

Confidence Building

By Vicki Jayne Yates BA Hons

This is the full un-edited article I wrote for Horsemanship Magazine.

The time and effort of building confidence is better than a life of regret.



I am the author of the download resource: Confidence Building for Horse and Rider which showcases how a blend of natural horsemanship and cognitive behavioural techniques can enable horse and rider to gain confidence. Cognitive behavioural techniques help to change how you think (cognitive) and what and how you do things (behaviour).

Cognitive behavioural techniques help you:

- Make sense of overwhelming problems
- Challenge negative and distorted thinking
- Understand biological responses in relation to what fuels a lack of confidence e.g. stress, anxiety, fear etc and regain control
- Consider useful ways of dealing with difficulties
- Plan for success, with realistic aims that are in line with your values
- Build confidence
- Regain perspective and control

Ten points to utilize before you leave to go to the yard:

1. Pack up worries. Accept you can't fix everything in one go. Allow a set time to deal with worries, one at a time, one step at a time. See worries as challenges. Take one simple action plan for an achievable challenge with you. Leave the other challenges behind.
2. Comfort zone. Plan to work within your comfort zone, learn new skills, develop and refine skills. With this strong foundation you can move forward positively.
3. Snap the perfection stick. Targeting perfection erodes confidence. Give yourself and your horse permission to make mistakes.
4. Relax. Relaxation helps to break the loss of confidence cycle. Actively practice relaxing while you journey to the yard. Encourage your horse to relax and enjoy hanging out together relaxing.
5. Cut some slack. It is easy to pressurize ourselves with goals. Remind yourself: Confidence building only takes place at the pace you can cope with.
6. Make it fun. Often we are serious around horses, and forget how to have fun. Place top of the list having fun and enjoyment with your horse.
7. Drop the heavy load. Ponder this: Have you had times when things go from bad to worse? The rest of the day you keep playing the bad bits over in your mind, the load gets heavy and difficult to let go. This clouds thinking, sense of perspective and batters confidence. Let bad sessions go.

8. Develop a support network. Seek out an inspirational horsemanship tutor and surround yourself with good friends. Use this support when working with your horse. Avoid people who make you feel bad. However remember you are working towards being independent.
9. Prepare to push. Confidence building is not quick or easy, be prepared to put in commitment, time and effort. Push on and keep going. Keep a progress journal to see the total distance you have travelled. For a confidence boost look at your journal to see the progress you have made.
10. Utilize graded exposure. Natural horsemanship methods use graded exposure using retreat and approach and this is great for building confidence.

However confidence issues are often complex and tricky to resolve. Therefore the above points benefit from reinforcement with knowledge of how to tackle confidence issues effectively.

Below briefly are a few more tips.

- Know the fuel. Lack of confidence is fuelled by many factors e.g. low self-esteem, anxiety, stress, panic, fear etc... Success needs knowledge about what fuels the lack of confidence so you can extinguish the fire and take control.
- Identify the problem and be honest. This removes pressure, enabling you to take positive, appropriate, targeted and practical steps forward.
- Suffering from distorted thinking? When caught in a loop of lost confidence thinking perspectives and realities can be altered. Compare your view point with people you respect.
- Use an action plan. Success is the result of planned achievements. It gives direction and focus. Tackle one challenge at a time.
- Break goals down into achievable steps
- Start with the easiest step, practice regularly, frequently, and consistently until you feel confident before moving on.
- If something is too hard, break that step down into intermediate stages or go back a step for a short while.
- Be prepared to try different approaches. Change the plan if required. Your plan is not set in stone.
- Reward successes however small.

Final thoughts

- It is never too late to build confidence.
- Life is too short to be limited by confidence issues.
- The time and effort of building confidence is better than a life of regret.
- Learning to build confidence can change your life, let it.