

# The Foundation Stones

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**This resource is for  
all who love equines.**

**The pack will support  
you with your personal  
learning.**



Image – Kez.  
Catherine Slade



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## Introduction.

This resource is to inspire, delight and educate. The encourage you to develop your own personal horsemanship tool kit. This resource is designed for you to use alongside other learning opportunities and tuition of your own choice. The resource will enable you to get the most out of lifelong learning.

**Intuition.** Please check out the article – **Intuition that was published in Horsemanship Magazine.** It is available as a pdf document to compliment this pack. It explores this topic in more depth. Intuition is our inner compass. Lifelong learning provides us with a road map. The two go hand in hand.



**Lifelong Learning.** In horsemanship we are all students of the horse. Each of us is somewhere on a horsemanship learning journey. Each of us is unique.

We may be just starting out or have a lifetime of learning to call upon. Where we start our learning can be vastly different. Some of us may have gaps in our knowledge, or are on a steep learning curve, or are interested in learning to finesse our skills.

We may support others with their learning, be a teacher, tutor or facilitator. If we work with people and or horses and are supporting their learning it is so important to know as much as possible about how to get the most out of learning opportunities.

There is formal learning and informal learning and always a mixture of both. Two legs or four we have preferred learning styles. When we can identify our own preferred learning style and embark on learning in that format learning becomes rewarding, easy and fun.

### Questions to Ponder.

- How much do you know about your preferred learning style?
- What type of learner are you?
- If you teach, facilitate learning or train are you delivering learning to your learners (two legs or four) in their preferred learning style?
- If you are training equines do you understand how they learn?

Lifelong learning and teaching is a vast topic and not space here to give you all you may like to know. **Please check out the Lifelong Learning pdf document** this will give you some tips, ideas and useful references.

If we embrace lifelong learning we open ourselves to always striving to improve our knowledge.

Within the area of horsemanship there are always going to be new approaches that are challenging existing thinking. Research and exploring the ethics of how we best interact with equines will lead us to kinder and better ways to interact with equines. Ethical horsemanship is fluid, it evolves as the more we understand the horse the more we question what is right and appropriate.

The key to lifelong learning is to develop an open mind, a curiosity and desire to question what we believe. There are many barriers which we may or may not recognise that stand in our way.





## Open Your Mind.

There are many great minds and educators in this world. Books to read, DVDs to watch, useful websites, horsemanship clinics, one to one tutoring, workshops and more. All have a valuable place. However when we look at horsemanship half of the partnership is the horse. Horses possess great minds and make fantastic educators.

A horse is like a mirror reflecting right back at us the very aspects of we need in a way of personal development. Think about what qualities our horse is looking for from us as their partner. If we lack these it will turn up in our relationship with our horse. Sometimes it is uncomfortable to recognise what we need to do to step up to be the partner our horse needs and expects. Horsemanship is as much about personal development. They say when the student is ready the teacher will arrive. Teachers can have 2 legs or 4. Your horse can be your personal teacher and guide. Often it is only our horse that can teach us.

It is a question of being brave enough to open yourself up to this experience. Being strong enough to listen and humble enough to learn. Switching roles from the human educating a horse to being the pupil being educated by the horse for many is a huge challenge. One of our greatness is that humans can rethink, change our approach and remake ourselves. The only thing that stands in our way is our-selves, beliefs, values, mind-set, and thinking.

## Exercise.

- What questions is your horse putting to you?
- Are you brave enough to ask?
- Do you carefully listen to your horse?
- Are you humble enough to be the student and learn from your horse?

## Blocks to Being Open Minded.

Being open minded isn't as easy as it sounds. There are many pressures that keep us from trying new or different approaches.

**Peer pressure** is one, if you are in an equine environment with other people you will find people are always happy to offer their advice and help. What you may find in short supply is people's understanding and tolerance to approaches they know little or nothing about or disagree with on principal. You may even be unlucky enough to have an "expert" or "experts" on the yard who will expect you to follow their advice as clearly they know it all and know what is best for not only your horse but you too. Using a different approach to what they expect you to use can then cause you further problems. You may even been seen as a maverick for going against the norm.



**Tradition and cultural conditioning.** This can hold you back from trying a different or new approach. If something has always been done that way then it can be hard to go in a different direction. There are people who are very rigid in their thinking and will only work within one method and guidelines. Consider this: There is a big wide equine world out there.

**Narrow thinking.** There are also people who will only work within one horsemanship approach too. By narrowing your thinking you will not allow yourself to open up to trying another approach, or something new.

**Fashion trends.** There are fashions and trends within the horse world. It is easy to get caught up in this. It is big business with powerful marketing that is all around us that promises to fix your problem.

**Assumptions.** Assuming something will not work before you have even tried it is another barrier for you to try a new or different approach.



### **Commitment and Consistency.**

When we invest in learning and are committed and consistent nothing will hold us back and progress will be made. If you place being committed to using consistent ethical horsemanship your horse will thank you.

The benefits you will see will go beyond your horsemanship.

Sadly what often happens for many reasons other things in life get prioritised and what has been gained melts away. Or people chop from one path to another before consolidating their learning.



## The Foundations Stones.

The relationship with any horse requires good foundations. In an ideal world these are laid down right from the start, the right way using the language of the herd. To engage in a true horsemanship partnership the opinion of our horse really matters.

Sadly this is not the experience for many horses. The starting point with their new owner can be from a negative starting point.

- Some have been discarded by their previous owners, sold cheaply and as quickly as possible.
- Some are labelled as naughty.
- Some have passed through many hands.
- Some are misunderstood.
- Some dislike humans because of prior abuse or trauma.



**Unique Personal Dream.** What we all share is a personal equine dream. That's why we want horses in our lives. Many people seek a close magical bond and partnership.

The road to success is paved with interspecies communication. When you use horsemanship training based on the equine communication and the language of the herd with the relationship coming first you can be a winner in your horse's eyes and heart. This fuels passion and unlocks potential.

## The five interlinked foundation elements of horsemanship are:

- **Bond and Connection**
- **Trust and Trustworthiness**
- **Respect and Respectfulness**
- **Time and Focus**
- **Enjoyment and Fun**

Sadly many horse's point of view on these five elements have been shattered, due to past negative experiences.



## **Bond and Connection.**

Horses are herd animals that require companionship this makes them feel safe. They seek meaningful social interactions and a sense of belonging. It is our responsibility to provide this for our horses.

Many horses sadly suffer at the hands of man. Developing survival strategies. Learnt helplessness, or behaviours that clearly ask humans to keep their distance. Some are sceptical as prior experience has given them no positive reasons for try to bond with humans. The scales of bad experience can weigh heavy with an unpleasant past.

Even if you have a horse that has no negative past you need be able to have the skills to create a close bond and connection with your horse.

**All horses need a fair chance, someone to listen carefully and to understand.**

Learning about how equines communicate is a vital tool. In our Equine Matters series we will cover Equine Communication as a stand-alone in-depth topic to compliment the Foundation Stones.

## **Tips for Building a Closer Bond with Your Horse.**

**Time and patience in industrial quantities.** In our fast paced modern world we can easily forget to slow down and take time with our horses.

It will take as long as it takes, there are no short cuts. No quick fixes.

Don't compare you and your horse's progress against others. You are individuals and one size does not fit all.

**Look out for the smallest of try and reward your horse and yourself.** As this is the ignition for your horse to want to engage in interactions with you. The smallest try is often overlooked and not recognised. Train yourself you look for them.

We are often hug up on an outcome and forget the steps that are needed to get there. Break everything down in to the smallest steps, baby steps and look for the smallest try for this. Reward it generously and give you and your horse time to process. Don't rush onto the next step.



**Be kind to yourself and your horse.** A compassionate mind is essential.

- How easy is it to focus on what we didn't achieve?
- To be hard on ourselves?
- To chase perfection?
- To coach ourselves to believe we are failing?

### **Learning something new isn't easy.**

Building a close connection with a horse is about exploring ourselves as much as learning about our equine partner. We may discover aspects about ourselves we need to change and this can be an opportunity for personal development. Sometimes facing this can be painful and an emotional time.

Think about how compassionate you would be to another who is doing something deeply personal to change something in themselves. The chances are you would be encouraging the other person, cheering them on for each new small achievement and the new skills they gained. Remember to apply this to yourself and your horse.

**If you are presented with a horse with a negative or sceptical outlook on connecting and bonding with a human.** To move from a negative mind set of no to yes there is a lot of maybe to travel through.

Make sessions positive and rewarding. Ensure your horse learns nothing bad will happen and time with you is safe and fun.

With deeply held trauma we must place a value on showing every interaction holds no pain or fear. Then you will see the horse start to evaluate things differently, and see you differently from the previous humans.

When offering your horse positive enjoyable interactions your horse needs to mentally process and consider its response. Expect and allow your horse to express how it feels. It is very valuable feedback on how you are doing. You can adjust or rethink what and how you are doing things.

It is ok for your horse to say no. Look for the first tentative maybe and the door is opening. Your horse may go back to no again. This is ok and expect that. Given time and patience your horse will consider maybe again. It will happen more frequently. Once at that stage let your horse learn, process, don't rush.

Lavish positive reinforcement and you will discover the shift happens to yes. A horse with a troubled past the no phase may take a long time. Along with you need to forgive any unwanted behaviour instantly and not take it personally.





**Spend time just being with your horse. Not doing.** For many it is an eye opener to just be with their horse and to put aside our agendas. We can easily get hung up on doing stuff with our horses. Have a go at quietly watching, observing your horse interacting within the herd and his environment.

From simply being you can extend into interactions that are the basis of meaningful two way open conversation.

**Be loyal, dependable and consistently tell the truth to your horse. Ignore the unconstructive, hurtful and negative comments from other people who are always ready to point out the “naughty horse”.**

### **Trust and Trustworthiness.**

Two legs or four trust is an emotional and logical act. Emotionally it exposes vulnerabilities because there is a feeling of safety and belief in another that they will not take advantage or cause damage.

Logically, it is assessing if behaviour will be predictable and trustworthy. It is about faith in another. There are strong emotions associated with trust these include safety, companionship, friendship, love, agreement, relaxation, comfort.

Horses and humans have a natural disposition to trust and to judge trustworthiness. Once trust has been lost it can be very hard to regain. When looking at trust it is just as important to be trustworthy as this is the only way to build and maintain a trust with another.

**For us to connect with our horses trust we must be trustworthy.**

- Our horses must know without doubt we have their best interests at heart.
- We must honour the horse.
- Demonstrate being truthful, authentic and keep our promises.
- Building trust requires us to have integrity and to be consistent.
- Empathy and equine compassion enable us to see from our horses view point.
- Effective listening skills so we can respectfully understand our horse this an essential skill in building trust.



Sadly humans can cause huge trust issues for the horse. Horrific pasts can shatter trust for the horse in humans, and damage their confidence, self-worth and self-esteem.

Naturally the herd is held together with trust, in the inter-relationships within the herd. Without it the herd would be in chaos.

Consider what type of human your horse had in the past.

I have known horses that have suffered with toxic intimidation and punishment. These horses can demonstrate emotional behaviours such as resentment, anger, frustration and fear. These horses do not trust humans or enjoy the human interactions.

### Trust is a two way street.

- **Behavioural issues.** It isn't easy to trust a horse that exhibits tricky or dangerous behaviour that is a result of prior negative or abusive treatment. To trust, you have to look beyond the behaviour, understand why and not take it personally. You have to forgive freely on the spot and bear no ill-feelings.
- **Trust yourself and the approach.** You have to have 100% trust in yourself, and your methods. Be honest with yourself if you feel out of your depth and get the right professional help.
- **An open mind.** I urge you to have an open mind and seeking out like-minded people and learn from professional practitioners who use an ethical approach. You owe it to yourself and your horse.
- **Time and Dedication.** It can be dangerous to take on horses with issues without the skills, knowledge, experience, time and dedication required. There are no short cuts or quick fixes.
- **Don't miss opportunities.** Every interaction with a horse is an opportunity to build trust. There are hundreds of opportunities to show your horse you can be trusted.
- **Be grounded, calm, confident and consistent.**
- **Provide safety and stability.**
- **Use positive reinforcement.** Make the interactions positive, rewarding, enjoyable and fun.
- **Listen to understand.** It is about listening to what your horse is struggling with and stepping up to show them it is ok, there is nothing to be worried about.
- **Mutual trust.** We must demonstrate our trustworthiness as much as trust our horse.
- **Learning their communication.** Their language and etiquette opens up two way dialogue. This enables us to hear our horses, tune in, and engage in an authentic relationship.



## Respect and Respectfulness.

Horsemanship is about mutual respect for each other.

Many horses suffer a great deal of disrespect. It is obvious that beating a horse is a clear act of violence, and is hugely disrespectful. Violence never solves problems.

Lower levels of disrespect are often harder for the untrained eye to detect. Disrespect is out there in many shapes and forms.

### Here are a few for you to ponder.

- Pressure, physical or emotional pressure.
- Intimidation and fear.
- Overstepping the horse's boundaries.
- Not seeking and gaining permission from the horse. Non permissive interactions.
- Behaviour or communication ignored.
- Labelling a horse. Name calling.
- Not allowing a horse to express an opinion.
- Not allowing a horse to say no.
- Nit-picking or criticism.
- Negative reinforcement.
- Demeaning the horse.
- Equipment to force compliance.
- Unethical training methods.
- Equipment to cause discomfort or pain.
- Not treating the horse as a sentient being.
- Not allowing the horse to be a horse to exhibit natural behaviours.
- Stressful living conditions and lack of enrichment.
- This list can go on.





It is easy for people to hang on to old style thinking and long held beliefs and prejudices.

Disrespect is very real it is out there in many shapes and forms.

There is big money in selling training approaches and equipment. The marketing language can feel a million miles away from disrespect for our horses. Plenty struggle to see beyond the slick marketing messages and step outside of this and ponder what it must be like for the horse. The equestrian world is starting to question practices and ethics. This is why it is so important to embrace lifelong learning and have an open mind.



**An exercise for you.**

**What disrespect have you witness in the equine world?**

**Write down your findings.**

## Why is it important to write this down?

The short answer is your horse will thank you for being well informed.

- Have you given it much thought?
- Have you questioned and researched approaches in regards to if it is respectful to the horse?
- If not, why not?

It is important to open your eyes, really look and question it. To continually question what is respectful and ethical.

To develop your own horsemanship tool kit you need the skills to research. Look at many different approaches, compare and contrast and draw conclusions. Process what you have learnt against what feels ethical and right for you and your horse.



## An exercise for you.

**How do you feel if you are disrespected?**

**Write down how it feels.**

## Why is it important to write this down?

If you can connect to how it feels to be disrespected you are somewhat there to having some appreciation on what it must feel like for a horse.

Horses are sentient and capable of feeling a vast number of emotions. So when we are on the pathway to building a good relationship with our horse we must reflect on how the horse will feel with the approach we choose.

We must be open to both positive and negative feedback from our horse. Along with being open to change.

## Respect and Respectfulness in the Herd.

You only have to observe horses in their own environment and you will see they thrive in calm, harmonious groups that have herd language, etiquette and rituals. In a harmonious herd these are honoured and respected.

Horses understand respect for each other and demonstrate respect and respectfulness. There are many lessons we can learn from our horses. Tap into this and you can have a relationship with your horse that thrives on clear respectful boundaries for you both.



## Being Respectful.

- To gain respect it is essential to be respectful. Respect is about understanding, valuing and considering another's feelings and perspectives on life.
- For us to have a respectful relationship with our horse we have to understand and honour their equine reality and have equine compassion.
- Respect is about appreciating the separate realities we exist in.
- Using the language of the herd you can communicate with a horse thoughtfully, politely and respectfully.
- It is seeing your horse as a unique and valued individual not a stereotype.
- It is about honouring the horse's dignity and self-worth along with being sensitive to their needs.
- You must attentively listen to what they have to say.
- Horse communicate out to us. Please read the article – **Telegraphing In** that was published in Horsemanship Magazine for more insights. It is an in-depth topic and to compliment this resource.





- Two legs or four we all desire to be treated with dignity, respect, courtesy, politeness, and kindness.
- To be heard and understood with the freedom to express our opinions and ideas. It is no different for our horses.
- The way forward is to look for the try, no matter how small, and show your horse how much you value them and their contribution. Use praise and positive reinforcement training methods to encourage faster learning. Positive Reinforcement is an in-depth topic there is a resource on Positive Reinforcement in the Equine Matters series if you wish to learn more.
- Herd language and niceties must be observed at all times.



### **The respect we have for ourselves.**

The best way of setting appropriate boundaries when interacting with horses in regards to respect is by using the language of the herd, tapping into intent and energy along with calm assertiveness. There are in-depth resource on Intent and Energy, Calm Assertiveness and Boundaries in the Equine Matters series if you wish to learn more.

### **Top Tips.**

- The most important thing to remember is a horse must be allowed self-respect, his dignity and self-worth must never be compromised.
- You must always respect the rights and boundaries of the horse.
- Communication must be ethical, appropriate, direct, honest and respectful.
- Communication must be open honest two way dialogue, horsemanship is not monologue. A 50 / 50 partnership is never monologue.
- Pay attention to your and the horse's emotions and how they impact upon the relationship.
- Respond to criticism from your horse positively see it as an opportunity to grow and develop.
- Horses thrive with ethical boundaries or the herd would be in chaos without them. Setting and observing healthy boundaries enables respectful meaningful communication. They allow horse and human to reach a comfortable understanding as to what is acceptable and unacceptable. It provides physically and emotionally a safe place as each knows what is expected. The language of the herd teaches you the boundaries horses have with each other and in turn teaches you to respect your horse's boundaries.

## Time and Focus.

- One of the things we are all pressured with is time, there are only twenty-four hours in a day. Many of us to afford a horse we have to work, often long hours. Plus family commitments to balance. Time is often in short supply.
- We live in a fast paced world, and this can lead people to look for fast results. There are no ethical quick fixes or short cuts.
- When working with our horse to form a strong relationship we need to dedicate time, and recognise that our concept of time and a horse's are very different. You need to dedicate regular quality time.
- This needs to be free from distractions and 100% of your attention.
- Consider this your horse may only see you for a few hours each day. If the rest are spent in a herd he is lucky.
- If you want your horse to bond, trust, respect and enjoy hanging out with you have to put in quality, meaningful and focused time with your horse.
- We all want our horse to be pleased to see us to look forward to time spent together. This will not happen if you are not willing to see relationship building as a priority.

**"The greatest gift you can give another is the purity of your attention."**

Quote unknown

**Kez**



## Enjoyment and Fun.

Discover what makes your horse tick and you will tap into a powerful internal motivational tool. Here we will touch upon motivation. However it is an in-depth topic. To compliment this resource in the Equine Matters series there a module on Positive Reinforcement and Motivation you can choose to add on if you are interested in learning more.

### Here are some questions to ponder, to get you started with exploring enjoyment and fun with your horse.

- **Do you know what your horse finds enjoyable, rewarding and fun?** If you set out to find the answer to this question you have a very useful tool in the ignition of mutually agreed activities you can enjoy together.
- **Do you know what your horse dislikes, doesn't enjoy or finds boring?** Having a list of this is very helpful. It is a starting point in thinking about how to turn the situation around. Often we are not open to our horse giving us negative feedback. Yet this feedback is golden opportunities in works clothing.
- **What is the basis of the interactions you have with your horse?** Is it permissive? Something to ponder many people have equines for a purpose. Ethically there is a big question about the line between use and abuse. As horsemanship evolves and science learns more things once thought of as ethical are no longer acceptable.
- **Is your horse allowed to say no to your requests?** If your horse is allowed to say no and how do you respond? How do you work with your horse to find a mutually acceptable answer?
- **What is a positive verses negative reinforcement?** Are you aware of these in horsemanship approaches and the impact they have?
- **Do you see play and free choice liberty interaction with your horse a priority?** There are many forms of play, one size does not fit all. It is an in-depth topic and The Art of Play in Kez's Club is another resource you can choose to access if you wish to learn more.
- **Do you understand your equine's communication?** If not if you want to learn more there I do work with people who are interested in Equine Communication.





## Summary of the Five Foundation Stones.

- If you use horsemanship that focuses on these five foundation stones you will win your horse's heart and be a winner in their eyes.
- Establishing this relationship is the foundation to building success, harmony and the magical connection we seek.
- There are life lessons to be taken from horsemanship. Take a look at the five interlinked elements: - Bond, Trust and Trustworthiness, Respect and respectfulness, Time and Focus, Enjoyment and Fun in relation to any relationship.
- When one element is missing or damaged the relationship will suffer.
- Recognize which is weak or broken and you can work to repair and strengthen it.
- Treat others how you would like to be treated.
- We all want to feel a bond within a relationship. To trust our spirit and soul will not be damaged or compromised. To be treated with respect and dignity. To know that we are given quality time with undivided attention doing something we enjoy.
- If you want to be a winner, try using the five element approach in all relationships, with your horse, people you interact with, your other pets and notice the many benefits.



## Foundation Stones Underpin Horsemanship.

- You will note I have spoken about what underpins horsemanship techniques not on the techniques themselves.
- Techniques that focus on the language of the horse, use positive reinforcement and are ethical, the key to applying them is what I am sharing with you.
- If you did not understand these underpinning horsemanship guiding principles you may well try a horsemanship technique and discover you and your horse struggle.
- It may even challenge you to think about how you want to change your horsemanship approach.

## What Your Horse Wants You to Know.

**Equines are sentient.** All equines are intelligent sentient beings. They are capable of feeling a wide range of emotions.

They have consciousness and very good perception. Equines use all their senses to perceive and comprehend the world around them and process information.

They are very able to communicate and give us feedback to our requests.

Humans often struggle to read if they have assent, consent or permission and can step over boundaries with equines.

The key is to learn to open two way dialogue with your horse.

**Understand assent and consent and the difference between the two.** Consent and assent very are different.

Consent can mean your horse will allow you to do something. Consent is more about compliance with what is requested.

Assent is when your horse has time to think and consider then agrees and approves with what you are suggesting.

- Yet in many styles of horsemanship is what you see seeking any type permission?
- Is it about pushing on with the human agenda?
- Be mindful there are approaches that are not permissive or seek any assent or consent.
- Listen to understand if your horse is in agreement with you.



## Equines are very sensitive to touch.

A horse can feel a fly land on its skin.

- Science has shown us that equines have far more sensitive skin than humans.
- It poses questions for us to ponder when we touch horses. That contact from touching with our hands, be it grooming, handling, holding the lead rope or reins. The physical experience for our horse when riding, contact pressure on the horse's back and leg aids. The sensations the horse feels when we use tack and equipment. Equipment amplifies pressure. Research has shown that physical pressure from tight nosebands causes distress to equines.
- Think about the use physical pressure you use. Aim to use less a lot less.
- How does pressure release training feel to a horse physically and emotionally?
- How does tack make a horse feel that uses pressure, discomfort or pain to achieve compliance?



**Touch and pressure is food for thought, especially when we question the ethics of how best to interact with equines.**





**Equines are highly social.** For wellbeing equines need to live with other equines.

- Horses are hardwired to connect and bond with other horses.
- They form close bonds, friendships and rely on each other for comfort, security and safety.
- It is this highly social drive that allows us to connect and partner with horses.
- If we spend time learning about equine inter-relationships the more we are able to be a better partner to our horse.
- This asks us to put aside our agendas and open up to the emotional aspects our horse needs from us.

### **Each equine has a perception of humans.**

Your horse may have been with you since birth or maybe had interactions with other humans before you. These interactions shape the perception your horse will have on humans.

Research has shown equines recognise individual humans, understand our body language and emotional state.

My personal view is they understand far more than this. So if your horse has had a troubled or abusive past at the hands of another person you will see this in the perception your horse has and expectations of what may happen. It will take you time, patience and skills to change this perception.

**The need to feel safe.** Horses by nature are always scanning for threats. They have a very strong fear response. Horses need to feel safe to relax and to learn.

Equines thrive with routine, familiarity and predictability. They need us to be consistent and reliable. For our interactions not to cause anxiety, stress or fear.

For equines that have experienced trauma, abuse or been trained using unethical practice they may be more easily triggered into a flight, fight or freeze response. Therefore these equines often need to have very careful considered approaches to help them to feel safe and build their confidence.

Training abused and traumatized horses is an in-depth topic. One that requires a stand-alone resource for those who are looking to learn more about this topic. Maybe one day I will create a resource on this.



## Horses love positive reinforcement.

Positive reinforcement is an ethical and kind way to work with equines. It is an in-depth topic. For those who wish to learn more about how to get started with positive reinforcement and how to apply it in horsemanship I have a FREE Positive Reinforcement on my website for you.

- In brief it is an excellent way to encourage the behaviour you are looking for.
- It is a very useful tool in rehabilitation and motivating horses.
- It greatly reduces stress, and helps to keep horses focused and interested.
- It has lasting positive impacts on learning and strong association that interactions will be rewarding and enjoyable.



Most horsemanship is a mixture of positive and negative reinforcement. There is much hot passionate debate on which negative reinforcements are ethical and which are not.

Future research is likely to inform us what ethical negative reinforcement practices are suitable to use. Until then if you are going to use a negative reinforcement please consider the previously highlighted facts equines are sentient and are very sensitive to touch.

Pressure be it physical or emotional in the form of a negative reinforcement needs to be very carefully considered, the softest and backed up with positive reinforcement.

Sadly many horsemanship approaches are based on using negative reinforcement and people are not knowledgeable enough to spot this.

**Can you spot what is a negative reinforcement? Did you know it is possible to interact and train using just positive reinforcement? Food for thought.**



## **Myths, misinformation and outdated thinking.**

As our understanding and knowledge improves over time we start to see what we thought was right is now in question. Hence why lifelong learning is something our horses want us to enjoy.

Research and cutting edge thinking helps us better care for, handle, interact with and understand our horses. A good example of outdated thinking is many training ethos is based on dominance and submission. Putting the human in the role of being dominant or the boss and the horse in the role of submissive. Yet if we want to create a bond and close connection with the horse this pathway seems at odds with equine psychology and bonding with our horse. It is certainly not a 50 / 50 partnership.



When we look at herd dynamics and structures new research is now challenging thinking. There are studies that are now showing the herd structure is not one of being a fixed hierarchy or fixed pecking or fixed leader roles.

What we are learning is different members of the herd will take up roles in different situations or on different days.

We are starting to see how herds function on the basis of individual relationships equines have with each individual.

## **Here is an example - 3 horses let's call them Chaz, Dave and Allen.**

Chaz may move away from Dave when Dave asserts himself. Yet Dave may move away from Allen when Allen asserts himself. However Allen may move away from Chaz if Chaz asserts himself. There is no fixed pecking order between all three. Instead the interplay of the individual relationships. This along with the reason why a horse feels the need to assert itself.





**Listen to understand.** Listening to understand is a skill we can learn.

I am sure you have experienced the frustration of not being heard or understood. It can have a serious impact on the inter-relationship we have with another.

Invest in learning how equines communicate along with be an effective listener. This is an in-depth topic so I teach those willing to learn Equine Communication. Two legs or four we all like to heard and understood.

### **Listen to Your Heart. If Something Doesn't Feel Right the Chances are it is Not Right.**

- I come back to taping in to lifelong learning and intuition. The more we learn the sharper and more accurate our intuition gets.
- Our horses rely on us to make choices, decisions and to have their best interests at the heart of everything we do.
- It is easy to be pulled in a direction that doesn't feel right if those around you are going in a different direction.
- It is not easy to take a different path. Being seen as a maverick and doing things differently has many challenges and pressures.

Listen to your heart it knows what is precious.



To give you more insight this you can read my unedited article **Maverick** that was published in Horsemanship Magazine. Are you a maverick?





### **To live free from pain, injury and disease.**

This should be a promise we keep to every horse. When things go wrong bills can get very expensive very quickly. Investing in understanding how to best care for equines is essential. Alongside support and advice from professionals in horse care and wellbeing.

### **Freedom from distress.**

Physical and emotional wellbeing for our equines is essential. This goes hand in hand with how best to care for our horses. However when the time comes that equine conditions cannot be managed and it causes distress to not shy away from the last kindness.

**Put their needs above our desires.** We have equines in our lives for different reasons. What all horses want is for you to love them unconditionally. Value and cherish them. Many horses are only cherished for what they can do or give.

**Be prepared to write off costs.** Things can and do go wrong. Dreams can be shattered and big bills roll in. It can leave a bitter taste in your mouth. However none of this is your equines doing and they doesn't owe us anything.

**Not to pass them on with the truth hidden.** Lots of horses get passed on with the truth hidden onto an unsuspecting new owner. This is the pathway to the downward spiral and these equines get passed from pillar to post and often end up neglected. If you do have to re-home an equine please ensure you do this in a respectful, ethical and responsible way. We are in the grip of a dreadful equine crisis.

**To ensure all their needs are met.** Make sure your equine has the correct management, provide him with an appropriate diet, equine friendship, a shelter for him to relax and rest.

Unconditional  
Love ❤️

Or in love  
with what the  
horse can do  
or give?



## How to Develop a Horsemanship Tool Kit

**Review what is in your tool kit already.** By looking at what you already know and use is the starting point. Ask yourself a few questions to help filter out what no longer serves you, to identify what feels right and which areas you want to develop and learn new skills.

**Here is an exercise with some prompts to get you started.**

Prompt Questions	Jot Down Some Notes
What are the achievements you are proud of?	
What did you and your horse do well? What enabled that?	
How did you overcome something you felt uncertain about?	
What challenges have you and your horse overcome?	
What feedback has your horse given you?	
What do you and your horse do on a regular basis? Are you happy with how things are done?	
Really think about things you do on automatic pilot. What things do you do without much thought?	
Are you open minded?	
What new learning have you experienced? And did it challenge your thinking?	

Have you learnt something and come to conclusion it isn't how you want to do things? If yes what? And why?	
What skills and qualities do you think your horse would like you to gain?	
What would your horse say you are good at?	
Can you identify gaps in your knowledge?	

- As learning is lifelong your horsemanship tool kit will change over time.
- What you once found useful or ethical may well get replaced with something new.
- It is well worth reviewing your knowledge and thinking on a regular basis against what is emerging as more ethical approaches with engaging with equines.
- Just as you are unique and so too is your horse, your tool kit will become as unique as you and your horse are.
- One size will never fit all.



## Understanding the Horse.

Little is taught at entry and grass roots about understanding the horse. People may learn the aspects of riding and horse care and not really understand the horse. I have met very skilled and talented riders who struggle to understand their horse.

Equine behaviour and equine behaviours shaped by human interaction is not a topic that many horse owners have studied. If they have studied it they realise it can take more than one lifetime of study to fully learn what needs to be learnt to fully understand all equines.

When people become first time owners of an equine they can realise they are struggling. Their horse arrives and they can be puzzled by what they experience.

- Some see problems they want fixing.
- Or they feel out their depth.
- Some lose confidence and realise they need help.
- Others may see opportunities to learn, grow and for personal development.
- Sadly some only see a “naughty” horse.

The truth is all horses are wonderful teachers and can provide us with profound lessons for us all if we are humble enough to be a student.

Equine learning opportunities are out there. In a rich diversity, formal and non formal learning. Everything from one to one private sessions, workshops, on-line content, books, DVDs, formal qualifications, short college courses to degree level and more.

It can be very confusing as to which path feels right for you and your horse. This is where you have to consider what matters to you about having an equine in your life. It is a very personal journey.

The chances are your individual learning may look like a patchwork blanket, with knowledge, influences and inspiration taken from many different forms of study and from many individuals along your way.

Each horse is a sentient unique individual. Getting to know a horse as an individual takes time. In my opinion at least a year. Travel through all four seasons together with an investment in observation with the willingness to view the world through their eyes.





**Humans and equines experience the world very differently.  
We need to step into their world.**

The advice I impart here is to always strive to have an open mind and don't lose your curiosity. Never stop exploring, researching and looking for more than one resource to support an approach. Examine as many views as possible, even ones that are the opposite thinking. We can learn a great deal from how we don't want to do things too.

- Work with professionals who you have a strong resonance with.
- Be mindful of peer pressure, social conditioning and tradition and how it is a block.
- Learning is lifelong, there is always something new to learn.



### **Take Time to Ponder**

**What is stopping or holding you back from learning more about understanding equines?**

**Jot down here what is holding you back**

**Jot down some ideas for how to overcome these barriers**

**Once you know this you can take action to overcome those hurdles.  
Now you can start to focus on what you want to learn and how.**



## Finding Your Equine Partner. The Pitfalls and Risks.

When we look for a new equine partner we are all looking to live a personal dream. The search is not only for a horse, it goes way beyond that; but a partner, a soul mate, a best friend to enable us to enjoy any number of different aspects of equestrianism. It's an investment in our dreams and aspirations.

Be it a private sale or from a dealer, anyone selling a horse could be a dream seller or sell you a living nightmare. Not everyone is dishonest, so I am not tarring all sellers with the same brush. There are good people who are honest and truly want to ensure the horse goes to a good home to be loved and cherished. However there are those who make profit from lies and misery, be it deliberate or not. There are horrific and unethical practices going on.



When we set out looking for an equine partner can be a minefield out there. Adverts can look so promising and lead us to believe the equine in question is the perfect match. However only for you discover the horse in question is not one bit like the advert. The language and description may mean one thing to you and something very different to the person that wrote it.

Be warned there are people who are good at smoke and mirrors and are willing to hide the truth. It is sadly not rare for equines to be passed on with the truth well and truly hidden.

Too many horses suffer and too many people's dreams are shattered. I have seen far too many damaged horses and people injured. Plenty of people I know have put to sleep horses they were sold as riding horses that turned out to have horrific underlying conditions. None of us are immune to this happening; it is rife to pass on horses with issues.

The harsh reality that many will say it is the new owner at fault not the seller. The reasons may well include: Buyer beware, sold as seen, sold in good faith, the new owner lacked skills or knowledge, the owner can't ride, the horse never did x or y with me, etc. However in the UK there are laws to protect us, yet in practice it isn't always easy to go through the legal process. It can be stressful, costly and take time.





## Know Exactly What You Are Looking For.

You need to be very clear and objective when looking for an equine partner. Know exactly what you are looking for. What you don't want. And be very realistic about your ability as over horsing yourself can have serious consequences.

If you are a non horsey parent looking for an equine for your child please note although your child may have more knowledge than you they will not be experienced enough to navigate the pitfalls in the equine world. Take a very knowledgeable objective friend or even better an experienced equine professional with you to give you their unbiased feedback on the horse.

- Make sure you don't look through rose tinted glasses.
- Always take a step back to think.
- Visit many times and try the horse in a variety of situations.
- Once you think you have found the right horse vetting is essential.
- Make sure you appoint an independent experienced equine vet, not one the seller uses or recommends.
- Never be pressured by a seller, walk away if you are pressured into a sale.



## A Good Seller.

### A good seller will give you:

- Time to think and time to connect with the horse.
- Opportunities to visit many times.
- Answers to all your questions in a transparent manner.
- Be forthcoming with detailed information about quirks, and behaviour of the horse.
- Details of medical history.

### A good seller will want to know:

- More about you, and the environment their horse will be going to.
- That the horse will be well cared for, loved and cherished.
- You and their horse are a good match and it will be the right home.

Good sellers want the best for the horse. Anyone who truly loves horses would hate to see things not working out, or the horse suffering.

Be the sale via a private seller or a dealer you need to know all about behavioural issues, quirks, veterinary history and have written clear description of the horse in question. Good practice is a formal sale contract that clearly states this, along with the seller details and transparency around commission to third parties.

## Contact Horse Welfare Organisations.

If you are looking for an equine partner please look at equines that welfare organisations are looking to re-home. They have many equines that you could be your perfect match. Many welfare organisations offer ongoing support when you re-home from them.

## Be Aware of Learnt Helplessness.

Horses that suffer uncomfortable or painful conditions that because of the training methods used can appear quiet and biddable.

There are unethical training methods that disregard discomfort and pain; be it physical or emotional, the horse will develop a learned helplessness. These horses are shut down, compliant, machine like and look spirit dead, it begs the question what methods are used?

Horses that are sold to new owners in this learnt helplessness state, once the horse realises the new home will not use methods that caused the learnt helplessness the horse will naturally start to develop any number of behaviours.

Sadly not many people who are purchasing a horse will understand the different types of training and what causes learnt helplessness, or what to look for in a horse that has shut down. They will just see a quiet biddable horse or the perfect horse.

## Legal Protection.

It can become a minefield if your purchase turns out to be wrong. I am no legal expert and if it does go wrong you are best to seek professional legal advice.

My understanding is in the UK the law defines a horse dealer / trader is somebody who sells equines with the aim to make a profit. It doesn't have to be their only income or their full time job. In this case the Consumer Rights Act applies to the sale of their horses. The buyer therefore has rights: The horse must be as described. Of satisfactory quality and fit for purpose. If not the horse dealer is in breach of contract, giving rise to a claim under the Consumer Rights Act. You are protected under law.

Personally I do think the Consumer Rights Act is not a good fit when applied to the sale of any animal. Horse dealers are selling sentient animals, not objects like a washing machine. Think of buying a washing machine that after a short period of time didn't wash clothes properly. The store didn't knowingly sell you a faulty machine, and you would rightly complain and expect the seller to be prompt in providing solutions. We expect good customer service from businesses. It is no different in the business world of selling horses. Yet many dealers will not be forthcoming in working with you and put up barriers and excuses. When you experience this, the dealer is not recognising the Consumer Rights Act or providing any customer service or solutions. You will need support from trading standards within your local council and even a lawyer.



The reality is there are horses sold with underlying conditions that surface after purchase. Some are impossible to detect without the best specialist vet and the latest technology. However who is going to step up and be responsible? Who is going to do right by the horse? You are within your rights if you purchased via a dealer under the Consumer Rights Act to return the horse. The crunch here is, you know full well if you return the horse to a dealer its' future most likely will be bleak. The sales of Consumer Rights Act works well for objects but not for living sentient animals.

### **Legal Ownership.**

Currently in the UK legal ownership of a horse isn't always easy to prove. Even though equines by law should have a passport and be chipped to aid identification of an animal, it however will not provide proof of ownership. Some people operate outside this system and plenty of equines have no passports or chips. Or strangely passports go missing and a new replacement one is offered with the horse at point of sale. This is a trick to hide an equine's past history. Even horses with passports legal cases are common around ownership of equines.



### **Who Chooses Who?**

When searching for our equine partner have you considered if the horse chooses you? My personal view on this is yes they know that they are in the position of being moved to a new human. In my personal experience equines have chosen me.

As a Reiki practitioner I am very aware of energy attachments. There is no escaping when they have attached an energy attachment to me. The pull is there. This is something you may feel and maybe understand or not understand. I include this in this section as heart to heart and soul to soul connections are real.

These connections can take us on profound life changing journeys. Push us out of our comfort zones. Take us to places that are not the dreams and wishes we started out with.

The journeys I have been on haven't been easy. They have been at times extremely difficult, emotional and challenging. They have demanded me to change, to examine myself and to be the student of the horse. My own desires had to be put down and are now in the rear view mirror.

If you experience this please ensure you have the skills, knowledge and expertise to take on the equine in question.



## An Essential Exercise - Can You Afford An Equine?

Before you purchase a horse you must ensure you are fully aware of the costs.

**You must do this homework before you even start looking for your equine partner.**

This includes going out to find out what is available in your area and how much it costs.

Below are the bare minimum of what you need to find out before you even consider getting a horse. There are additional costs beyond what is listed below. Such as purchase of equipment for you and your horse, tack fitting and regular tack fit checks, lessons, travel costs to and from where you keep the horse, etc. Plus unexpected bills, such as vet visits for injury or sickness, physiotherapy or alternative therapies to aid recovery. And much more.

<p><b>Where are you going to keep your horse?</b> If you don't have your own equine property you will need to get out there to find out what is available in your area.</p> <p><b>What are the standards of welfare like?</b> Establishments can and do vary from excellent, good, average to really dreadful.</p> <p>How much does it cost? What is included? What is not included? Are the other horses happy and well cared for?</p> <p>What is the state of the grazing, fences, yard, shelters, etc.? Visit several places to compare and contrast what is on offer, standards of care and the feel of the place.</p>	<p>Your notes</p>
<p><b>Register with an equine vet.</b> Ask about to find out who other equine owners recommend.</p> <p>How much does a pre-purchase vetting cost? What is their call out fee? How much does it cost routine dental and vaccinations?</p>	<p>Your notes</p>
<p><b>Insurance.</b> Find out how much it costs to insure your horse. Compare different insurance companies.</p> <p>You will need public liability insurance and you may like to consider personal accident cover for yourself and cover for vet bills for sickness and injury as treatment can be very expensive.</p>	<p>Your notes</p>

<p><b>Feeding.</b> Your horse will need forage feed for winter time, or even all year round depending on how you are going to manage your horse.</p> <p>How much forage will your horse eat per day? Per week? Per month? A rough guide is a horse needs about 2% of its healthy body weight in forage per day.</p> <p>More for some horses and a less if your horse is overweight.</p> <p>Find out how much it costs to purchase hay or haylage. How long will a bale last? How many bales per week?</p> <p>If your horse needs a bucket feed, what is an appropriate feed for your horse? How much will this cost?</p> <p>If your horse requires supplements or medication in their feed how much does this cost? How long will that last your horse?</p>	<p>Your notes</p>
<p><b>Bedding.</b> If your horse has a shelter it will need bedding. Price up how much this will cost.</p> <p>You will need to remove soiled bedding and replace with fresh. How much will this cost?</p>	<p>Your notes</p>
<p><b>Hoof Care.</b> All equine require regular hoof care. About every 5 to 6 weeks.</p> <p>Who covers your area? Who do other horse owners recommend?</p> <p>How much will this cost?</p>	<p>Your notes</p>
<p><b>Worming.</b> How much does it cost to test your horse for worms? Faecal worm egg counts? Saliva Tapeworm testing? How much do wormers cost?</p>	<p>Your notes</p>

## Can you answer how much it will cost to keep a horse?

Good research and you should be able to answer this.

<b>Per week</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Per month</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Per year</b>	<b>£</b>

- **How much should you set aside for unexpected bills?**
- **Can you afford this comfortably from your income?**

### **Commitment and Time.**

Looking after an equine is a daily commitment.

Come rain, sleet, snow or shine your horse needs care every day, minimum twice a day.

The care for a horse is physically demanding especially in the colder winter months, mud, cold, wet, ice and slogging through snow.

Do you know how much time it will take to look after a horse? Can you commit to this? We all have other callings on our time. There are only 24 hours in a day.

Being realistic about the time you can commit to care for an equine will enable you to see if you need assistance. If you do you need assistance. There are questions you need answers to.

Does the person have the skills, knowledge and time to properly care for your equine? Will they be ethical in their interactions? What approach do they use with horses? Are they reliable and trustworthy? You will also need factor in the cost for this. How much does it cost to pay someone to care for your horse? Get references before allowing them to care for your horse.





## Safety before Everything.

### Manage Expectations.

When your new horse arrives do not expect much from your horse in the first few months. A new home, a new routine, new herd to adjust to living in, new environment, and new humans is stressful for any equine.

The same applies if you have years with your horse and you move location to a new yard. A stressed horse may act out of character or react unpredictably, they can be more prone to spooking, and they could be anxious, fearful, or tense. Make allowances. Give your horse time to settle in. Take time to help your horse to adjust.

If your horse is new to you make it top priority to get to know your horse, rather than do anything that is a human led agenda.

### Safe Leading.

Have you been taught how to safely lead your horse? Are you confident leading your horse? Do you have issues with leading?

Issues come in many forms. Horse not wanting to move. Horse dragging human. Stopping to graze while being led. Rearing, spooking, bucking, spinning, leaping, and running away. Many people struggle with this. Yet safe leading is something all of us want to achieve.

It is an investment in your horsemanship to learn how to lead and direct your horse from the ground. Yet little is taught of this at entry level.

When leading, we want our horse to be aware at all times where we are, as we don't want to get stood on, pushed over or trampled. Here I will share some tips for you to use alongside professional support of your own choice.

**The correct equipment for you:** Gloves designed to protect your hands. These you can purchase at most tack shops. Good sturdy footwear with grip on the soles you may even like to consider steel toecaps to protect your toes. A safety helmet (riding hat) please check it is new not second hand and to current safety standards. If your hard hat has had a blow it will need replacing hence not to purchase second hand as you will not know its history. Hi viz clothing if you are venturing off site.



**The correct equipment for your horse:** Headcollar or halter or bridle that correctly fits. An incorrectly fitted headcollar, halter or bridle can cause serious problems. These come in many styles and designs. Some are harsher than others.

Never select equipment based on fashion trends, be educated in its purpose, action and how to ethically use it.

You will need a leading rein / rope. Available in many different materials, a range of colours, styles, lengths and weights. Choosing what feels right for you will depend on your personal choice and the approach you use.

A golden rule for holding a rope is in folds not loops. If your horse was to pull a loop can quickly tighten around your hand and cause terrible damage.

Hi Viz items for your horse if you are venturing off site.

**Environment.** When learning or practicing our leading skills it is important to have a safe area in which to work. This could be the school, yard, or a sectioned off part of your field. Make sure the area is clear, no hazards to trip over or slippery surfaces.

**Side by Side.** You haven't got eyes in the back of your head. Have your horse walk by your side so you can see your horse.

### **Give Direction to Your Horse.**

Practice leading your horse to destinations you select. Reward your horse for the correct behaviour. Positive reinforcement is a wonderful ethical approach to use.

Set boundaries while practicing leading, it is ok to ask your horse to focus on you and to be assertive in regards to what you expect. Assertiveness is miles away from being aggressive.

**Insurance.** Horses are big strong animals and accidents can happen. It is essential to have insurance to cover at least third parties. You may like to consider what other aspects you would like your insurance to cover such as personal accident cover, vet fees for illness and injury, etc.



## **Safely entering and interacting with the herd.**

Not much is taught at grass roots about how to enter into a field and how interact with a herd of horses. Resulting in people struggling with this or having issues. It is not uncommon for people to lack confidence in this. Or experience difficulties.

Here I will share with you some tips to help you to be used alongside lessons or support from a professional practitioner of your own choice.

## **Spend time watching how your horse and the other horses in the herd interact with each other.**

- Does your horse have particular friends they enjoy spending time with?
- Are there horses in the herd your horse doesn't like to hang out with or he avoids?
- Are there horses in the herd that are more assertive than others?

If your horse is new to a herd it will take time for your horse to settle into the herd and make bonds and friendships.

## **Observe intent and energy in the herd.**

Intent and energy is part of their language. It is an in depth topic and one I have more resources on that given time I will create. You can read for FREE the article Intent and Energy that was published in Horsemanship Journal. Here I will give you a quick overview.

When horses are happy and relaxed their energy will be low, their intent maybe to graze together or snooze in the shade.

When horses are feeling playful, excited, fearful or anxious the energy will be high and the intent will be play / letting off steam / to assess if they are safe / to run, etc.

Learn to read intent and energy within each horse in the herd.

It is safe to enter a field when the herd is in low energy. It is not safe to enter if the herd or individuals in the herd are in high energy.

Get in touch with your intent and energy. As your horse will read it. If you are high energy your horse will react to that and also raise its energy. Always ground yourself and enter in a calm and relaxed energy.





**Understand equine communication.** This is an in depth topic one teach to people who wish to learn more. To be safe in a field with a herd of horses you really need to understand their language.

**Personal space.** Just as we have an invisible bubble around us that we only feel comfortable sharing with certain individuals, so too do equines.

There is a language about sharing space, be we humans or equines. Watch how horses share space, the conversations that allow this to happen. And when they don't want to share space. Often it is very gentle and subtle. You need to be fully aware of this if you want to be safe when you need to interact with equines in the herd.

- You can ask respectfully and ethically for permission to approach a horse and share space.
- You can ask appropriately for horses to move without force or intimidation and not disturb herd harmony.

When there is space it is best to avoid invading another horse's personal space, so as to leave them in low energy and content. Being able to move horses without upsetting them is an essential skill when navigating the gateway with other horses near the gate.

**Gateways.** Understanding the language on personal space is one aspect in safety with horses in gateways.

Another issue is the ground conditions. Gateways can get very muddy and slippery. This is a hazard. Good practice is to have the gateway well drained with a suitable non slip surface.

Good practice is for the gate to open inwards into the field. It gives you more control when leading your horse through the gateway.

Horses can and do gather by gateways when they seek to come out the field often motivated by the desire for more food. This can pose a problem if you want to get your horse out the field without the other horses also getting out.

**Here I share so tips on how best to get through the gate.**

**Invest in ground training** with your horse. A horse that is easy to direct forwards, sideways or backwards gives you options in manoeuvring and best positioning your horse.



**Lead your horse to the fence line at latch end of the gate** positioning your horse nearest to the fence line. This way you can calmly direct, and move the other horses out of yours and your horse's personal space.

**Once at the gate latch you can open the gate wide enough for your horse to go through.** It is essential to practice training your horse to turn after going through the gate you don't need to let go of the gate. So you can close the gate as soon as your horse has got through the gap. Therefore you will be well positioned to stop any other horses following.

It is a combination of ground training your own horse. Learning how to ask the other horses to move away. Along with positioning yourself at the gate for the best advantage for success. Please use these tips along with working with an equine practitioner of your own choice. As hands on tutoring really will help you gain the skills and confidence you need.

**Safe Catching.** Most equines if you approach them in an appropriate manner are easy to pop on a headcollar and lead rope.

**When experiencing difficulty in catching your horse the first place to start is with yourself.**

- Are you approaching your horse in low energy, calmly and so your horse can see you approach?
- Do you ask permission to enter their space?
- Do you offer a reward to your horse? As a reward is a great start to connecting with your horse.
- Have you asked yourself what is in it for your horse to choose to spend time with you? If your interactions are all your agenda, you may see why your horse is not keen to spend time with you, and as a result may prefer to avoid you.



There are many reasons why a horse is reluctant to be caught. Once you know why the path to success opens up.

- Equines rescued from terrible abuse are truly terrified of humans.
- Others have negative past experiences of being caught because it then led to interactions using unethical methods the horse hated.
- Plenty of horses have had their permission boundaries ignored.
- Other horses have so little interaction with humans so they are wary.
- A few have no interest in interacting with humans.
- If the humans anxious, fearful, or stressed the horse most likely is not keen to be caught and spend time with a human who makes them feel uneasy.
- A few equine and human partnerships are at breaking point with a list of issues going on and catching is the tip of the ice-burg.

**A final thought to ponder** – Some horses express not wanting to be caught in the field as this environment maybe the only place they have control over what happens.

**Clearly one size will not fit all.**

Some of these horses will reluctantly allow themselves to be caught and then they emotionally shut down once caught. Others may be determined not to be caught and when caught either shut down in learnt helplessness or they may exhibit a range of behaviours to keep you away such as biting, kicking, rearing, bolting, etc.

### **Success in catching comes from the horses view point.**

Each horse and human partnership is unique.

Therefore there is not a catching formula that fits all.

- A deeply traumatized horse that is turned out in a huge field progress maybe measured by getting permission to close the gap between horse and human.
- With a horse that is emotionally shut down it will be about helping that horse to deal with the emotional baggage, and ignition of joy, happiness and intrinsic motivation.
- For a nervous human it will be about building confidence and teaching them how to be appropriate with their horse.

### **Positive Reinforcement.**

An essential tool for all issues is use of positive reinforcement.

This comes in many shapes and sizes.

### **A Fearful Horse. Permission to Approach.**

When a horse that is fearful allows you to come a tiny bit closer to him, acknowledgement of this can be moving away and giving the horse time to think and reflect, it is a positive reward and reinforcement for that horse.

Bit by bit using this technique your horse will allow you closer.

Permission to approach is what we are seeking.

That's completely different to permission to share space and permission to touch. Or permission to put on a headcollar.

Many people fail to recognise we may not have permission to approach, let alone share space respectfully with the horse, let alone touch. We have to earn this right.

A fearful horse needs time to assess if he is comfortable and safe letting you near. The deeper the fear the longer this evaluation may take. Therefore be prepared to pack patience with you. Once you are on the edge of your horse's personal bubble be patient and wait for him to reach out to move into your bubble. Yes let your horse approach you, check you out. You can reward this with a treat. Then leave. Let your horse process and reflect that nothing bad happened. This is a long game as this is the start of the journey of teaching your horse to catch you.





**Treats.** Positive reinforcement can be embedded into all interactions. You can teach a horse, a noise = a reward. It enables you to be very accurate in marking a behaviour that you looking for.

This includes ensuring mugging for food is not rewarded. It is possible to use positive reinforcement for clear boundaries on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. They have to earn the reward, learn and process what he has done to receive the treat.

Please note food as a reward is only one positive extrinsic motivational tool. There are lots of positive extrinsic motivational tools we can use.

**NEVER BRIBE a horse with food. It sets up lots of problems.**

**Address the root cause.** Dealing with the root cause is a huge part of the solution along with working on catching.

For horses that know being caught equals activities they don't enjoy, it is time to address this. If this is the case I urge you to access our detailed workshop / online module on Positive Reinforcement and Motivation it will help you to gain insights into changing things for you and your horse.

When activities become rewarding and enjoyable for you and your horse. Your horse will choose to leave his field buddies, the grass and catch you, because being with you will be more important.

**An example case study.** My son's horse Moss. I purchased Moss, a 16.3hh TB for my son. When we tried him out he was foot perfect. A real gentleman. He passed vetting with flying colours too. Yet I couldn't help but feel we would see the real Moss once he came home. I wasn't wrong.

I turned him out in the field and off he went to settle into the herd. The next day, he wasn't going to be caught. So I spent 2 hours in the field negotiating closing the gap between him and myself until he gave me permission to approach. Then I gave him a carrot and departed so he could ponder that.

The next day I could see he was thinking....ok she has carrots....maybe lets her check out. So no fuss....he allowed me into his space, to touch him, pop a head collar on and give him carrots. I could see some degree of scepticism in his eyes. So I didn't do anything other than make a huge fuss of him, finding his sweet spots where he liked to be scratched and let him leave when he was ready, which was a considerable time as he loved sweet spot scratches.



Day three he walked over to check me out, here is the lady who does excellent sweet spot scratches and has carrots. He was relaxed in my company and not at all bothered. Again I let him leave when he was ready.

Day four he came trotting over to see me and presented his favourite spot to be scratched.....his bottom! So I could tell he wasn't scared of me, so it was more to do with what he associated interactions would be after he was caught. I could see it wasn't about being beaten, as touch didn't induce any flicker of fear or anxiety. So it was something else.

I remember how he was foot perfect, so compliant when we viewed him. It led me to think he switched into a learnt helplessness state once caught. He hadn't been allowed to express an opinion so he just gave in and did exactly as requested.

So that first day at his new home, in the field was the only place he could feel safe to express himself. I knew as he realised we would allow him to have an opinion we would be in for some interesting conversations. And for sure we did have interesting conversations.

I learnt from Moss that the previous approach he experienced the joy had been sucked out interacting with humans, prior training had been serious and drilling. Once he realised this wasn't our approach we discovered Moss had a high play drive, and a high level of curiosity to learn.

### **Invest in play.**

If something is fun and enjoyable your horse will look forward to you arriving. Play provides us with an excellent opportunity to fully engage with our horses on many levels: cognitively, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. Did you know there are lots of different types of play horses enjoy?

It teaches horses and humans about sharing a learning experience. In horsemanship play is a wonderful tool in development of a shared language as it opens up two way communication. It builds self-esteem and self-confidence in both equine and human participants which enriches a shared supportive relationship.



Play is wonderful for building mutual respect, trust and bonding. There are so many benefits to engaging in play for both horses and humans. It is easy to get hung up on being serious with our equines and suck the joy out of the partnership. I have another online resources on The Art of Play in Kez's Club.

**Shift your intention.** Humans are very goal driven.

So when we have a difficult to catch horse it is easy to get focused on catching the horse. Rather than step back and think why is the horse not happy to be caught?

If you know the root-cause for example the horse is fearful, you can shift your intention from catching to being about helping the horse not to feel fearful, to relax, to trust and to be calm. Then guess what the catching problem usually fades away.

**Use the language of the herd, habituation and desensitization, using a graded approach and retreat technique.**

If this is placed as highly as the relationship between you and your horse you will be on the right tracks. The aim is to not catch your horse but have your horse want to catch you. As a partnership you will both become confident, comfortable and trusting in each other. Think of the catching issue as an opportunity to change perceptions about the relationship between you and your horse.

Golden gifts are often wrapped in crappy paper. Reflect on how you can shape the time you spend together as from your horse's perspective, what does he find enjoyable? Rewarding? Fun? Equestrianism is a human agenda, horses are not born with tack and equipment. So thinking more like a horse and the herd really helps here. If you can see the world from your horse's view point and make the time fun the chances are your horse will choose to spend time with you.



**Understand Equine Communication.**

Invest in learning how horses communicate with each other and how your horse communicates with you. Horses telegraph out to us all the time. A huge part of staying safe is to be able to understand how your horse feels, what it is thinking and how it may react.

Horses are emotional sentient creatures and it is important the horse knows you will listen to understand and provide them with the safety and security they need to feel safe and secure. We want our horses to look to us at their times of need.

If you use an approach that has a positive reinforcement you can teach your horse to check in with you, to think, rather than react. This requires both understanding equine communication and positive reinforcement. Both large topics to cover here. Therefore we will provide modules on each of these topics so you can learn more about this.

If we can understand our horse, and then appropriately respond in an ethical way we can make life much safer for ourselves and equines. To give you a taster to compliment this resource is the published article – Telegraphing In which was showcased in Horsemanship Magazine. You will find this in the FREE Horsemanship resource section on my website.



## Safety Equipment

Interacting with horses can be hazardous. Learning how to safely and ethically interact with them can prevent many types of accidents. However unexpected things can happen so it is always wise to ensure you use equipment that can offer you and your horse protection from injury. Here we will look at some essential items you should have.

**Safety hat.** Many only see these as to be used for riding. However they are not. A safety hat can be worn when interacting with horses from the ground. They provide high levels of protection for your skull and its precious contents. Check when you purchase a hat it meets current safety standards. Never purchase a second hand hat. If it has been dropped or been involved in an impact it will not give you the standard of protection you need.



**Gloves.** If you are leading a horse gloves made for horsemanship are a wise investment. They protect your hands should the horse pull away and prevent rope burns. They are also essential when doing chores around the property. They prevent cuts, abrasions, thorns, etc. Our hands are precious and prevention is better than cure.

**Boots.** Even with the most careful, mindful and ethical interaction with a horse an accidental misplaced hoof on your foot really is painful. There are many types of boots made for use around equines. Carefully select boots that provide you with good protection, you may like to consider steel toecaps. Ground conditions can also be a hazard, slippery and muddy ensure your boots have good tread and sturdy soles.

**Body protector.** These are mostly considered for use when riding and in my opinion a great bit of kit for any rider. However if you are interacting on the ground with very troubled equines for example fear aggressive equines wearing a body protector would be wise. There are many makes and styles available, and you can even have them made bespoke. Always purchase new, never second hand. The materials these are made from mean they need replacing, each manufacturer can advise you on the shelf life of their product.

**Hi viz.** If you are venturing out and about wearing high viz for yourself and your horse is a must. It gives people advance warning of your approach. Plus if you are out in the countryside off the roads and an accident happens and you need assistance people can more easily find you.

**Correctly fitting tack.** Bridles, halters, head collars must be the right size and correctly fitted. Poorly fitting tack can rub, abrade, and hurt your horse.

If you are going to turn your horse out to pasture wearing a head collar make sure it is a field safe design. Field safe head collars are designed to come apart if your horse gets caught on anything. Regular head collars will not break if your horse gets caught.

If you are going to tie up your horse ensure the head collar is a wide soft strap design. Narrow cord halters / head collars if the horse pulls back it will dig in. Ensure you tie your horse to a break free system so if your horse pulls back the break free allows the horse freedom. If the horse cannot break free, it is likely to panic resulting in an accident and injury.



Remember a horse's head is packed full of nerve endings and they are super sensitive to pressure. Accidents can and do happen because the tack the horse is wearing is uncomfortable or hurting. Be it either from the design of the equipment and or how it is being used. Even the kindest tack used inappropriately can result in discomfort or pain.

If you ride your equine the tack you select for this must be professionally fitted to your equine and yourself by a well-respected, qualified and highly experience professional. Comfort for your equine and yourself is essential. The saddle must place you in the correct balanced position.

A poor fitted saddle can cause discomfort, pain and damage to your horse. It is often the cause of many accidents as a horse in pain will not want you on its back.

As seasons in the year change your horse may change shape, or as you do more your horse may change shape due to muscle development. Tack also through use needs regular adjustments. Developing a working relationship with your professional is ongoing.

**Advice on gadgets. Ethical horsemanship will never use of any gadget or short cuts.**

An uncomfortable horse = at best an unhappy horse and at worst one that is deeply distressed. Who would enjoy interactions if it led to discomfort or pain?

Learn what the tack does. How to use it ethically.

All the tack we use amplifies pressure. Tack is only as kind as the knowledge in the mind that uses it. We should aspire to use the softest suggestion in the kindest equipment with the aim to refine our horsemanship that equipment is not required.

Never purchase tack on the latest fashion trend and slick marketing. Seek independent professional advice, not from someone who has financial gain in selling you equipment. Do research from many different respected views and educate yourself fully on what options are out there.

Whatever equipment you use to keep it in safe working order means regular inspection for any defects and wear and tear. Regular cleaning following the manufacturers guidelines is essential to maintain the equipment's integrity.

## **Recognise Pain to Stay Safe.**

Equines can be very stoical and as they very rarely vocalise pain it is essential to be able to assess pain as it is critical for welfare and safety. Horses that are in pain can react unpredictably and accidents can and do happen.

No degree of training can train pain away. However unethical practices can induce learnt helplessness and the horse will resign to its fate of training while in pain. Once the unethical practice stops (this often happens when the horse changes hands to a new owner who doesn't use bad practice) behaviour surfaces that has its root cause in pain.

It is important to remember horses have much more sensitive skin than us, they can feel a fly land on them. Equines can and do experience discomfort and pain. Therefore it is our responsibility to be well informed in matters of discomfort and pain for our equines.

They also experience emotional pain. This is often overlooked. Horses feel a wide range of emotions. This can be related to how they are managed, training approaches, the environment, their herd and pair bond, relationships past and present with humans, situations and experiences, and much more.



## How to recognise pain.

A horse in physical pain will have facial expressions that are an indicator of pain.

### Here is what to look for:

- Ears. Backward facing, low and asymmetrical.
- Eyes. Tightened eye lid muscles. Eyes not soft but with either with a stare or withdrawn. Eyes partially closed but not relaxed. Muscle tension above the eye. It may appear v shaped and more prominent. Corners of the eye will be more prominent than normal.
- Chewing muscles. Tight, strained, tight or prominent. Increase in tension above the horse's mouth.
- Mouth. Tight and tense mouth with a pinched look. Upper lip drawn back towards the teeth. Making the chin look more prominent.
- Nostrils. Dilated, strained and tense.



If you are not sure what to look for if you do an on-line search you will find more detailed information and images.

**Note one facial expression can have many meanings. So assessment should be all facial features along with other factors.**

### Other factors to look for:

- Change in what is normal behaviour for your horse.
- Off his food.
- Tail swishing or tail wringing when you are interacting with him or requesting something in training.
- Dislikes a certain area to be touched.
- Hot areas or spot on his head, neck, body, limbs or hooves.
- Limping or reluctant to move. Slower than normal to turn.
- Snatching away a hoof.
- Disinterested in what is going on.
- Kicking at his belly and or rolling.
- Pawing the ground.
- Pacing and unable to relax.
- Check vital signs are abnormal. (Information about these is in the next section).

**When to Call the Vet. Simple. If in doubt get the vet out.**



## Vital Signs.

Knowing your own horse and what is normal for them is essential. Plus what are normal parameters of good health and vital signs.

### What are normal parameters of good health and vital signs?

Here we will offer information on the normal ranges for an adult horse that is calm and resting. Please make allowances for changes in these ranges due to hot weather. Allow your horse to settle if it anxious, fearful or stressed, or if the horse has exerted itself either in the field or due to exercise. As this will influence what readings you get.

- **Body Temperature** – 37.5 – 38.5°C (99 - 101°F)  
Temperature is usually taken by holding the horse's tail to one side and gently inserting a thermometer into the anus. Take care to hold the thermometer or secure it by attaching it with cord to the horse's tail.
- **Respiration** – 8 - 15 breaths per minute. A vet uses a stethoscope to listen to a horse's respiration not only for the number of breaths also for sounds that indicate if there is any illness. Most of us don't have a stethoscope so you can count the respiration by watching your horse's rib cage or flank as it rises and falls. Take 3 readings and then do the maths for the average.
- **Heart Rate** – 36 – 40 beats per minute. Place three fingers (not your thumb) underneath your horse's jaw. Feel around to find the pulse on the jaw bone. Press down lightly and count how many beats for 30 seconds then multiply by 2. Another useful technique is to check pulses to the feet. Here you may not just be checking rate and if it is elevated but also if the pulse is stronger than normal. A strong or pounding pulse could be there is an injury, infection, inflammation, laminitis, etc. You can find the pulse just over the sesamoid bones. Again using three fingers place them on the inside of the wide part of the fetlock. Here is a large vein. This doesn't have a pulse. The artery you are trying to find which has the pulse is thinner and is close to this vein. Practice makes perfect in location of finding pulse points and taking accurate readings. Taking an accurate reading of a horse's pulse requires practice.
- **Mucous Membranes.** These are the lining of the mouth and gums. They should be pink, a healthy colour and moist.
- **Capillary Refill Time.** Press your finger on the gum and release. Healthy capillary refill time is 2 seconds or less.



- **Gut Sounds.** A healthy horse has a large number of gut noises. It can sound like gurgling, bubbling, grumbles, tinkling even a roar. They are heard every few seconds. A quiet gut or not many sounds is not normal. To listen to your horse's gut sounds place your ear next to his belly.
- **Hydration.** A healthy horse drinks lots of water a day. They can get dehydrated if not enough water is available, in hot weather or if they are unwell. To check is hydrated pinch a fold of your horse's skin and let go, it should return to flat in 1 – 2 seconds. Always ensure your horse has access to clean fresh water. Ensure water containers are kept clean.

### **An Essential First Aid Kit for Your Horse:**

- A clean and dry, dust proof, mouse proof container to store your first aid kit.
- A clean bowl or bucket kept just for first aid.
- A roll of cotton wool.
- Antibacterial scrub (Hibiscrub).
- Salt to dilute with boiled water or handy packs of sterile saline solution.
- Ready to use poultice. (Animalintex).
- Non-stick dressings.
- Wound gel, there are several available for equines. E.g. Derma Gel.
- A roll of Gamgee. Large scissors to cut this.
- Round end scissors for trimming hair from the edges of wounds.
- Bandages: Vet wrap, softban, stretchy and stable bandages.
- Adhesive tapes: gaffer tape, electrical tape, micropore tape.
- Tweezers.
- Digital thermometer.
- Vaseline.
- Poultice boot or thick plastic to wrap round an injured hoof.
- Clean towel, hand soap and nail brush.
- Disposable gloves.
- A torch.



**Keep a basic human first aid kit for yourself.**

**Ensure you and your horse are fully vaccinated against tetanus.**

## First Aid Training.

Having a well-equipped first aid kit is wonderful. However you need to learn about how to give equine first aid. There are many training providers who offer short courses on equine first aid. It is a wise investment to access training. There are in person courses or on-line training. Do a search as to what is available in your area.

## Emergency Contacts.

Having your emergency contacts for others to easily access at the place where you keep your horse is essential. As accidents can and do happen when you are not there. Or you may be involved in an accident and people need to contact your chosen contact for these situations. These contacts should include:

- Your vet's name and contact telephone number(s)
- The name your horse is registered with at the veterinary practice.
- Your telephone numbers, work, home and mobile.
- Details of your chosen contact should you have an accident. Their name, relationship to you. Their telephone numbers for work, home and mobile.
- Any health issues that emergency professionals need to be made aware of.



Keep this updated should any details change over time.

## Stay Safe By Reading and Understand the Flight, Fight, Freeze, Fidget and Faint Response.

Equines are hard wired to run from danger, be it real danger or perceived danger. It is a survival mode from the times horses had to run from predators. They have never lost this instinct. To safely interact with equines we need to understand this response and behaviour. Fear be it real or perceived feels the same and it triggers an automatic biological response.

**Flight.** The horse's preferred response to something they find fearful is to run from a fearful object or situation. Thankfully in the UK horses no longer have natural predators, however they still look out for perceived threats that could be predators. The horse flapping plastic bag in the hedge ready to grab them, the log in the ditch waiting to pounce, the wheelie bin with its mouth open ready to eat them, the deer suddenly dashing from the hedge that could be running away from a predator, the list goes on. They also sense danger and remember situations and interactions that cause pain. Horses have evolved the perfect body to run away fast.

**Fight.** If a horse cannot run away from what it is frightened of it will be left with the option to fight. In an enclosed space such a stable, or corner of a school, field or paddock with a horse that is fearful and it feels it has no escape route it may well defend itself. Its natural reaction maybe to bite, kick, rear or barge through you to escape.

**Freeze.** This phase is usually just before flight. The horse will go ridged, grow taller, hold its breath, or shallow breathe, even sound an alarm snort and raise its tail. If it cannot run it may then fight with bucking, rearing or barging.

**Faint or Play Dead.** Extreme stress and fear may cause a horse to shut down completely and even fall down to the ground. It is a rare response but should be included.

**Fidget.** Anxiety, stress and lower levels of fear is usually expressed by equines as fidgeting. It is a good indication they are struggling in the situation they are in.

**All above are natural responses for horses. To be safe around horses we must be able to read this and be appropriate in the given situation.**

**It is impossible to train instinct completely out of horses.**

The world out there is full of the unexpected and scary situations are likely to happen. This need not stop us as we can work with our horses to build their confidence.

If we use ethical methods that build mutual trust and create a strong connection and bond. Along with providing them with a strong sense of safety and security when with us. With this as a foundation we can build a relationship where a horse will think rather than react. We want to use an approach that encourages the horse to look to you for support and guidance.

**Here I will share some tips to use alongside support from a professional practitioner of your own choice.**

**Do not attempt these solo without guidance.**

**Keep yourself safe.** If your horse is in full blown panic get out the way of your horse. Be very attentive to positioning yourself as safely as possible with your horse. If your horse is scared of something or something you can't see, yet makes it plain which direction it is scared of place yourself between your horse and the scary thing. As horses don't tend to run towards what they are scared of, so this is the safest place. If you are mounted you need to consider if you feel safer dismounted. There is no shame in getting off your horse if you place the relationship first and you are better equipped to help your horse from the ground.





**Don't join in.** As if both of you are scared you cannot help your horse. Easier said than done when you are faced with a frightened horse. Deliberately slow down your breathing. Soften your muscles. Talk reassuringly and calmly to your horse.

**Lower your energy.** Intent and energy are part of the language of the horse. When a horse is fearful it's energy will be high. It is at times like this you need to lower and ground your energy. This will show your horse you are not scared. This is a big topic so one we will cover in the Equine Matters Series.

**Stay calm yet assertive.** Being calm and assertive is a million miles away from aggressive, it is ethical. Being passive will not help you in a situation where your horse is frightened. There is information on Calm Assertiveness to compliment this resource. It is a skill you can learn and apply to many aspects of life not just horsemanship.

**Help your horse to relax.** Being relaxed is the polar opposite of anxious or scared. It is impossible to be relaxed and frightened at the same time. There are techniques that cross the species divide that you can use. That will also help calm and steady you too. This is an in-depth topic so we will be offering this as a module in the Equine Matters series.

**Use Positive Reinforcement.** Once you have got the basics of the positive reinforcement technique you can use this to reward the right behaviour. In tricky situations you can reward your horse for listening to you. For lowering its energy a little. For starting to relax. Even a small step in these directions can be rewarded. I will share some tips for closing the gap between you and your horse and the scary thing. Once very close a horse that has been prior taught target touch with positive reinforcement, you can help your horse to really see there is nothing to be scared of. This is really helpful in helping horses overcome fear and building confidence.



**Two Types of Scary Things.** When you come across scary things they will be either; things you can pick up and move or not. Here are tips for turning into a training opportunity if the environment and situation is safe to do so.

**Scary things you can move.** If it is a lightweight portable item and it is ok to move it, pick it up and walk away with it. As predators never leave. Do not approach your horse with the object.

Allow your horse space to follow you. If your horse is reluctant to follow don't force your horse. Wait until your horse is happy to follow you.

As you are walking your horse will note you are not being attacked by the object. That you are calm and not bothered by the horse scary thingy that you are carrying. Your horse will re-evaluate and go from scared to curious.

Once your horse is curious he will want to check out the horse eating thingy, at first very tentatively. Your horse may get closer at first. Keep walking away until your horse has closed the gap and is very close to the object you are holding.

When you get to this stage you can stop walking away with the horse eating thingy and ask your horse to target touch. If your horse is brave enough he will sniff it and then retreat to think. Click on the sniff, so your horse knows he's done the right thing and give your horse a reward.

Don't approach with the object. Wait for your horse to come forward to check it out. Ask your horse to target the object. The second time your horse may linger a bit longer to check out the object. Again click and reward as your horse checks out the object. Allow your horse to retreat if it needs to. This gives your horse time to think, reflect and consider things. The third and fourth sniffs, your horse is likely to have worked out the object is not scary. Always reward your horse's bravery. Once your horse is comfortable with his nose on the object if you wanted to carry on your walk simply return the object back to where you found it.



**Scary Things You Can't Move.** If it is a safe place to use the scary object for training place yourself between the object and your horse. It is the safest place to be as scared horses don't tend to run towards what scares them.

Keep your energy low and reassure your horse talking gently and slowly. As your horse lowers his energy and starts to relax, calmly move a bit closer to the scary thing. Reward your horse if he follows you. Even if it is only one step. If your horse gets worried and the energy comes up you can allow him to back up. Do not turn away, as this may trigger the runaway response. Gradually you will close the gap. And maybe closing the gap and your horse being relaxed about being closer is where you finish the session for that day. You can always repeat this on another day. There is no rush with things you can't move.

If you can get close enough for you to touch the scary object do so. Show your horse it is safe by interacting with the object, if safe touch it or stand on it. Your horse will eventually work out it hasn't attacked you so it will get curious. At first very tentative and may only close the gap a little to get a better look. Reward this bravery. And maybe that day this is as far as you want to go.

Or if you feel comfortable to take the next step it is retreat a bit and give your horse time to think, reflect and relax. Then approach the scary thing again as before taking your time. Then retreat as before. Repeat and repeat taking your time. It takes as long as it takes for a horse to be brave enough to trust your judgement.

### **Replicate in the school or safe area.**

There are lots of objects you can use to practice these skills. You could build an obstacle course. We explore this in the Obstacle Challenge module in the Equine Matters series. Here we will look at how to help your horse become confident tackling obstacles it will have not come across before. By practicing in a safe environment you build up the skills and expertise with your horse. Once you and your horse are confident in a safe environment with any number of challenges you will have very valuable tools in your tool kit when you are out and about. Practicing this will help you and your horse overcome fears. You and your horse will learn to trust each other.

**Take Your Time.** There is no quick fix for tackling fear, be it in you or your horse. There are two types of fear real and perceived. They both feel the same. You can only go at the pace that feels right for you and your horse. Helping your horse to learn things are not scary and can be safely investigated will build communication between the two of you. This you can take out and apply in many situations. When building a relationship with a horse we want them to feel safe when they are with us. We want them to look to us for safety when we meet objects or situations that trigger fear.



## Safe Handling.

**Touch.** Interactions with our horse include handling. Previously in this resource we have discussed permissive interaction. This must include permissive touch.

- Do we have permission to touch a horse?
- How many people will walk up to a horse and without thinking to stroke or pet a horse?
- If we have no relationship with an equine do we have a right to touch without permission?

If the horse is accepting of this and enjoys it there will be no problems.

Some horses may not enjoy this interaction. Horses with prior bad experiences with humans, suffered abuse, neglect, unethical training practices or little experience with humans will want to avoid being touched. This is when problems can and do arise.

### Here are just a few examples:

- A fear aggressive horse that has previously suffered abuse may well see your well intentioned touch as a threat and react by biting or striking out with a hoof.
- A horse that has suffered an injury may see your interaction to touch to examine and treat the injury will cause pain. The horse may well be defensive and try to stop you going near or touching that area.
- Unethical training approaches will make a horse at best sceptical at allowing you to touch them, or they may give in and go into a learnt helplessness state, or defend themselves.
- A horse with little or no experience with humans will be wary, maybe frightened, stress or anxious. By nature they will want to avoid contact.
- Your horse may not happily allow you to touch certain areas.
- Difficulty in picking up hooves for inspection, cleaning and hoof care.
- Difficulty in handling a head shy horse, as past experience it was hit around the head.
- A horse that doesn't trust humans may well go into flight, fight, freeze, faint or fidget when we try to touch them.





## Assent and Consent.

Previously in this resource I touched on the importance of understanding assent and consent and the difference between the two. Consent and assent very are different.

**Here is a recap.** Consent can mean your horse will allow you to do something. Consent is more about compliance with what is requested. Assent is when your horse has time to think and consider then agrees and approves with what you are suggesting.

## Let us explore this in more depth.

**Consent.** True consent must be free from manipulation and coercion. Humans are often required to give consent, for example you have to give consent for a medical procedure. You will be given all options and time to process what you are giving consent to. You may not enjoy what you are consenting to however you understand it is for your benefit. The person has to have the mental capacity to understand what they are consenting to. So think of humans that don't have the mental capacity for example a young child. It is then the child's guardian that must give informed consent.



**How does this apply to equines?** We must be mindful in our seeking consent we are not being manipulative. Equines have the mental capacity to process many of our requests if we ask in an ethical way and give the horse chance to process. In some areas they will not have the mental capacity to process what we require to happen. Such as a medical treatment that maybe unpleasant yet vital for their wellbeing, or even lifesaving. This is when as their guardian we must make well informed choices for our equine partner.

**Assent.** For us humans assent is being in agreement and to approve of what is being suggested or offered. It follows a period of thoughtful consideration.

**How does this apply to equines?** This is when what we are engaging in with our equines they are in agreement and we have their approval.

**Seeking permission from the horse.** Yet in many styles of horsemanship is what you see seeking any type permission? Is it about pushing on with the human agenda? Be mindful there are approaches that are not permissive or seek any assent or consent. Listen to understand if your horse is in agreement with you.

**Seeking permission to touch.** When we seek permission to touch a horse we need to carefully observe and listen to understand our horse. We need to be very aware of the threshold or boundary of where the issue is in regards to touch.

Only when we have permission to approach the horse and share space with the horse and the horse is comfortable and relaxed with this we can work on touch.

### **A Case Study – Jimmy**

Jimmy was one of the most extreme cases I have worked with. He had a horrendous past of violent abuse. I was approached to help with Jimmy after the person who rescued him Stephanie couldn't get near him.

After being rescued Jimmy had been turned out into a field with other horses. Stephanie couldn't get near Jimmy. Any attempt would freak Jimmy out and he would run.

The personal space Jimmy required for feeling safe was huge. The first step in solving Jimmy's fears was to see where the edge of that boundary was. So slowly and calmly in low energy I approached. As soon as Jimmy stopped grazing and looked at me I stopped, so as not to cause him to feel the need to run. I did not want to lose the fragile confidence he had in allowing me to approach so it is essential I retreated a few steps. I wanted him to feel safe with me on the edge of his boundary. This was homework for Stephanie to negotiate with Jimmy if she had permission to approach and stop at his boundary.

Once he was allowing Stephanie to approach and stop at his boundary the next stage was about negotiating getting closer. Once on his boundary taking one small step closer with Jimmy watching. Reward at this stage was to retreat to give him time to think. Bit by bit the gap got smaller. All the time paying attention to how Jimmy was feeling and being mindful not to overstep his boundary.

The day came when Jimmy would allow Stephanie so close, less than an arm's length away. Oh so tempting to reach out to touch. But an absolute no, as this horse had suffered the most horrendous abuse. This stage of just being together was vital no touching Jimmy by Stephanie. Instead we waited for Jimmy to get brave enough to touch Stephanie. That day it was a huge leap of faith for Jimmy as he reached over to sniff Stephanie and gently touched her. Nothing bad happened. Jimmy realised Stephanie wasn't going to grab him or make sudden movements to scare him.



Over time Jimmy discovered Stephanie would give him treats. The very start of positive reinforcement. Stephanie was the first human Jimmy had known who waited, listened and let him have the time and space he needed to try to trust again. Once Jimmy was happy touching Stephanie, it was about dialogue regarding Stephanie being allowed to touch him. The first few times he let Stephanie touch him they so brief, yet huge tries from Jimmy. Which he was given lots of rewards and time to process.

Bit by bit he let her hand settle a bit longer. Bit by bit he allowed her to touch a bit more of him. Eventually he discovered her touch could give pleasure and not pain.

He started to trust Stephanie. Step by step she worked on touching every part of him. Introducing a head collar and leading. He is now one very settled pony with Stephanie and the herd he lives in. His humans around him understand him. There was no quick fix. Credit to Stephanie and her friend Chris who have taken the time it takes to help Jimmy. He has learnt to trust again. In the wrong hands this trust would come undone very quickly.



### **Case Study – Frankie.**

Frankie was a rescued from near death by a welfare organization and rehabilitated back to health. He was rehomed from the rescue organization to Di. She worked with Frankie to establish a wonderful bond and connection. She rebuilt his shattered trust in humans. When I met them they already had a fantastic bond and connection with each other.

The problem was Frankie had developed a very painful skin condition on all of his legs. The vet was working with Frankie and Di to resolve this. However it was getting to the stage understandably that Frankie hated anyone going near his legs. As he associated this was going to be uncomfortable or even painful. A real problem for Di, the vet and the hoof trimmer.

At the worst of the skin problem Frankie was admitted to the equine hospital so the vets could treat him onsite at the practice. Something that added to the emotional trauma for both Frankie and Di.

Once the skin condition turned the corner and healing was starting to take place, it was also time to heal the trauma from the association of leg handling equalled something Frankie hated. Di asked for my help as Frankie hated his legs being inspected, touched or handled.

The starting point here was to use positive reinforcement. So I taught Di how to use positive reinforcement in other aspects of her interactions with Frankie. So he really understood desired behaviour led to reward. Then we could start on the problem areas, his legs.



There was a very clear boundary line on where Di was allowed to touch and where not. So using a hand on a stick, as not to risk injury if Frankie was to kick out I instructed Di to gently go over the line just for a few moments. Click and reward if he allowed Di to do this. And give him time to process.

If he didn't allow it, that was ok too but no click and no reward. What he learnt was Di would be gentle and reward when he allowed her to touch just over the boundary. He discovered there was no pain and nothing to fear. Bit by bit Di was able to touch more and more of his legs. Until he was completely relaxed about having all four legs touched and she could use her own hands.

From there it was the next step was about handling his legs and picking up his feet. Touch was one milestone, the next was handling. As the positive reinforcement approach was now well established and there was no anxiety or fear over touch this part was about teaching Frankie to trust with someone holding his foot.

The first step in this was to teach Frankie to unlock the leg you want to pick up. So asking him to move over just enough so he shifted his weight from one front foot to the other but without taking a step. Click and reward.

This would be the start to teach him to balance on three legs. With the unlocked leg not being weight bearing.

Next was to ask him to bend his knee on the unlocked leg. Click and reward. At this stage he was very able to shift his weight to the other leg, unlock his leg, balance on the other 3 legs and on request bend his knee.

The next stage was to ask him to allow Di to hold and support is lower leg and hoof. Click treat. This process had to be taught for each leg in turn. Taking the time it needed. Not rushing Frankie. Allowing him time to process and to feel safe.





## Tips for safe handling.

- Seek permission from the horse.
- Respect your horse's boundaries and thresholds.
- Negotiate with dialogue with your horse.
- It is ok for your horse to say no. It is feedback. It is an opportunity for you to reflect on your approach and if you are going too quickly.
- Use positive reinforcement.
- Learn about and apply equine communication in your approach.
- Listen, observe and understand your horse.
- Break everything into small baby steps.
- Wait and let your horse think and process every step of the way.
- It is ok to retreat, give ground and take steps back, before moving forward.
- Take your time, as much time as you need.
- Use other interactions not just the problem you are trying to work on to show your horse you are trustworthy.
- **Always work with a professional practitioner who uses positive reinforcement.** It is an investment that can transform your relationship with your equine. Ethical, fun and rewarding interactions that enable you and your horse to enjoy your time together.



**Happy Healthy Horse.** When we become a guardian for an equine we are responsible for their health and wellbeing. Horses rely on us to ensure all their needs are met and that they have a healthy and happy life.

**Appropriate diet, weight management and fresh water.** Today there is a great deal of information out there on equine diets and how to manage their weight.

The key to success to navigate the wealth of information out there is to start with knowing if your horse is the correct weight. Not everyone has access to an equine weigh bridge to get an accurate weight reading. Even if you do have a weigh bridge you need to know if your horse is the correct weight for its height and breed. This is where condition scoring your horse is a really useful tool. It helps you to know if your horse is under weight, correct weight or overweight. (Welfare organizations have free resources you can access on condition scoring and weight management).

There is big business in equine's diets. With a huge range of bagged feeds and supplements available. You are sure to find something that is the right for your horse. However what we put in a bucket for our horse is only one part of the picture. If you decide to give your horse a bucket feed ensure the bucket is suitable for equines. Horses can be rough on their feed buckets and ones not up to the job can be a hazard. Always keep the bucket clean.

The environment and management style you keep your horse will have a huge impact on your horse's diet. If you own your own land you can decide how best you will manage your horse and your land.

However many of us are not so lucky to own land. We are then looking as to what is available in our area. There are many different approaches. For example environments and management styles vary widely from horses out full time at pasture to living out on a grass free track system 24 x 7 with grass replaced with hay. To horses out at pasture for a proportion of time and off pasture for some of the time.

The type of pasture they graze can vary massively too. Some pasture is very rich and not great for horses. What we may desire as a management system for our equine may not be available in our location. So it is about doing the best we can and managing our horse within these options. Management of grass intake is a huge part of equine management.

There are serious health issues relating to horses becoming overweight. You should work with your vet or a professional independent equine nutritionist in creating a plan to help your horse lose weight safely. By working with a professional they can assess your individual horse, the management system where your horse lives and the pasture. They can then create a bespoke plan that will be right for your horse. Along with consideration to your location and management situation.

Fresh clean water available 24 x 7 is essential for all equines. Water containers need to be suitable for equine use or they can be a very dangerous hazard. Water containers must be kept clean.

Keeping your horse happy and healthy a safe environment that is appropriate for equines is essential.

- Fencing must strong, suitable for equines and be well maintained.
- Plenty of space for horses to move freely.
- Land managed not allowed to become sick.
- Hazards, such a poisonous plants regularly checked for and swiftly removed.
- Equipment safely stored away from horses.
- Shelter provided.
- Freedom for horses to interact, engage in natural behaviours and social interactions with other equines.
- An environment that is peaceful, and allows horses to relax and live without fear or distress.
- Free access to fresh water and suitable forage.



**Enrichment.** Equines thrive with enrichment in their lives. Enrichment goes beyond meeting their basic needs such as suitable environment to live in, appropriate food, water, shelter and a herd to social interact with.

Enrichment that is appropriate for equines is stimulating, rewarding and fun. It helps the horse to develop physically and mentally. Enrichment promotes positive behaviours and builds confidence. It helps horses to develop cognitive skills and to solve problems. By engaging in a wide range of enrichment your horse will have better mental wellbeing and be more resilient. This helps them to be less anxious and fearful. It helps horses to be more peaceful and at ease with their environment. By engaging in enrichment with your horse it will strengthen your relationship and bond.

Enrichment is a large topic. I have FREE resources in Kez's Club you can enjoy.



**The Foundation Stones.** Written by Vicki Jayne Yates.

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## Useful links

**FREE Positive Reinforcement Download** <https://www.vickijayneyates.co.uk/positive-reinforcement>

**Kez's Club** <https://www.vickijayneyates.co.uk/kezs-club.html>

**FREE Horsemanship Resources** <https://www.vickijayneyates.co.uk/horsemanship-resources.html>