to the on looker look like very little is being accomplished. To the participants a lot is happening. Progress with this approach can only happen at the pace the horse and or human can handle. There is a very fine line here between moving out the comfort zone to grow and over facing someone. It is strongly advised you seek professional support. It is essential to start with the easiest and smallest step first. When building your or your horse's confidence with your instructor you will need a plan of action and you should be open minded as you will learn a range of techniques / tactics / skills.

Relaxation

Before you can help your horse to relax you must learn the art of relaxation.

Myth - Gentle Relaxed People Can Not Be Super Achievers.

- Culturally we are encouraged to think being hurried, competitive and being able to handle more and more stress is the sign of a super achiever.
- There is a fear that becoming more peaceful, relaxed and calm, achievement of goals will be compromised. Not true.
- People confuse relaxation with being lazy and apathetic. Relaxation is totally different to being lazy and apathetic. They are miles apart.

Benefits of being relaxed:

- It allows you to connect with what really matters in life, inner peace. Inner peace is what is magnetic to horses.
- Centres your energy. Being able to handle more and more stress, uses up huge amount energy. It drains you.
- Relaxation can enable higher achievement, better communication, open minds and fuel creativity.
- It enables faster, clearer learning plus easier problem solving.
- It takes the drama out of situations.
- Relaxation leads to better understanding, control of emotions, and a balanced state of mind and energy.
- With relaxation you become more aware of everything around you.

All these turn you become a super achiever.

What our Horse Needs

- Horses are drawn to relaxed, peaceful people who can demonstrate calm assertive leadership. How do horses react with people who are hurried, stressed, tense, anxious, fearful or frantic?
- If you want to be a super achiever with your horse you must firstly learn how to relax, to centre your energy and then become a relaxed calm assertive leader.
- Your horse will look to you for guidance in times when it feels stressed, fearful, anxious, tense, etc..... You have to be the calm relaxed eye in the storm.
- How can you teach your horse to relax if you struggle to relax? You can't. You have to learn first, develop your skills and then you can teach your horse the art of relaxation.
- Your horse already knows how to relax. They practice it every day naturally in the herd. Think about how our interactions have the potential to move our horse out of relaxation?



What stops you relaxing?

Each of us has some personal inner struggle which prevents us from relaxing. These blocks are what we bring unwittingly to our horsemanship and we see the effects in the partnership with our horse. The horse is like a mirror, reflecting right back at us.

Here are a few reasons...of what stops people relaxing.

- Switching off from lives packed with fast paced stimuli, heavy responsibilities, never ending to do list, etc.....
- High levels of anxiety, stress, depression from non-equine matters affecting their state of mind and energy, in turn it becomes highly damaging to their equine relationship.
- Lack of confidence or self-esteem. There are many factors that cause a lack of confidence...that is a huge topic.
- Lack of skills. Over horsed. Fear of failure. Perfection paralysis. Fear of lack of control. Peer pressure. Social expectations. Media pressure. Poor relationship with your horse. Health issues etc.

Some of my observations

People feel the strong urge to always be doing. We are human beings not human doings....when was the last time you were content with just being with your horse? Do nothing except just be? I see in their horsemanship they are unaware of the impact their busy energy has on their horse. As horse will often reflect right back at you what is going on in your life. Many of us have lost touch with simply being, slowing down, doing nothing, relaxing being calm and finding inner peace.



Identifying your inner struggle

What prevents you from relaxing? Here is some simple homework to practice away from your horse: Being bored. I am not talking about being lazy. To sit still until boredom helps you notice your own thoughts, feelings, breathing pattern, inner struggles and your energy. The beauty of this it teaches you to recognize your personal blocks. You can then take personalised targeted action to address these.

People and horses can actively practice relaxation to get in touch with their mind and balanced energy. It is not easy, it takes time, dedication and seeing it as a priority in life.

Relaxation is a technique you can learn and master.

- There are many techniques you can try.
- You should try a few so as to find one that suits you.
- Don't worry if you find it difficult to relax at first.
- It's a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice.
- Relaxation methods help a person to relax, to increase calmness, reduce anxiety and stress
- Learning to relax has many health benefits including decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathing rates etc.

Here are a few tips to get you started:-

- Live in the moment. Let go of past and future concerns. When not checked they can lead to energy blocks such as anxiety, stress and frustration.
- Practice being patient. Think of all the daily opportunities.
- Use cognitive behavioural techniques to re-shape your thinking and quiet your mind. Your thoughts are a powerful tool, learn to use them positively.
- Let go of the need to prove yourself to others.
- Stop focusing on the imperfections, flaws, or what needs fixing.
- Stop blaming yourself, others, or your horse and cut yourself some slack.
- Lighten up and learn to have fun.
- Redefine your equine meaningful accomplishments. Remind yourself it is only your horse's opinion that matters.
- Each day give yourself a quiet and peaceful time. Actively relax, there are lots of methods to try, meditation, breathing techniques, visualisation, yoga, exercise, etc. In this resource pack there are several examples for you to try out and master, then try them you're your horse.

Once you can tap into relaxation you can then teach your horse to relax. This resource is designed to get you started. It showcases a few techniques that have meaning in the language of the herd. Once you are more relaxed with a base line of calm relaxation you will be better able feel what is happening with your horse. Then you can teach your horse how to relax. You have to tap into breathing patterns, rhythm, energy, muscle tension and emotional balance.

Relaxation Techniques

Breathing Technique

Why this is good for horsemanship: Horses read each other's and our breathing patterns. They are very finely tuned to pick up a change in breathing. As a prey animal it is part of their language for communicating when it is safe to relax and when to get ready to run. It's a very early warning system that something is wrong. Breathing is an involuntary response. You are not aware most of the time of how you breathe. It's the most natural thing to do. Relaxed people and horses breathe softly and slowly. When we are tense, anxious or fearful our breathing pattern will reflect this. If you do become aware how you breathe and that your horse reads it you can use it to both relax and to enrich your communication with your horse. Refinement of horsemanship involves using core breathing. To be able to do this you need to first develop a neutral breathing pattern and energy.

The relaxation breathing technique is simple and powerful. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing techniques.

The key to deep breathing is to breathe gently and deeply from the abdomen (your core), getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel. It is essential you gently breathe, slowly, don't grab at the air. Really focus on your breathing pattern.

How to:

- Practise deep breathing at a regular time and in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.
- Make yourself feel completely comfortable. Sit in a comfy chair which supports your head or lie on the floor or bed.
- To find your lower part of your lungs. Place both hands on the lower part of your chest just at the top of your stomach fingers tips gently touching. When you breathe deeply into this part of your lungs your fingers will be moved slightly apart.
- Once you know which part of your lungs you are going to fill place your arms comfortably on the chair arms, or flat on the floor or bed, a little bit away from the side of your body with the palms up. Get comfortable. If you're lying down, stretch out your legs, keeping them hip-width apart or slightly wider. If you're sitting in a chair, don't cross your legs.
- Fill up the whole of your lungs with air, without forcing. Imagine you're filling up a bottle, so that your lungs fill from the bottom.
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in slowly and regularly counting from one to five (don't worry if you can't reach five at first). Your stomach should rise.
- Then let the breath escape slowly, counting from one to five. Your stomach should move in as you exhale.
- Keep doing this until you feel calm. Breathe without pausing or holding your breath.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.

Practise this relaxed breathing for three to five minutes, two to three times a day (or whenever you feel anxious or stressed). Once you have mastered this at home you can do this while with your horse. I get people to quietly walk with their horse using the counting their breathing technique. What they notice as they relax using their breathing exercise so does their horse. Breathing is invisible unless it's a really cold day. So a huge benefit as you can practice it and nobody will know what you are doing.



Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation Technique

Before practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation, consult with your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. With regular practice, progressive muscle relaxation gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the body. This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.

Why this is good for horsemanship: We can easily spot a relaxed horse, muscles soft, eyes soft...etc. It's just as easy to spot a tense horse too. Muscle tension is part of their silent language of the herd to read body tension in their own species and others. The muscle tension or relaxation is alongside body language gestures. Their very survival was dependant on getting this right. Some are so subtle it is easy to miss. Horsemanship is about learning to read and understand this communication. For example a tense horse often has a tense jaw. So do people. For people a tense jaw here is an exercise to try: simply press on the roof of your mouth, behind your front teeth with your tongue then relax. A horse with a tense jaw is telling you he's not happy, he could be anxious, fearful, tense etc.....the horsemanship response is to ask why and try to help your horse. Whole body tension is another you will see in horses that struggling, even very subtle tension if missed and you carry on can lead to an undesirable behaviour. Soft relaxed muscles in horse and rider = harmony and fluidity.

How about our own muscle relaxation? How aware are you of tension in your body? Did you know that your own body tension is strongly linked to our state of mind? The Deep Muscle Relaxation technique takes around 20 minutes. It works different muscles in turn and then relaxes them, to release tension from the body and relax your mind.

How to: Find a warm, quiet place with no distractions. Get completely comfortable, either sitting or lying down. Close your eyes and begin by focusing on your breathing; breathing slowly and deeply. If you have pain in certain muscles, or if there are muscles that you find it difficult to focus on, spend more time on relaxing other parts. You may want to play some soothing music to help relaxation. As with all relaxation techniques, deep muscle relaxation will require a bit of practice before you start feeling its benefits. For each exercise, hold the stretch for a few seconds, and then relax. Repeat it a couple of times. It's useful to keep to the same order as you work through the muscle groups. Again if you can master this technique at home you can then take it with you when you are with your horse. I find it very useful when helping clients to find a soft, relaxed body and mind. It also helps people locate any areas of tension which in turn will disturb harmony in the saddle.

You can start from the top or from the toes. Here is from the toes up:

- Get comfortable. Take a few minutes to relax with your breathing technique.
- Pay attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels. Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10. Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose. Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- Pay attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through each body part, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
- So next is the Right calf
- Then Left calf
- Followed by Right thigh
- Then Left thigh
- Next Hips and buttocks
- Move onto the Stomach
- Then the Chest
- Move to the Back
- Then Right hand
- Followed by Left hand
- Next Right arm
- Move onto Left arm
- Followed by the Neck and shoulders
- And finally the Face.

It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

* If you are left-handed you may want to begin with your left foot instead.

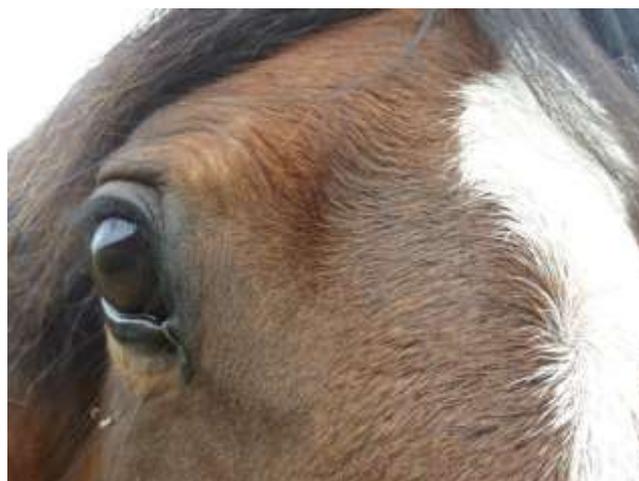
Body Scan Technique

A body scan is similar to progressive muscle relaxation except, instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensations in each part of your body.

Why this is good for horsemanship: Any area we carry tension will affect our horsemanship both on the ground and ridden. Our horse can read our body tension. In the saddle it can block our communication, our horse will feel we are not fluid so it can cause our horse to brace, fix and resist.

How to:

- Get comfortable.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes.
- Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot.
- After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg.
- From there, move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders.
- Pay close attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort.
- Move your focus to the fingers on your right hand and then move up to the wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, and shoulder.
- Repeat for your left arm.
- Then move through the neck and throat.
- Finally all the regions of your face, the back of the head, and the top of the head. Pay close attention to your jaw, chin, lips, tongue, nose, cheeks, eyes, forehead, temples and scalp. When you reach the very top of your head, let your breath reach out beyond your body and imagine yourself hovering above yourself.
- After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to stretch, if necessary.



Visualization Technique

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that requires you to employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and sound. When used as a relaxation technique, visualization involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety. You can choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether it's a tropical beach, a favourite childhood spot, or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this visualization exercise on your own in silence, while listening to soothing music, or with a therapist, or an audio recording of a therapist guiding you through the imagery. To help you employ your sense of hearing you can use a sound machine or download sounds that match your chosen setting—the sound of ocean waves if you've chosen a beach, for example.

Why this is good for horsemanship: Once you can master visualization you can use it in horsemanship. Here is an example: you could worry about any number of outside influences affecting your riding. Left unchecked your imagination can create all sorts of scenarios and nightmares of what may happen. Result is you become tense, anxious, fearful etc.... You can use the power of your imagination positively too. For sure you should be aware of your environment for safety sake but no more. Here is a visualization I use: Imagine you and your horse are in a beautiful peaceful clear bubble, you can see through it and all your senses are not affected. Things on the outside of this bubble can only come in if you let them. And you're not going to let them in. Practice being calm and relaxed in your bubble and enjoy being in there with your horse. It's just you and your horse and beautiful relaxing things in with you. The rest of the world is outside. Live in the moment (there is a technique for living in the moment covered later) so if trouble comes towards your bubble, only then do you have to deal with it. When you are calm and relaxed in your bubble you will be able to calmly and confidently deal with whatever approaches you. The benefit is you will not mentally leave your horse; you will stay more connected, be more in control and be happier.

How to:

- Find a quiet, relaxed place.
- Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don't select images because someone else suggests them, or because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you.
- If you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake, for example: Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colours and textures around you. Spend some time exploring each of your senses. See the sun setting over the water. Hear the birds singing. Smell the pine trees. Feel the cool water on your bare feet. Taste the fresh, clean air.

Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelopes you as you slowly explore your restful place. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present. Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session. This is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle-movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.



Mindfulness Technique

Mindfulness is the ability to remain aware of how you're feeling right now, your "moment-to-moment" experience—both internal and external. It is about living in the here and now. Thinking about the past—blaming and judging yourself—or worrying about the future can often lead to a degree of stress that is overwhelming. But by staying calm and focused in the present moment, you can bring your nervous system back into balance. Mindfulness can be applied to day to day activities such as walking, exercising, eating, etc.

Why this is good for horsemanship: Horses live much more than we do in the here and now. Yes they carry memories positive and negative which the negative experiences can cause them stress when exposed to similar situations. However the difference is they tend not to dwell on it and it tends to surface much more in reaction to what is happening to them in a here and now. Our job is to help our horse to be emotionally balanced and to be able to cope with those issues.

How to:

- Choose a secluded place with no distractions or interruptions.
- Get comfortable.
- Select a point of focus. This point can be internal – a feeling or imaginary scene – or something external - a flame, a beautiful stone or meaningful word or phrase that you repeat it throughout your session.
- You can do this with eyes open or closed.
- An observant, noncritical attitude. Don't worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you're doing. If thoughts intrude during your relaxation session, don't fight them. Instead, gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.



Calm Yourself by Centring Yourself

If anxiety is creeping up on you, stop. Yes stop and centre yourself.

1. Use a breathing technique to calm yourself.
2. Look about you and look for 5 different things around you.
3. Touch 4 different things about you.
4. Listen for 3 different noises.
5. What can you smell? Find 2 different things to smell.
6. What can you taste?

Repeat and this time take each step slower. Spend more time on each element. Take time to centre yourself until you feel calmer and more aware of what is outside of you.

1. Use a breathing technique to calm yourself.
2. Look about you and look for 5 different things around you. This time really look and see the details, form, colours and textures.
3. Touch 4 different things about you. Take time to feel each object, use your hands to examine the surface and note the sensations.
4. Listen for 3 different noises. Enjoy listening to the sounds.
5. What can you smell? Find 2 different things to smell. Take your time to let your mind fully process the details in the aromas.
6. What can you taste? Really notice the flavour in your mouth.

When anxiety attacks happen it is easy to become very inward focused. By using this exercise to use all your senses helps you to connect to the world around you rather than be lost in a cycle of inward anxious thinking. Take time to look, touch, listen, smell and taste. Really notice the details, the colours and any smells or sounds.



Re-Direct the Mind

This technique once perfected is really useful. Instead of your mind taking you down the anxiety road put your mind to work. Re-direct or distract your mind, and, or your horse's mind. Everyone is different so one distraction technique may work for one and not another. The key is finding something that you really have to concentrate on. Giving a mind a job is really helpful as it leaves little or no room for anxiety. The more absorbed in the task the better.

In a practical horsemanship session I may have the participants work on patterns and changes of direction. I remove all predictability so both minds have to focus on the here and now and the job in hand. I banish the use of the outside track of the school, as riding or ground working down a familiar route leaves minds free to wander into anxiety. The outside rail is not your best friend when you and or your horse suffer from anxiety.

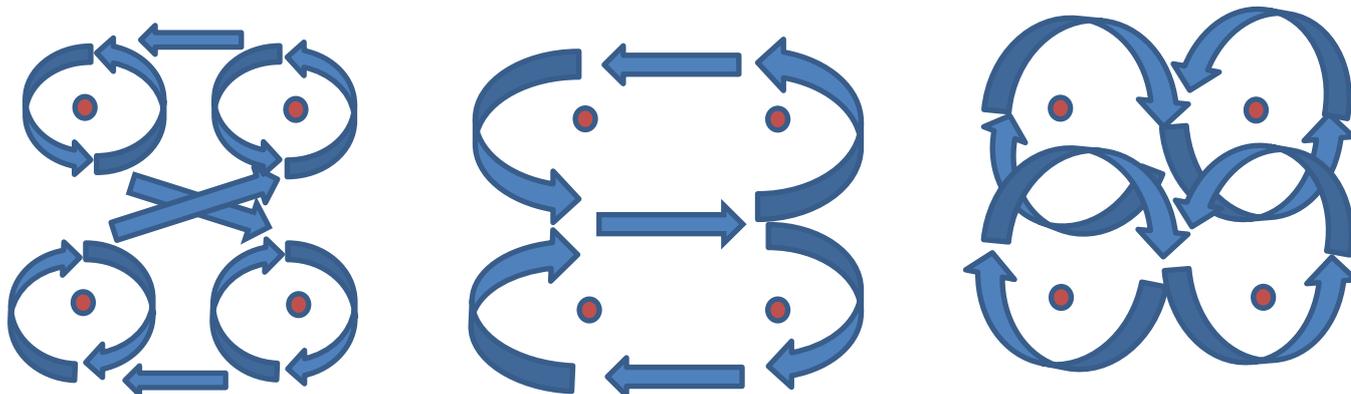
Here are just two distraction exercises to try with your horse:

The Random Scribble Game

When I use this with clients I call out instructions such as left turn, right turn, halt and walk on for the equine and human partnership to do. There is no predictability to the order of the instructions, often they will be very close together. It requires careful listening to follow the instructions, plus working on technique for each manoeuvre.

The Four Dots Game

Use four markers to mark out a square. A small square is best for anxiety say 10 metres – 15 metres apart to start with. This is because there is less distance between the points on the square for thoughts to leave. I then ask the horse and human partnership to use the 4 dots to create patterns. Maybe start walking around the four corner markers and halting at each corner. Or ride a circle on each corner. Zig zag. Figures of 8.....The more patterns they create the better. As anxiety is reduced and confidence grows the markers can be spaced out. Over time the square will grow to eventually filling the entire arena. Once perfected both horse and human learn the patterns and they become a relaxing comforting exercise. Another bonus is the patterns are made up of straight lines, parts of circles and circles so you will be practicing schooling techniques as well. So a win, win.



The more the horse and rider have to focus on a task the less room there is for anxiety to visit. Many of us interact with our horses without a task and focus and this is prime territory for anxiety to invade our sessions. So here I am talking about tasks being a re-direction from our anxious thoughts. Filling both horse and human brains with tasks is a great way to reduce anxiety.

Using Distraction to Banish Anxiety in Everyday Life

We can use distraction techniques to move your thoughts away from troubling thoughts or anxiety. Here are a few suggestions:

- Take up a creative hobby. Here are a few suggestions: writing, drawing, cooking, photography, model making, knitting, crafts, colouring in, etc....They all require us to really concentrate and focus. They take us out of our usual thinking patterns and absorb us in something fun, rewarding and enjoyable. Being totally absorbed in an activity is the polar opposite of being anxious. These are seriously worth considering if anxiety is invading many aspects of your life. As the time you spend being creative takes you off the anxiety wheel.
- Listen to music that you find uplifting and then focus on all the different elements in the music, the voices, the instruments, the rhythm and tones.
- Set yourself a challenge such as counting backwards from 1000 in multiples of 7.
- Distract yourself by focusing on your breathing.

- Organize yourself, be productive clean and tidy your home, car, the stable yard, the way you work, etc.... By doing this you will be establishing order and control.
- Immerse yourself in something you find funny. Laughter is a great way to banish anxiety. Laughing also has a relaxing effect, and will help to reduce body tension.
- Choose to think the opposite of your anxious thoughts.
- Do a puzzle, crossword or Sudoku.
- Keep a scrap book of things you find uplifting and inspirational.
- Read a book.

Personal Mantra

Here I am not suggesting you use chanting or make the “om” sound in your horsemanship, as people do during meditation. Meditative mantras are used to enable people to connect spiritually. Even without a spiritual component, using a mantra can help in relaxation. What I am suggesting is using a personal mantra as a mental distraction. A mantra can be useful in focusing your mind. It can be calming. A mantra using positive phrases can help you to reshape your thinking into a more positive mind set. If you want to deliberately block out negative thoughts use a calming self-talk mantra.

Rituals

Performing a ritual can give us a feeling of control. It can help to soothe anxiety and help you feel more comfortable in dealing with uncertainty. It is not a remedy but more about shaping how your mind deals with matters. When a ritual is used alongside other anxiety banishing techniques and practical steps to reduce anxiety it can help restore positive feelings of control and confidence. I am not talking about anxiety leading us to compulsive ritualization; which has the potential to lead to very damaging outcomes. Here I am talking about us recognising the anxiety and taking steps using a ritual to reduce or banish the anxiety. There are so many rituals we already observe in our daily lives without thinking. It is about establishing some that can help us when we are experiencing anxiety.

Being Prepared

We have all used preparation rituals and strategies in our lives to help us when facing trials and tests. Passing exams and job interviews etc....in horsemanship it is the same. You wouldn't go unprepared for an exam or job interview. Here we would naturally place a high value on researching, studying, learning, gaining knowledge and skills before sitting an exam. Place a high value on the ritual of continual personal development and watch how it shrinks anxiety. Learning new skills enables you to be prepared in facing what causes you anxiety within your horsemanship.

Dress for Success

To reduce anxiety and grow in confidence wearing the right clothing and safety equipment can give you a much needed boost. Some people wear lucky items of clothing or a talisman piece of jewellery. As crazy as it sounds, wearing clothes that help you to feel better you will perform better.

Burn it

Anxiety can play like a loop in our head. Learning how to let go is one way to free you from anxiety. Letting go of anxiety is not easy; as most anxiety is in bad past experiences, negative memories or from prior situations that caused despair. Getting what makes you anxious out into the open is a great way to stop it doing damage from within. So write it on some paper. Then have a ceremony to burn it. Seeing your anxiety written on paper in a physical form, firstly exist outside of you and then through your own actions disappear in flames and fade to ash is a powerful metaphor. Be very CAREFUL when burning something, as fire can be dangerous, so do this with mindfulness in a suitable place.

Release it with the wind or water

If using fire is not for you. Rip the paper into tiny pieces and let the wind or a stream take the pieces of paper away.

What If....

When you suffer from anxiety it can be fuelled by what if..... It is the mind creating scenarios that make us feel anxious and fearful. So our world gets smaller, because I had better not do x or y in case what if.....happens. You avoid and your world gets smaller. This erodes your confidence. Some of these what ifs may be based on a past frightening experience others not. If you suffered a frightening experience and an injury your brain will make you examine that fear, as it is a very natural behaviour to keep you from harm. So if your particular fear or what if had caused you harm in the past and could be harmful / dangerous again you need to listen to this carefully, do not ignore it. What ifs can be fear based. However there are two types of fear, real and perceived and they both feel exactly the same. So before we tackle what ifs and the negative inner dialogue it is essential we truly understand the nature of the beast of fear.

What is Fear?

Fear is there to stop you doing something that is harmful and keep you safe. It is a natural feeling for humans and horses. Tune into your fears they are telling you very important messages. There are two types of fear, a true fear and a perceived fear and they both feel emotionally and physically exactly the same. A true fear is telling you not to do something as it is very dangerous. A perceived fear feels as bad as a real fear, as our mind has taken a situation that is not life threatening or dangerous and perceived it to be a threat and danger. Your body and mind prepare you to take action to keep you safe. The way to tackle this and to build confidence is know what type of fear you are experiencing. With a real fear and dangerous situations you need to get professional help to work through the particular problem for you and your horse. Working at a pace you feel comfortable with safety a top priority. Learn skills and techniques. Develop a strong bond with your horse and build trust so you can effectively communicate with each other. Become the calm, confident leader your horse needs in times of crisis.

The problem is to be able to identify if your fear is real or perceived. It sounds so easy when you read this on paper. However in real life when fear has got hold it feels terrible. Let's explore the differences between real fears and perceived fears.

Real Fears

You can identify real fears by the fact they are about safety issues or lack of skill or knowledge that put you at risk of harm. You have the right to be afraid when you are not safe. Here are some examples of situations that are not safe: A horse that is in a blind panic bolt. A horse that is not in control of itself E.G: bucking, rearing, etc. You are pushed to do something you don't want to do. You lack skills and knowledge to deal with a particular situation. You know you are out of your depth.

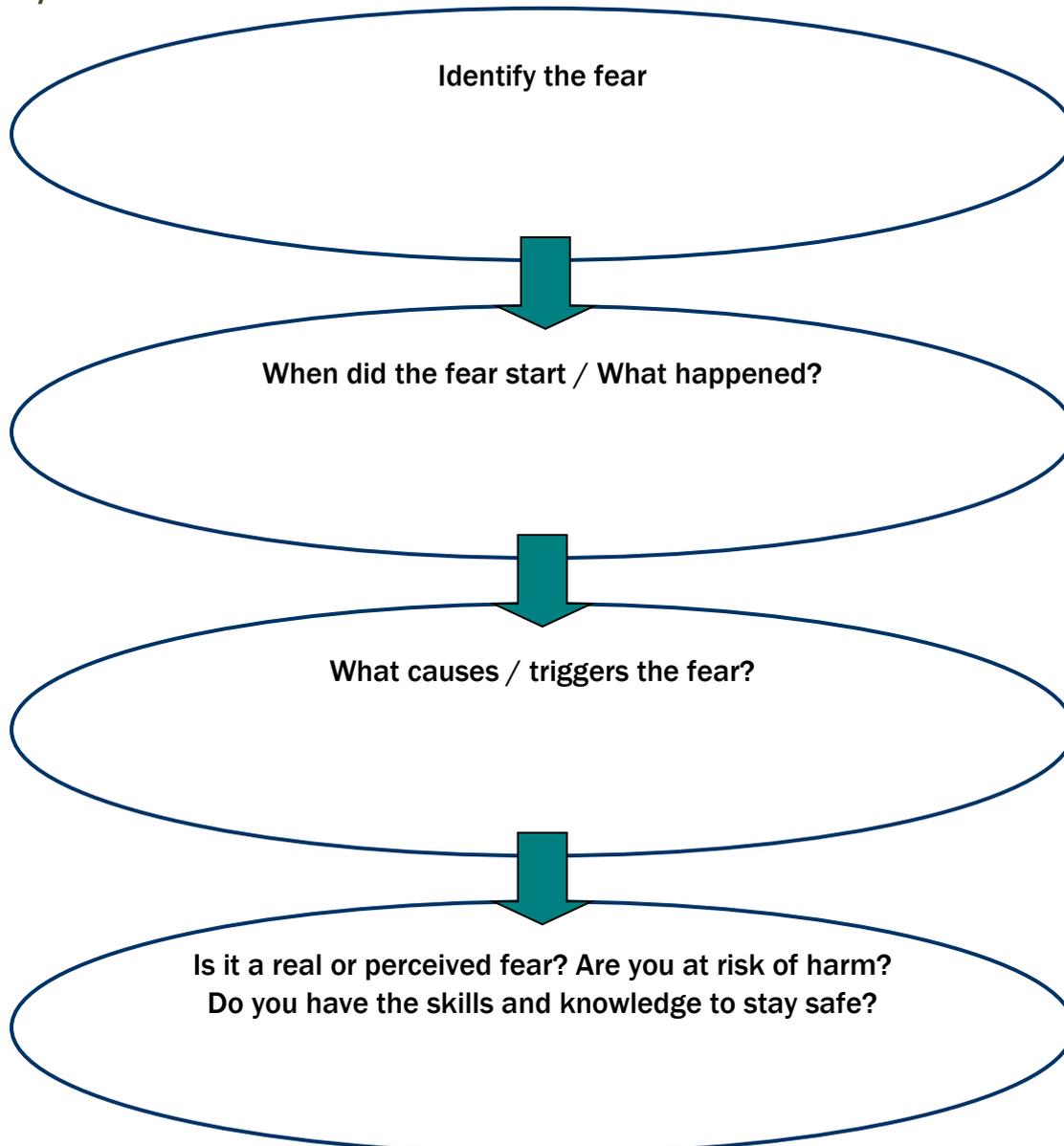
Perceived Fears

Imagined fears feel as intense as real fears. They are imagined fears, your mind focuses on what might go wrong, or images of other people's bad experiences play in your mind, or stories of other people's misfortunes play on your mind. Sometimes it has its foundation in lack of knowledge and understanding of horses. Many owners find it difficult to understand why their horse behaves as he does and it scares them. Perceived fears when examined carefully don't pose a threat or harm.

Do You Feel the Fear? And Should You Do It Anyway?

Have you ever sat down and identified your fears? Thought about when they started? What caused / triggered these fears? Are they real fears or perceived fears? The act of getting your fear out in the open is the first step in banishing it. Ousting the fear based demon, no matter how silly or foolish you feel it is needs to be done. While it can hide it feeds your anxiety and erodes your confidence. Once you know the type of fear you can take appropriate steps in conquering it.

Is your Fear Real or Perceived?



How many times have you felt the pressure to face your fear and do it anyway? We tend to pressure ourselves by comparing ourselves to other people. Or think that our fears are not valid or justified. Or we are being silly. Or that you should be able to do whatever causes you to feel fearful. Then into the mix is the help from others who could be giving you good or bad advice. Your gut feeling tells you not to do it but you do it anyway and you still don't feel any better in fact it can feel worse. So overriding your fear can be at best un-helpful and at worst dangerous. Trapped in this cycle you can soon become incapacitated by your fear. The sooner you start to listen to your fears, real or perceived the sooner you can take control, take the steps that feel right for you.

How to Beat Your Perceived Fears and Banish the What ifs

1 - Acknowledge it. This is a huge first step. If you do just this today, you've done something great. Many of us have these fears, but they are at the back of our mind, unnoticed, unacknowledged, as we try to ignore them and pretend they're not there. But they are there. And they affect us and make us anxious. So acknowledge the fear.

2 - Write it down. Writing it down externalizes the fear. It takes the fear from the dark lurking places in the back of your mind, where it has power over you, out into the light of day, outside of you, where you have power over the fear. You can do something about it. Set yourself up for success using a plan. Then have a ritual, maybe burn the paper, crumple it up, stomp on it, do whatever you like. Post it on your fridge as a reminder of your enemy that you will defeat.

3 - Feel the fear. You're still afraid of it, reluctant to even have this fear, perhaps even embarrassed about it. Well, no more. Recognize that you're not alone, that we ALL have fears. Fear is natural.

4 - What's the worst thing that can happen? Often it's not as bad as we think. E.g. I can't stop my horse. You can ask your instructor to work with you to give you skills in the very areas that causes you fear. Giving you skills in the areas you fear equips you to face your fear and do it anyway.

5 - Prepare yourself for battle. Prepare yourself, arm yourself, have a battle plan, train yourself. You need planned purposeful practice, with a plan to succeed. We perfect what we practice the most, so invest in your horsemanship and gain skills. Then go out and implement the plan using a graded approach and retreat method.

6 - Feel the fear & do it anyway. Just do it. You have the skills. To beat the fear, you have to just do it. The first few times you do it you may need the support from your instructor. It's an exhilarating feeling. How you view fear will also shape how you tackle them. Change your attitude towards your fear / what if to being a training opportunity and to expand your horsemanship can really make a huge difference. Beating your fears is an opportunity in works clothing. It's a golden gift in crappy paper, more about this later.

7 - Be in the moment. We get caught up in worrying about what might happen, what if. Instead, banish all thoughts of the future. Banish even thoughts of past mistakes and failures. Now focus on right now. Do something right now to beat your fears, to pursue your dreams, and forget about what might happen. Just do it, now, in the moment. When you find yourself thinking about the past or future, bring yourself back in the moment and focus on what you're doing right at this moment. Your horse lives very much in the moment.

8 - Small steps. Conquering fear and pursuing a goal can be overwhelming, intimidating. So start small. Just take one little baby step. Something you know you can do. Something you're sure to succeed at. Something just outside your comfort zone. Use a graded approach and retreat method. Then feel good about that, and take another small baby step. Keep doing this, and soon you'll have conquered a mountain.

9 - Celebrate every success! Even the smallest little thing. And use this feeling of success, of victory, to propel yourself forward and take the next step. Build upon each success; use it as a stepping stone to the next victory.

A Few Tips for Coping with Fear

- Stop telling yourself you are wrong to feel fear
- Remind yourself fear is there to protect you from harm
- Remind yourself that your safety is your responsibility
- Work at your pace; don't let others push you no matter what
- Learn to identify if it is a real fear or perceived fear
- Remember the approach and retreat graded exposure technique
- If you can't find the answer, try asking a different question
- Be prepared to take your time, it takes as long as it takes
- Be prepared to put in the time for consistent practice
- Be realistic about your skills and willing to learn
- Be patient with yourself and your horse
- Don't give yourself a hard time
- Get professional support and use an agreed structured plan
- It is ok and normal to feel fear

Now you have a better insight into your fears you are better placed to work with a professional to help work through the fear, be it real or perceived. The instructor should assess both you and your horse and support you with applying a safe and considered graded exposure approach and retreat technique you feel safe applying. You shouldn't face a real fear without the skills, knowledge, experience required to deal with the situation. Remind yourself fear is there to protect you from harm. Only you can decide what is safe for you. Your safety is your responsibility.

Many or most fears when examined carefully are unnecessary, to be baseless, and are holding you back from achieving your dreams. Fear of something bad happening in the future is one of the things that make us human. Horses feel fear too but tend to live more in the moment and react in that moment to a perceived or real immediate danger. If exposed to fear on a regular basis in the same place they too can start to fear something may happen. On the whole it is more a human condition to fear something that might happen, that isn't happening now, that isn't even likely to show its ugly face at that moment. Having the fear is natural. Letting it stop you from going after your dreams is a tragedy. Learning how to identify if something is a real fear or a perceived fear is the first step. Ousting it and then taking targeted action with the right support is the next. Then facing your fear with the skills to banish it enables you to live your equine dream. No one said it would be easy, but it is worth it.

Golden Gifts in Crappy Paper

My work takes me out to meet all types of people and their horses. All have very interesting stories to tell. Mostly people want me to help them with a problem of some description. Sometimes I am a last resort call. Horsemanship by nature is inter-species communication. So it not surprising that when horse and human are learning a new shared language, great learning opportunities are brilliantly disguised as problems. My calling is to help people and horses. The first thing is to help them make peace with the problems, no matter what they are. These problems can be the "golden gifts in crappy paper".

It is a matter of perspective. A problem is often an opportunity to explore. Anxiety may be an opportunity for personal growth. Sometimes it is about starting a fresh. This time more intelligently, to learn new skills, to build a strong foundation to build success upon. The trouble with a problem is it can be viewed as hard work and not worth the effort. How about thinking it could be a fun on the journey? There could be opportunities for personal growth. It is sometimes about switching mind sets. A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. However an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

Opportunity rarely arrives easy or neatly packed. Most people miss opportunities because they arrive as problems that cause anxiety. Opportunity dances with those already on the dance floor, so my work is often about getting horse and rider as dance partners. I help people and horses to walk confidently onto the dance floor, with the skills they need. With the aim is to facilitate them being able to dance together without me. For this I use a blend of horsemanship, cognitive behavioural techniques and when required healing.

Horsemanship technique will get you so far. It will only work with the correct mind set and emotional state. Time and time again I can show someone technique and the person can try to replicate it. However if the person is not in the right emotional place the horse will know. Horses know if we are nervous, anxious, fearful, tense, apprehensive, tentative, etc..... Horses are hardwired to read emotional state within their own species and that of other species. You cannot wear a mask the incongruence rattles them. For horsemanship to work horses require us to be authentic, consistent, trustworthy, respectful, calm, confident, patient, listen to understand, and above all honest. Horses are divine mirrors and will reflect back to us what we must work on from within. Horsemanship is as much about personal development of as it is about being great with horses. This is why cognitive behavioural techniques bring so much to horsemanship. As some people need help to deal with issues such as anxiety, fear, stress, depression, lack of confidence, the what ifs, the negative inner dialogue, the self-doubt, etc.... And often their horse and a little help is the only way onto the right path.

When I meet a new horse and human partnership presenting with a problem I have to come at it with a problem solving mind set. One I will share with you as problem solving is essential in almost every area of life especially when tackling anxiety.

Responsibility

Firstly I need to establish the root cause of the problem. Not that easy as humans are great at burying their heads in the sand and avoiding the problem. Avoiding the problem doesn't make it go away. It builds up in the background until a crisis point is reached. The problem may have been inherited. Humans are great at passing the buck. Sometimes the problem gets given to a professional to train the horse. The horse returns fixed, however the horse is only 50% of the partnership and the problem resurfaces. Then it can lead to the blame game. This sadly leads people down a negative pathway where others are less likely to offer assistance. I have to help the person to see the problem, and take responsibility, be willing, proactive and committed to working through to a solution.

Emotions

Emotions play a huge part in horsemanship. You can't convince me that horses are not emotional beings. So understanding the horse's and the human's emotional state is critical to success. We invest so much into our equine dream. Your emotions are so powerful they can have a huge impact on your decisions and actions. A massive part of helping someone; be they have 2 legs or 4 through a problem is to respect their emotional state. And offer appropriate support, guidance and encouragement. Some emotions take time to unpack. Taking ownership of feelings is the first step in how to work through emotions. Horsemanship requires horse and human to centre them-selves so they are composed, calm and confident, enabling thinking, rather than reactive behaviour. This enables an effective choice for the correct response in a situation.

Goals

Success is not just for the gifted and talented. When faced with a problem, knowing the true root cause and the desired end result enables us to put in place a step by step plan.

Listen to Understand

I have to listen to not only the human but also the horse when I am asked to help solve a problem. I need to make sure I really understand what I am being told, so I often ask lots of questions, observe, reflect and check back with the person and horse so I really understand. With complex issues it can take time for the layers to open up and the information we need come to light. It is about the relationship I have with the client and their horse that enables delicate topics to be aired. Some issues run deep, anxiety, abuse, trauma, frightening experiences, etc.... I am 100% committed to my clients, dedicated, and above all what is said to me is confidential. It is not just listening. It's about being compassionate, supportive, caring and empathic.

Explore Options

There is always more than one answer to a problem. Spending time considering each and this will lead you to the one that feels appropriate. Plus enable you to be flexible in your approach as there is always more than one way to work through things with horsemanship. As you can see from this Banish Anxiety resource there are lots of different methods and techniques you can try. If one doesn't work for you try another, then another, maybe a combination will work for you.

Review and Evaluate

Once you have embarked on your problem solving journey from time to time, stop and reflect. Keeping a journal can be a very useful tool, as it will enable you to see the distance you have travelled. Your journey is not set in stone so you can review and evaluate your progress and adjust your plan as you go along.

Dealing with Set Backs

On our journey through solving a problem, or banishing anxiety there may be setbacks and times you feel like giving up. This is the time to use tools and strategies that help with keeping you and your horse motivated. You can read for FREE to 7 articles I wrote on motivation that were published in Horsemanship Magazine. Start by reading the article - Panning for Gold, then the 6 in the Motivation series. You will find them on www.VickiJayneYates.co.uk in the FREE Stuff section on the Published Articles page.



Negative Inner Dialogue

Self-defeating statements and negative inner dialogue feed anxiety and erode confidence. Negative inner dialogue creates limitations that frighten you and prevent you from trying to resolve the problem. These feelings are very restricting. The negative inner dialogue is more than likely based on your opinions rather than based on facts. Plus the negative inner dialogue will focus on negatives not positives. Your thoughts become your beliefs; your beliefs will influence direction, choices and action. Your inner dialogue is your coach. If you learn to use positive statements it can help you to reach your highest potential. If allow negative inner dialogue in it can make you feel anxious, worthless and erode confidence. Negative inner dialogue is a harsh inner critic telling us that we'll never succeed. You may listen to this inner voice without knowing and just see the results. It stops you from pursuing your dreams. Even use it as an excuse to not even try. You can free yourself from the chains of self-disbelief.

The Power of Thoughts



Do your thoughts control you or do you control your thoughts? Having strategies to control thoughts enables us to live our dreams. Frees us from limitations, release our abilities and unlocks potential.

Thoughts come and go. Most start in the sub conscious, so many of us are not aware of our thoughts. Thoughts directly shape our feelings, so we can be aware of the impact our thoughts have. Some thoughts limit us in a negative way, making us feel bad, sad, fearful, anxious or tense. Some make you smile, feel good, cause you to feel happy, confident or relaxed.

How to Control Your Thoughts

Stop

Not easy; as usually we are wrapped up in feeling a certain way (positively or negatively). The human condition is to press on, rush along, getting frustrated, annoyed etc. Rather than examine the thoughts behind the feelings. Or even recognise our thoughts created how we feel. So next time a feeling is spoiling your equine dream; instead of pressing on, stop and examine your thoughts. Acknowledge your inner dialogue. Tune in and pay attention. Don't dismiss it. Your brain uses inner dialogue to shape your life, beliefs, choices and actions. Your inner dialogue is there all the time. You're likely to be listening to it without even realizing it. Start to notice how often you're making statements to yourself that are hindering your ability to do great things. Acknowledgement is the first vital step in change. Be open and honest about your negative inner dialogue and fears.

Identify Thoughts

Getting good at stopping the better you will get at identifying the root problem. As thoughts shape feelings start by examining how you feel and work backwards. Negative thoughts create unpleasant negative feelings. Most people do not want to face something that feels bad. The human condition means they would rather dismiss it, ignore it, suppress it, and hope it goes away. Face it, examine it; give it no place to hide so you can take control. Are you having judgmental thoughts? Or finding fault with yourself? Are you experiencing distorted and intrusive negative thoughts? Self-defeating statements and negative thoughts erode confidence, create limitations and frighten you. In extreme, negative thoughts can keep you awake at night, cause stress, fear and depression.

Get It Out

Once you have identified your negative thoughts, get it outside your head. Say it, acknowledge it and if it helps write it down. It takes the heat off, calms things down. Acknowledgement is the first vital step in any process of change.

Action

Challenge your thoughts. Look for and recognize the truth. What evidence do you have to support your thinking? Be objective, stand outside the situation. What alternative views are there? Are you overlooking solutions to the problem assuming they will not work? What is the worst that can happen? Then prepare to accept it. Are there errors in your thinking; are you catastrophizing or overestimating the chances for a negative outcome? Are you jumping to conclusions? Are you seeing the world in terms of fixed or in-flexible rules? Are you worried about how things should be? Do you find yourself using words like should, must and can't? Are you thinking in black and white or all or nothing terms? Have you ignored the middle ground? Are you personalizing? Challenge your negative thoughts. Don't just accept it. Challenge your inner voice's statements. When it tells you

that you're "not able" or "it is too difficult" or you're "not good enough" or you're "stupid", then challenge it. Don't just accept it as truth.

What are the barriers to challenging these negative opinions?

- Low self-esteem
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Feeling in-effective
- Fear of failure
- Errors in thinking
- Irrational beliefs
- Fear of criticism
- Other people's expectations etc.

Quieten Your Mind

When you have acknowledged and challenged your negative thoughts, you need to learn to quieten your mind. Dampen the negative thoughts so the positive thoughts can be heard. It is useful to actively practice relaxation or meditation, to free your mind. You need to make sure that the negative dialogue isn't anywhere near as loud as the positive dialogue.

Grow Positive Thoughts

Now that your mind is not using precious time listening to the negative thoughts, it's time to get some positive thoughts coming your way. For example, when you hear yourself say that you can't do something, replace it with the fact that you can. Whatever your negative inner voice says to you, just replace it with the exact opposite wording.

Believe

Chances are you've been having negative thoughts some time. So, changing the way you think is one thing, believing it is something completely different. To help yourself with this particular step remind yourself of your strengths. List all your and your horse's positive qualities. Remind yourself of all the things you like doing, enjoy and things that others have complimented you on. When you have lived with negative thoughts you may have missed compliments people have given you. Ask friends and loved ones to help you list your positive qualities. When a negative thought visits you can use this resource to prove it wrong and silence it.

Work in Progress

Be the best person you can be at this moment in time. So, when a thought wants to point out something you did wrong or something that you are not yet exceptional in, you can quiet it by the fact that you are work in progress. Just because you're in the trial and error phase, doesn't mean that you're worthless. It just means that you're not where you want to be yet. Learning to no longer listen to the bad comments and put-downs and changing them to supportive and encouraging comments takes time and practice. Actively focus on coaching yourself to think supportive and encouraging thoughts in regard to your work in progress. But as long as you stay persistent, you will eventually learn to get rid of that negative voice that drains your confidence and replace it with a positive, uplifting voice that will build your confidence and unlock potential.

A final thought to ponder: Change the way you think about things and the things you look at change.

An Exercise to Challenge Negative Inner Dialogue

1 - Acknowledge Negative Inner Dialogue

Write down your negative inner dialogue. Ousting gives it no place to hide to continue to eat away at your confidence. Nothing is silly, stupid or ridiculous.



2 – Challenge Your Thinking

Challenge your negative inner voice.

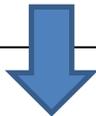


3 – Learn to Quieten Your Mind (Relaxation is one way to quieten the mind)



4 – Replace the Negative with Positive Dialogue

Write down the opposite view to that of your negative.



5 – Believe it

Test-drive your new thinking.
Put it into practice if needed with support from friends, family or your instructor.



6 – Remind Yourself That You are Work in Progress

Rhythmic Exercise Technique

Running, horse riding, walking, cycling etc.... can relieve anxiety and stress when performed with relaxation in mind. You must be fully engaged in the present moment, focusing your mind on how your body feels right now. As you exercise, focus on the physicality of your body's movement and how your breathing complements that movement. If your mind wanders to other thoughts, gently return to focusing on your breathing and movement.

Why this is good for horsemanship: A great one to do in the saddle it unlocks levels of refinement in horsemanship. As you can connect with your horse, how it's body moves, it's foot fall, it's energy, and emotional state of mind. You can learn to move as one. With groundwork your horse will tap into rhythm, you can influence your horse's rhythm with your own. Horses are hard wired to read rhythm and will love to take direction from very subtle rhythmic changes. Learning to use rhythm in relaxing with your horse adds a whole new dimension to your horsemanship.

How to:

- Let's pick walking. You can do this easily and once mastered have a go with your horse in hand.
- Start with your breathing exercise.
- Then focus on each step.
- The physical sensations of your feet touching the ground and how your body moves.
- Notice the rhythm of your breathing while moving.
- Relaxed people and horses walked relaxed. They mosey along. Tense horses and people hurry along. Can you walk like you are 92?
- Get into a relaxed rhythm. The pace you move at has a direct relationship with the way you feel. Slow down your movements and you will feel more relaxed.
- Enjoy the feeling of the wind against your face, if you're lucky the sun on your back.
- Notice the beautiful sounds of birds, wind in the trees etc.



Remember being relaxed is the polar opposite to being anxious, tense, fearful or worried. The key to success here is to make relaxation techniques a part of your life and valuing relaxation. The best way to start and maintain a relaxation practice is to incorporate it into your daily routine. Between work, family, school, and other commitments, though, it can be tough for many people to find the time. Fortunately, many of the techniques can be practiced while you're doing other things. I haven't covered every technique so there are lots more you can try.

Keep a Journal.

With anxiety the road out can be rocky. It will have some great highs and lows. What matters is the total distance you have travelled. The act of writing allows you to vent and take what causes the anxiety outside of you. You also have to concentrate at the same time, so it is a great distraction. Remind yourself to record in your journal even the smallest success. Most people when they suffer anxiety will focus on the one thing that went wrong and made them feel anxious and not the positives. Plus when you have travelled some way you can reflect back on how far you have come. It is a great confidence boost and will help you with building self-esteem.

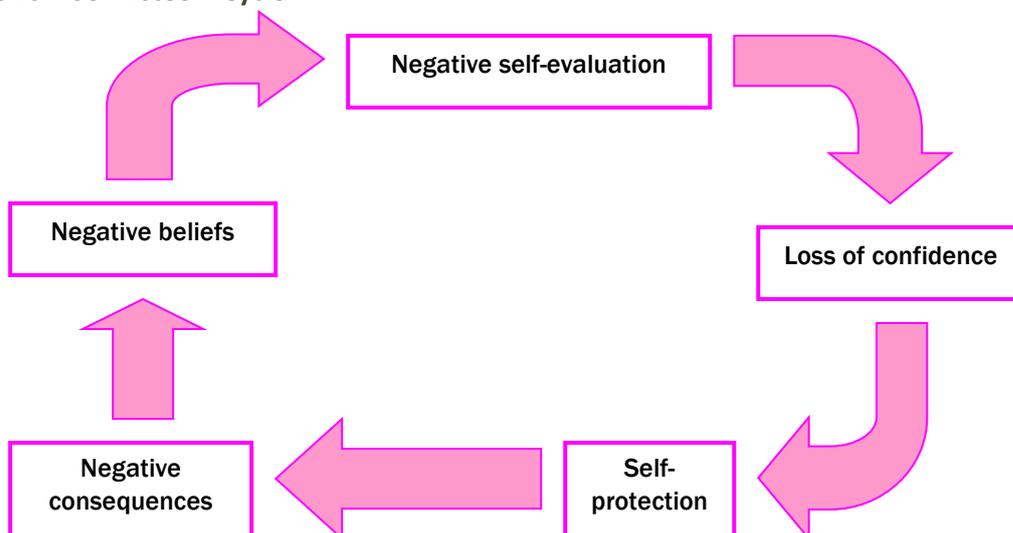
What is Low Self-Esteem?

Anxious people tend to lack confidence and often have low self-esteem. Self-esteem is:-

- The overall opinion we hold of ourselves.
- How we judge ourselves.
- The value we place on ourselves.
- Core ideas we hold about what type of person we think we are.
- The beliefs we hold about ourselves.
- Our self-worth.

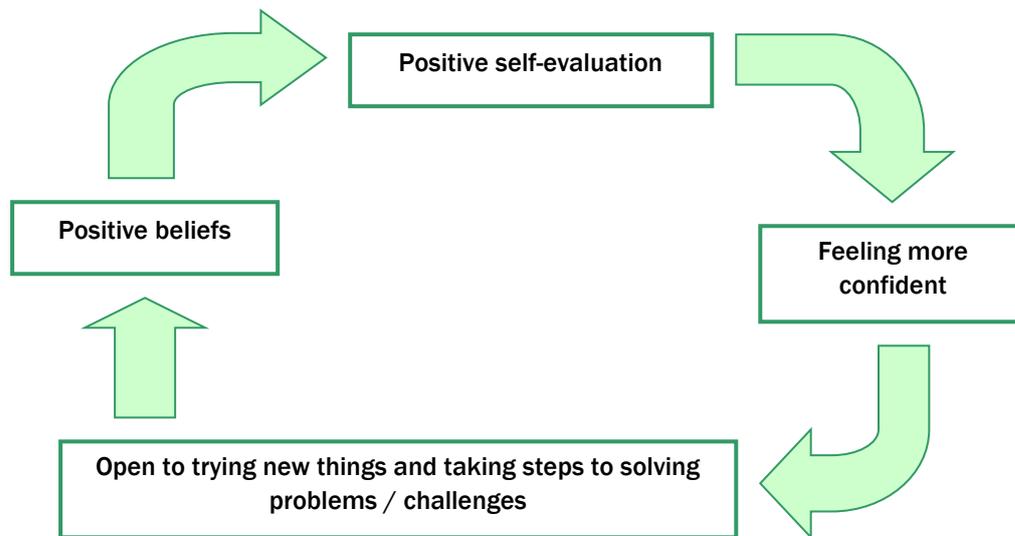
We often think these are facts, statements of truths about ourselves. However they are likely to be only opinions. They are conclusions you have arrived at based upon life experiences. So if you have had a life that on the whole provided you with positive experiences your beliefs about yourself are likely to be positive. If your life experiences have been negative then it is likely your beliefs about yourself will be negative. To break out of the cycle of low self-esteem you firstly need to become aware of the cycle and then you can take steps to break free.

The Low Self-Esteem Cycle



To break free from a cycle of low self-esteem you can start at any point on the cycle. For example you could choose to start with the negative self-evaluation, and focus on the positive things about you. Examine what you are good at. Look at what you and your horse have achieved and the things you have done that you are proud of. Or you could choose the loss of confidence and evaluate what happened in an objective and positive way. Often it is helpful to get professional advice at this stage. This then gives you the opportunity to see this in a positive light and as a learning opportunity for you and your horse. Or you could open yourself up to new experiences and challenges so tackling self-protection and negative consequences. Or you could examine your negative beliefs and challenge your thinking and replace these negative thoughts with positive statements.

Positive Cycle of Self-Esteem



The Perfection Stick

There is great merit in practice to refine our skills, but don't confuse this with chasing perfection. It is fine to aim for the stars and to recognise by doing this you will achieve great heights but targeting perfection can be unrealistic. It can set you up to fail, cause anxiety and erode confidence. I meet people who regularly beat themselves with the perfection stick. They feel they are letting their horse down by not being perfect. Remind yourself all any of us can offer is our best, to strive to improve our best and that refining our skills is a journey not a destination. Recognise too that this is all your horse can offer too. Yes you and your horse will make mistakes and at times let each other down. These mistakes are part of the learning journey. Give yourself and your horse permission to make mistakes and you will enrich your learning.

Chasing Moonbeams and Spiky Profiles

When you learn something new and you feel what you have learnt with your horse really work and things come together it can be like stepping into a pool of enlightenment. It can be fleeting or last some time. It is similar to stepping into a small bright shaft of magical moonlight, you get the feeling, you see things clearly and as they should be. Then it melts away much to your frustration and you are back to your old way of doing things. Then it is so easy to get anxious. Have you ever felt this?

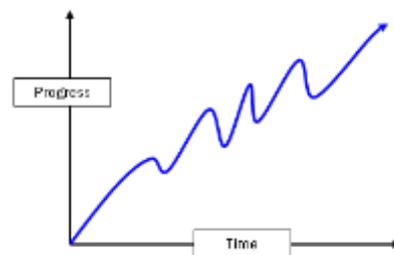
If you have felt this you may understand how easy it is to get trapped into chasing moonbeams. The more you try to recreate the end result, the enlightenment the more it is impossible to find. This is because you focus on the end result and not the journey that enabled you to discover this new understanding / knowledge. Stop chasing the moonbeam and focus on the process that enabled you to arrive to your new learning. Then you will notice those small moonbeams become bigger and what you have newly learnt gets easier and then the normal way to do things.

Exercise - Next time the frustration and anxiety of chasing the moonbeam of the newly learnt skill creeps in ask yourself are you chasing the end result? If so stop and focus your energy to refine the process that enabled you to arrive into the light.

Spiky Profile

Learning for humans and horses very rarely follows a smooth up-ward curve. You will find you and your horse will have good days and bad days. Sometimes you will feel your progress slip away. It can feel like you take two steps forward and one back. With working your way out of anxiety you could easily give up if you didn't make peace with a spiky profile. A spiky profile is very normal. To help you stay positive at times like this it is best to focus on the total distance travelled; hence the suggestion of keeping a journal.

With a spiky profile, the downward dips are an indication that you should focus on your previous learning to consolidate this. Maybe it is the horse and or the rider that needs more time to embed this learning and build confidence. So be prepared to go back and look at the stages that you and your horse have found easy before working on the area that caused the downward dip. By consolidating this you will have a stronger base to build further success in tackling the next step in banishing anxiety. So it is time very well spent.



A chart of a spiky profile

Avoidance and Evasion

Avoidance and evasion are part of the cycle in anxiety within horse or human. Both will try to avoid or evade situations that make us feel confused or anxious or fearful or stressed, it is a natural response. Many clients I work with will have very well established patterns of avoidance and evasion. Here are a few examples I see in humans: Most common is the last minute cancelling of a session, the anxiety gets too much so they cancel. Only wanting to work on stuff they feel safe with, the anxiety stops them from wanting to grow their world. A reluctance to look at the root cause, it is too uncomfortable so they would rather ignore it and hope it goes away. Handing the horse over to other people to work with, that is 50% of the partnership that gets the help. The what ifs and negative inner dialogue, that are then supported with excuses as to why not to give something a try. I know this is down to how the person is feeling. Anxiety has the potential to stop you in your tracks, preventing you from even having a go, doing things you used to find enjoyable, rewarding and fun.

Exercise – What avoidance or evasion behaviours do you have? What are the triggers? How do you feel being placed in situations that make you want to avoid or evade? How does it affect your anxiety and confidence?

Sadly for horses this avoidance and evasion is often labelled as being naughty. To help you think about this from a different view point ponder this: You are invited to do something that triggers your anxiety. You politely decline the invitation as you feel anxiety and your lack of confidence grab hold. However how would you feel if the person who invited you put pressure on you to comply with their wishes? They labelled you as being difficult or naughty. They may even think shouting and hitting you would help to encourage you. Does this sound a familiar story for horses?

As a lack of confidence in horse and human can be fuelled by low self-esteem, stress, fear, anxiety etc. it is important to understand the nature of lack confidence before you can deal with the individual's avoidance / evasion with the most appropriate method. As an instructor I see many horses that are labelled as naughty as the avoidance and evasion have become deep rooted. The behaviour may well have started as a genuine reaction to a situation in which the horse sees his actions as appropriate and logical, to the rider or handler the reaction is seen as inappropriate. Again it is the issue of we live in different realities and to understand our horse we need to develop and apply equine compassion. Without this understanding the horse becomes labelled as naughty. And the label of naughty can lead to the inappropriate use of punishment.

With horses the more punishment and pressure applied the more resistant the horse can become. When this happens over a period of time the horse may well have a distant memory of the trigger of the behaviour and it will have now been replaced with an ongoing battle with the human. So the next time your horse avoids or evades a request with behaviour you could call naughty, ask yourself why is your horse behaving like this? It is our job to help our horse comply by using appropriate training methods that are based upon equine compassion, fairness and an understanding of our horse's confidence issues.

Exercise – What avoidance or evasion behaviours does your horse exhibit? What do you think triggers the behaviour? How do you think he / she feels being placed in situations that make him / her want to avoid or evade? How do you think it affect his / her confidence?

From doing this exercise you may well have a list of questions that you are now ready to look for answers to solving the avoidance or evasion.

Talking it through

Anxiety likes to hide in the dark, bringing it out into the light gives it nowhere to hide. Anxiety can make you feel isolated, however you are not alone. Anxiety is common. It may feel difficult to talk about your anxiety, but do. It can be very helpful to discuss with family or friends or someone who has had a similar experience. As a horsemanship practitioner when I am helping someone with anxiety it is essential that my client shares with me what is causing their anxiety and how they feel. A client sharing with me not only helps them to off load and cope, but it gives me the insight on how best to support that individual.

Horses talk to us; the skill here is to earn their language. This is horsemanship. Horses telegraph in with us if we are receptive to listening. I wrote an article Telegraphing In for Horsemanship Magazine exploring this topic. This article was inspired by my friend Norma. Her beautiful little horse Tsar is very expressive. Norma has learnt to read Tsar's intent, emotions and energy and described this to me as "Tsar telegraphs in to her". I find myself using this phrase often as I couldn't have put it any better myself. Norma can now read Tsar's intent, emotion and energy and recognises how this shapes her conversations with him. She learning what is appropriate to telegraph back. It was a revelation to her that Tsar could read her intent, emotions and energy way before any physical aid was applied. Her physical aids got softer, lighter and given practice were not needed.

To me horsemanship is open honest dialogue. For many people their first experiences with horses are mechanical, learning the basics of position, balance, the aids, to ride using monologue, telling and directing the horse. It's vital to also learn about listening to understand with compassion and empathy and being appropriate. We can recognize equine feelings and opinions. Horses provide us with very useful feedback. Positive feedback we know we're on the right track. Negative feedback gives us the golden opportunity to change our approach and develop our horsemanship. The horse makes up 50% of the dialogue and if we seek a true partnership the horse's opinion is the only one that matters. The magical connection people seek with their horse is about using open honest dialogue to reach a mutually agreed partnership that strives for harmony and refinement in activities both horse and rider find fun, enjoyable and rewarding.

I teach people its first intent, flavoured with emotion, then energy, followed by body language then if required a soft physical aid. Intent is what we plan to do and how we feel. For example we may think about asking our horse to walk on, and feel any number of emotions, anxiety, fear, confidence, passive, assertive, happy, calm, tense, joyful, serious etc..... Horses pick up on our feelings and emotions very quickly. They find human extremes of emotion difficult and can reflect your inner issues right back at you. If we are focusing on helping a troubled horse, or positive progressive

training, and building a partnership with our horse it is our responsibility to turn up balanced emotionally, spiritually and mentally. I do not mean being false or wearing a mask. You can't fool your horse, they will know, they are astute. They will look for any sign of incongruence in you and it will rattle them. I am saying deal with your own root cause of your issues. That is your true responsibility to yourself and your horse. Centred emotional balanced energy enables us to see what our horse is struggling with, to read and understand your horse's communication. Once a horse knows you will listen and take on board their feelings and opinions you're more likely to be able to help your horse. Everyone likes to be valued, listened to, heard and understood. Horses have emotional needs; seek spiritual harmony and mental safety. During the early days of owning my horse Merlot, he taught me about being emotionally balanced in order to help him. His troubled abusive past at the hands of his previous owner left him with huge issues and considerable emotional baggage. To off load this he needed to be listened to, understood, empathy offered and allowed to work through them supported in a safe partnership.

This is not a one way street. Horses can be the best therapy. Many horses help their humans work through their life issues. They are like a mirror reflecting right back at their human the very issues they need to work on from within. They say when the student is ready the teacher will arrive. Teachers come in all shapes and sizes; some have two legs, some four. Sometimes your horse may be the only one who can take you on the journey to banish anxiety by teaching you how to be calm, confident and assertive.

Equine Separation Anxiety

Horses are herd animals and will often experience anxiety when separated from their herd. As a species horses are social creatures that form pair bonds and relationships within the herd that have social dependency in finding comfort and safety in numbers. It is inevitable that at some point during horse ownership you will see equines suffering separation anxiety to some degree or another. There are steps you can take to try to keep separation stress to a minimum. How horses are housed and managed should be mindful of the need for equines to have company of their own kind. When helping a herd bound horse it is essential you invest time in bonding with your horse. Alongside a slow and steady approach to gradually help the horse feel safe in an environment separated from his herd. In extreme cases I have done the training to start with in a herd situation. One horse I took her pair bond with me for several weeks until she was comfortable working with me. Then I gradually separated her from her pair bond for short positive reinforcement training sessions. When helping a horse to settle on its' own make the environment one your horse enjoys spending time in. So have a supply of sweet hay for him to munch on. A stable mirror can help too. You may like to consider essential oils for their calming properties. A calming supplement may help there are plenty on the market that are designed to help. There are even appeasement pheromones available you can use for horses, such as Confidence EQ.

Health Issues and Nutrient Deficiencies that Can Cause or Worsen Anxiety

A healthy diet for human and horse is essential for physical and emotional wellbeing. However modern lifestyles and pressures often make us deficient in certain vitamins and minerals. Speaking from experience of being diagnosed with many years ago thyroid problems and last year vitamin d deficiency I can vouch these can impact us physically and mentally. Therefore I strongly urge you to have health checks undertaken as anxiety can often be a symptom of an underlying condition or a vitamin or mineral deficiency. As you can't treat a nutrient deficiency or underlying health condition with cognitive behavioural techniques or horsemanship or drugs prescribed for anxiety.

Calm Assertiveness in Horsemanship

My definition of assertiveness in relation to horsemanship:



Assertive behaviour is about calmly, confidently communicating your message using the language of the herd. This is without aggressively disregarding or threatening the rights of the horse. It is not about dominance or not considering the horse. It is not submissively permitting the horse to ignore your conversation. It is a state of mind, how we feel and how we act. Being assertive involves taking into consideration both your own rights, wishes, wants, needs and desires, as well as those of the horse.

Assertiveness means listening to your horse, taking in their opinion, views, wishes and feelings, in order that both parties act appropriately. Assertiveness is about listening, understanding and honest open dialogue. It is learning to see eye to eye, treating your horse as a partner. Assertiveness is about being flexible and willing to compromise. There are times you should choose to be passive and times it is essential we are assertive. There is a scale of passive to assertive it is like fine tuning what you need at any given moment.

Watch how horses use assertiveness in their communication. Often a horse is chosen by others in the herd as one they take direction from. This horse's behaviour is characterized by calm confident clear statements without using aggressive behaviour. A harmonious herd has a calm assertive horse that others like to spend time with. Watch closely and the horse that is aggressive and dominates others in the herd is not the one the herd look to for guidance and reassurance. We should aspire to using a calm assertive approach with our horses.

Aggression: In its broadest sense is behaviour that is forceful, hostile or attacking. It is an intention to cause harm or an act intended to increase relative social dominance. Aggression can take a variety of forms and can be physical or be communicated verbally or non-verbally. Aggressive people do not respect the personal boundaries of others (human or equine) and thus are liable to harm others while trying to influence them. Aggressive behaviour is based on winning. Who the heck sees a relationship with their horse as one winning or losing? In my opinion this is a terrible path to go down. Aggression is taking what you want regardless, and you don't usually ask.

Aggression is a natural behaviour in horses and can involve bodily contact such as biting, kicking or pushing, but most conflicts are settled by threat displays, body language gestures and intimidation that cause no physical harm. Horses may use aggression to help secure territory, including resources such as food and water. Aggression between males often occurs to secure mating opportunities. Aggression may also occur for self-protection or to protect offspring. As attack is the best form of defence.

We have several behavioural drivers we can apply, passive, assertive, aggressive or manipulative. So to help you see the picture more fully, what are passive and manipulative behaviours?

Passive Behaviour: Passive people tend to comply with the wishes of others at the expense of their rights and self-confidence. Many people adopt a passive response because they worry they will be disliked or will upset others (humans or their equine friends). They place greater weight on the rights, wishes and feelings of others. Being passive they had over decision making and responsibility. Horses find comfort and safety by knowing you are the reliable, consistent and will be the one they can look to for guidance and reassurance. So by you being passive your horse will have to step up and make the decisions. Fine if your horse is confident and makes choices you agree with. There will be times your horse will lack confidence, feel fearful, anxious, etc...and look for guidance. At these times being passive will not help your horse. Without a trusted, calm assertive partner the horse will revert to instinctive behaviours, flight, fight, freeze, etc... Passive people have trouble in saying no and setting boundaries. If you own a very respectful and well educated horse being passive may not cause you many concerns. However with young horses, poorly educated horses, horses with negative past experiences, dominate horses, high spirited horses etc...you will have a problem if you are passive. Passive behaviour is often linked to poor self-confidence and self-esteem. In the herd horses use passive behaviours, you will observe this in many situations. It enables harmony. This is why being passive is an essential skill to learn with horses as there will be times you need to be passive.

Manipulative Behaviour: You will come across manipulative behaviour much more with humans than horses. In humans manipulative behaviour is about hidden agendas or motives. It is often very subtle and may be easily overlooked, buried under feelings of obligation, love, or habit. It is often controlling in nature and intent. In horses manipulative is very rare in the wild. However the behaviour can be learnt. For example the horse can learn to manipulate its' human. A horse can train and manipulate its' human. Many horses I get called out with behavioural problems have effectively trained their human and manipulated the relationship to their advantage. This is because the horse lacks a respected, trusted, calm assertive partner. I also see humans trying to control their horse by using manipulative behaviours. In terms of the language of the herd and desirable human behaviour using manipulative behaviour is not healthy in any relationship.

In horsemanship I do not see it as a question of dominance and submission. In horsemanship any interaction is always a two-way process and therefore your reactions may differ, depending upon your relationship with the horse. You may find that you need to respond passively or assertively when you are communicating in different situations.

Assertiveness helps us to:

- Control our anxiety...as anxiety and assertiveness are polar opposites
- Build confidence and self-esteem
- Create clear boundaries
- Increase awareness of personal rights and rights of others
- Be appropriate, as you will know the difference between passive, assertive, aggressive and manipulative behaviours.

Most of us women are not raised to be assertive. Many struggle to know what assertiveness means, what it feels like, sounds like and looks like. Assertiveness is a skill you can learn. It is about learning both verbal and non-verbal assertiveness skills within our own language and species. As well as understanding assertiveness in terms of the language of the herd.

Assertive behaviour in horsemanship includes:

- Being open in expressing wishes, thoughts and feelings and encouraging your horse to do likewise.
- Listening to the views of your horse and responding appropriately, whether in agreement with these views or not.
- Accepting responsibilities and being able to delegate responsibilities to your horse.
- Regularly expressing appreciation of what your horse have done or are doing.
- Being able to admit to mistakes, it is part of learning, apologise and move on.
- Maintaining self-control.
- Behaving as an equal with your horse.
- Putting the relationship first.

Assertiveness is a communication style and strategy. It is about how you deal with and view personal boundaries, your own and those of your horse. In horsemanship being a calm assertive partner is about setting clear boundaries using the language of the herd. This is along with being able to say no to your horse without feeling guilty. A small inner voice may know what is going on with your horse is about you setting boundaries and saying no, but because you lack assertiveness you find it impossible to put it into practice. It is often hard for people to say no to the ones they love, this includes their horse. Remember it's not your horse you are rejecting, or not loving your horse. Being a calm assertive partner to your horse you will have acceptance and love in your heart. It's about saying no to a behaviour and setting relationship boundaries; you are not rejecting your horse.

A calm assertive partner is open to criticism from their horse. As horsemanship is open dialogue. Learn from what your horse tells you. Natural horsemanship gives you the skills to understand your horse's communication. Many people are paralysed by perfection. You will make mistakes, so will your horse. When you get it wrong, listen to the criticism from your horse and view it as an opportunity to grow. Some people I go out to, are out their depth and don't understand the criticism from their horse. Getting help, practical advice helps with how to do things differently. Think about your horse as a resource in helping you to develop.

A calm assertive partner builds confidence in their horse. Giving your horse positive feedback, target and reward with positive reinforcement the things you liked / wanted. Help your horse to learn new skills, or change behaviours. Focus more on the positives and be generous with praise. Be clear and direct in your communication with your horse. There are assertiveness techniques you can use with your horse. Here are a few examples.

The Broken Record - This is one of calm persistence of repeating the same horsemanship message again and again to your horse, without becoming angry or irritated. Consistently and calmly repeat the request, do not up your energy or engage in argument. Stay calm, clear and keep the message simple. You are able to compromise using the broken record technique. For example the smallest try for what you are looking for can be rewarded lavishly. Often the smallest try will be the first step in happily achieving the outcome you are looking for.

Fogging - is a useful technique when dealing with horses that are upset, angry or aggressive. Rather than arguing back, fogging is about giving a minimal, calm response. It's about letting the horse express himself. We remain centred and calm, not arguing or being defensive or agreeing with the horse. You allow the horse to throw his arguments into a wall of fog that they cannot bounce back from. By not providing confrontation often it enables the horse to cease the behaviour and calm down. Then you are best able to look for the truth in the situation and suggest to the horse an appropriate direction to take.

Take Your Time - Very few things in horsemanship are emergency situations. A great assertiveness technique is to stop and take your time. This is a great tip, especially if you are feeling too emotional. It's ok to time out and come back to things when you are calm and composed. It enables you to come at the communication more thoughtfully.

Calm Escalation - This type of assertiveness is sometimes necessary when your reasonable requests that your horse understands, is capable of doing are being ignored. I use low grade irritation, just like if you get in a car and try and drive away without fastening your seat belt the car pings at you until you fasten your seat belt, then rewards you by going silent once you comply. With horses I use a bridge noise that equals low grade irritation is coming. The low grade irritation can be as tickly a fly, using the ends of your reins, the end of your rope, or tickle with your stick. I do this in a cycle of three, first three tickles are so soft, then the next three a bit more, and the next three firmer and so on. As soon as the horse complies I quit the annoyance and reward generously.

Empathy and Compromise - With assertiveness it is essential we recognize our horse's views the situation. If the horse is having problems, listen to understand and the path of the middle ground will open up before you. Humans tend to have all or nothing thinking and there is nearly always some middle ground that is the stepping stone to longer term success.



Tips to Help Manage Anxiety

Identify What Worries You and Your Horse

When we feel anxious it is sometimes hard to pinpoint exactly what is causing us to worry and become anxious. However to deal with anxiety it is helpful to bring out into the open what is worrying you. It can be a half formed idea or a nagging doubt that keeps running around in your mind becoming a bigger and bigger worry. You can break this cycle by getting out into the open what worries you. It takes away a lot of the pressure and enables you to then take steps in dealing with your worries.

Horses can worry and become anxious; our job is to help our horse overcome the worry and anxiety. Again the first stage is to identify what is worrying your horse. Again by recognising what causes the anxiety we can then take steps to help deal with the anxiety. So pay attention to your horse, watch his body language, energy, reactions and you will soon be able to identify what worries your horse.

Look for Evidence

By checking out evidence for the cause of the anxiety we can be sure we are not jumping to assumptions. Jot down evidence for both sides of the argument and review the information you have gathered. Getting an objective professional view point is also very useful at this stage. Now you can rate how much you believe your anxiety / worry to be true. Often this simple exercise alone is enough for you to see some things that were causing anxiety are not as bad as you first thought. It helps you to gain perspective and see a positive way forward.

Explore the Outcome

Many of us get caught in our anxious thinking and focus on the worst possible outcome. This thinking can become far from reality and the fantasy is usually far worse than the reality.

Other View Points

How would someone else view the situation? What advice would they give? Again this is about checking your thinking as when we are caught in a loop of anxious thinking perspective and realities are easily lost. It is very useful to check out and compare your view point with people you respect and a professional instructor.

Ten Years' Time

Ask yourself will this worry / anxiety matter in ten years' time? Looking from a distance can help you see what you think are mountains are molehills.

Distorted Thinking

Check your thinking about the situation. Example: Are you thinking in all or nothing terms? Do you think in terms of total failure or total success? If you are you will be missing the middle ground. Progress should be measured on a scale say between 0% and 100%. Keeping a perspective can really help you deal with worries and anxiety.

Pack up Your Worries

If your anxious thoughts keep going round and round in your head you will find it impossible to even start to solve the problem. So try packing them away and allow yourself a specific set aside time to deal with them one at a time. If you can change your thought process to being one from being worried / anxious about a situation / problem to one of when the time is right I will tackle each problem one at a time and one step at a time. You can start to see them as challenges rather than worries.

Safe Graded Exposure

Once you know what troubles you and or your horse you can work on using a planned safe graded exposure technique. An example of this is below. You need to work within levels that you or your horse are comfortable with and repeat the exercises several times until anxiety begins to subside. Also be prepared to try different approaches as there are always many solutions to solving problems. If the step you are trying to achieve is too big be prepared to break it down into even smaller steps.

Take Action

One of the best ways to tackle worries and anxiety is to take steps in solving your problems. Worries and anxiety can spur you on a journey of self-discovery and new learning. There are many ways you can change your situation. The first step is to recognise something has to change. If you do the same you will get the same. Are you ready to try a new approach? Are you prepared to work with an instructor?

Relaxation Techniques

Using a relaxation technique is very helpful when breaking the anxiety cycle. You cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time. There are many different techniques you can learn. And it is personal choice as to which you may find the most effective. Here I will give you just a few ideas; there are relaxing breathing techniques, progressive muscular relaxation techniques, mental relaxation techniques, guided imagery techniques etc. Relaxing breaks the cycle of anxiety as it slows the body's systems. And like all new skills the more you practice it the better you will get at being relaxed. So this skill is very useful to learn for everyday life too. Our job is to help our horses to relax.

One at a Time - You Can't Fix it all at Once

As an instructor I come across this very frequently in relation to anxiety and confidence building. I understand how frustrating it is to be anxious and losing confidence as all the things that seemed easy now are tricky, scary or out of reach. You feel like you should be able to fix your or your horse's anxiety issues and everything will slide effortlessly back into place. The reality is that banishing anxiety and confidence building takes time and you have to be prepared to take things one step at a time at a pace that is suitable for you and your horse and above all commit yourself to the process. To put it simply you can't fix it all in one go and there is no quick fix.

As an instructor I see the bigger picture and I assess the horse and rider partnership and decide which aspects are best to focus on first and build a structured training plan for both horse and rider. On your own it is tricky to step outside objectively and look in to assess yourself. It is possible but it is not easy. Assessment and feedback from an objective, knowledgeable, experienced third party is often very useful.

The worst cases I come across are when I am called in to help and the person expects me to fix their or their horse's anxiety and confidence issues in one or two sessions. The client looks to me to fix the problem and it is clear there is no commitment on their part to see this as a longer term process. I am usually one in a long line of instructors they have called upon. It is unrealistic to expect your instructor to fix it for you. Yes be guided by your instructor, however confidence building comes from within you. So between lessons you need to set aside time to focus on working on building your confidence step by step. If you read this Banish Anxiety resource and are not prepared to commit to setting aside time, energy, and seek support from a professional to complement the resources you will struggle to banish your anxiety and fix your confidence issues. Remind yourself - One step at a time, one issue at a time, nobody can fix everything at once. It certainly will take time, as long as it needs to take.

Set Yourself up to Succeed

Is success inspirational triumph against the odds or is it achieved by those with rare talent? Are you dreaming of accomplishing horsemanship skills beyond your current capabilities? Sadly many of us live with the illusion that expertise is only for special gifted people and inaccessible to us. This is the first stumbling block to banishing your anxiety and achieving your dreams. Achievement of your goals can be done with a teaspoon of talent and shed loads of planned and purposeful practice. Top performers learn no faster; however they plan ahead and purposefully practice more to achieve their goals. It is quality of consistent practice that counts as we perfect what we practice most. If you practice a fault you will perfect this, it pays to take advice. Seek out like-minded people and an environment that encourages your chosen field of horsemanship to speed up your development.

You will benefit from learning from an inspirational horsemanship tutor to master technique. However attainment of success cannot just be taught, or handed to someone, as it is a developmental process requiring regular purposeful practice which will deepen knowledge and understanding for both horse and rider. Remind yourself that your personal horsemanship development is a rewarding journey not a destination.

Goal Setting

- Always consider your horse when goal setting and put the relationship first.
- Be flexible and open minded as you may need to alter your plans.
- A planned approach will accelerate your progress.

Ten tips for you to use when creating an action plan:

1. Use only positive language in your plan.
2. State clearly what you want to realistically achieve.
3. List what you need to do to work towards your goal.
4. Be specific with your goal, and break this down into small achievable chunks and concentrate on working on one small step at a time.
5. Write down what you know will be involved in achieving this. (For numbers 4 and 5 if you are not sure a professional can help you identify your goals and what is involved, plus support you).
6. What are the costs? Time, money, beliefs, values etc.
7. Refer to it regularly and use it as a working tool.
8. Review progress and adjust your plan if required.
9. Evaluate and celebrate success.
10. On achieving your goal set a new goal.

Tips for How to Do it and Get What you Want

- Focus on making your horsemanship sessions fun and you will tap into a strong internal motivational tool. Check out the FREE to read series of articles on motivation in the FREE Stuff section on my website www.vickijayneates.co.uk on the Published Articles page.
- Be willing to try different approaches, adjust your attitude, think outside the box and adapt. Extend your mind, become curious, and push yourself to learn.
- Refine your skills and constantly nudge your limits of technique. Strive for a goal that is just out of reach with the knowledge and support to bridge the gap. With quality, purposeful, deliberate practice the gap will disappear.
- Step outside your comfort zone and accept progress is sometimes built upon learning from failure. Failure is an opportunity to learn, grow and develop. Perfection can be inspirational however it can also appear to be unattainable.
- Being tutored, acquiring knowledge and feedback will propel you towards your goal. Seek out a support network and tutor / trainer.
- Work on building confidence and self-belief. This is a very powerful emotional tool that will greatly support you in achieving your dreams.
- Commit yourself to your personal challenge. Be persistent, as hard work and determination make a big difference. If you want your dreams to come true, be prepared to push and put in time and effort.
- Watch out for negative inner dialogue and replace with positive inner dialogue and observe the power of your words.
- Learn how to deal effectively with anxiety, nerves etc. By actively practicing and using relaxation.
- Patience is a virtue and you will need this to achieve your goals. This is a skill you can actively practice. Think of the everyday opportunities when you could practice being more patient.
- Surround yourself with sources of inspiration. (People, images, books, videos etc.)
- Take control of your emotions, the journey to your goal will be an emotional rollercoaster with the highs of achievements and lows of negative emotions. These lows can erode your outlook if you allow them. Actively focus on the positives and the total progress made.
- Use your structured plan to define the work you do with your horse for each session.
- Remember the old adage: nothing ventured, nothing gained. Find the courage to take the first step.
- Pursue your passion with optimism and self-discipline.
- Enjoy yourself and have fun.

Final Thoughts to Ponder

- Worry when the time comes. Worries are the fuel that anxiety needs to thrive. Most worries are about future concerns that may or may not happen. Concentrate on the here and now.
- Prune or banish pressure phrases. Phrases like 'I have to' 'I must' 'I should' fuel pressure and stress. Listen to your words and thoughts and replace them with more relaxed phrases 'I may' 'I choose to' 'I will make time to' etc.
- Watch out for tense people. Time spent with tense anxious people can be infectious.
- Know when to stop. If stress levels are rising, stop, take a break, do something else.
- Make peace with imperfection. It's ok for things to not be perfect. The perfection stick is one we beat ourselves with and it is highly damaging.
- Be aware of your thinking and use it positively.
- Be more patient. Things will only happen at a pace you and your horse are comfortable with.
- Lower your tolerance to stress. You were not put on this earth to live under stress, learn to say no. Just because someone throws you a ball doesn't mean you have to catch it.
- Slow down, most things are not an emergency.
- Look beyond your horse's behaviour and ask why.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Practice being calm and relaxed – being the eye in the storm.
- Be flexible with your plans.
- Think as problems as golden opportunities in works clothing, or golden gifts in crappy paper.
- Cut yourself and your horse some slack.
- Ask yourself what is a meaningful accomplishment from my horse's view point.
- Listen to your gut instinct and your feelings. If something doesn't feel right the chances are it isn't. Read for FREE my article on Intuition on my website www.vickijayneates.co.uk you will find it in the FREE Stuff section on the Published Articles page.
- Lighten up and have fun. Smile. A smile is relaxing and helps you to feel good.

These Banish Anxiety resources are not a replacement for professional support. They are designed to be used alongside regular lessons from a professional horsemanship practitioner of your choice. Horses that struggle to relax, that are tense, anxious, fearful, stressed etc.... can be unpredictable and dangerous.

I am retired from teaching. I share these resources with you as a gift.



Photograph by Cat Slade

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