

Coaching To Improve Rider Confidence

Fact Sheet



Learning outcomes

By studying this fact sheet you will gain an insight in the thoughts and emotions of an unconfident rider. It will also examine the causes of lack of confidence or fear and techniques the coach can implement to help riders progress, including;

- How the brain works.
- Confidence in and out of the saddle.
- Personal Comfort Zones
- Goal Setting – “tiny attainable tick able targets”
- Coaching conversations to promote confidence
- Exercises to promote confidence in the rider.
- Working with unconfident riders within a group of riders.

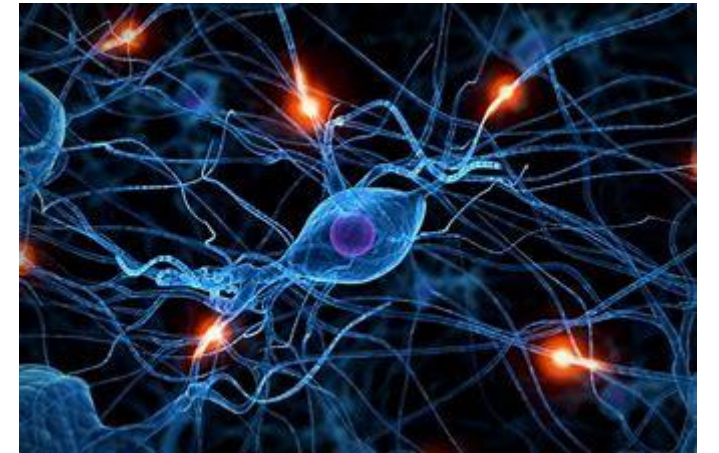


How The Brain Works

Neural pathways (comprised of neurons connected by dendrites) are created in the brain based, on our habits and behaviours.

The number of dendrites increases with the frequency a behaviour is performed. It may help to picture these neural pathways as deep grooves or roads in our brain.

Our brain cells communicate with each other via a process called “neuronal firing.”



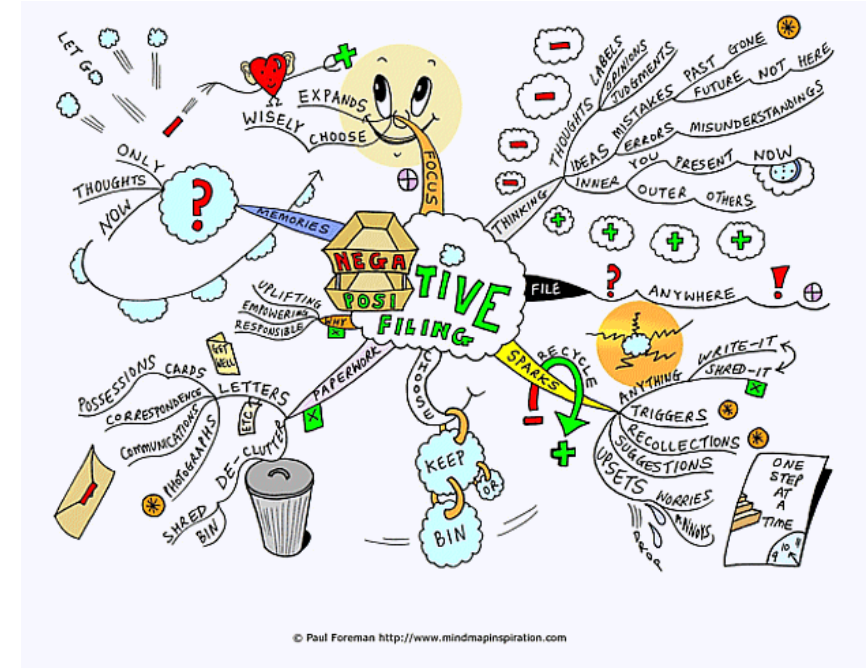
How The Brain Works (Cont)

When brain cells communicate frequently, the connection between them strengthens and “the messages that travel the same pathway in the brain over and over begin to transmit faster and faster.”

With enough repetition, these behaviours become automatic.

Reading, driving, and riding a bike are examples of complicated behaviours that we do automatically because neural pathways have formed.

Studies have found that a habit of prolonged negative thinking diminishes the brain's ability to think, reason, and form memories



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How The Brain Works (Cont)

It is estimated that it takes 10,000 repetitions to master a skill and develop the associated neural pathway.

It is important to understand that every brain is different. Each person has their own unique experiences that have shaped their brain and continue to shape it throughout their lives.

It really is important to listen to the rider/groom individually to understand their unique experiences and values in order to help them develop a clear plan for achieving their personal goals.

THE TYPES OF LEARNERS

visual
learner



learn what they see

kinesthetic
learner



learn what they do

auditory
learner



learn what they hear

stress
learner



learn what stresses them

ease
learner



learn what relaxes them

scribble
learner



learn what they write out

trust
learner



learn from authority

teach
learner



learn by teaching

copy
learner



learn what they can copy

Confidence In And Out Of The Saddle

Emotional Intelligence - 90% of psychology happens before the rider is legged up on the horse, we allow our emotions to control us.

It is important to remember the rider may have several factors that are affecting their ability to be confident.

This could be nothing to do with the horse they are riding or the task they are completing at that time. It could be a previous life experience such as being bullied, trauma in their life from their upbringing or a fall, or simply on that day how they feel emotionally or physically.

In order to gain an idea of how we can help, it is key that as a coach we ask questions.



Confidence In And Out Of The Saddle (cont)

• Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand how to recognise and control personal emotion – stress- effective communication-challenges-social awareness

Self awareness of emotional intelligence out of the saddle could offer a chance for reflection and how change can be applied to the future development.

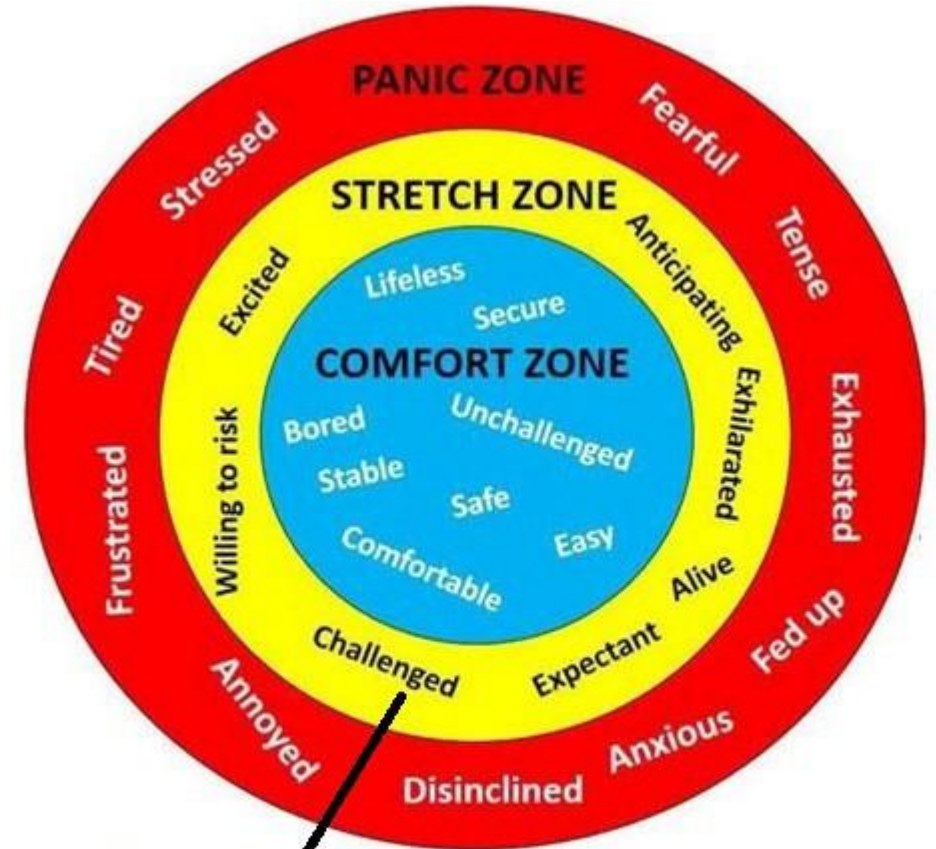


Personal Comfort Zones

A comfort zone is a psychological state in which things feel familiar to a person and they are at ease.

They are in control of their environment, experiencing low levels of anxiety and stress. In this zone, a steady level of performance is possible.

By breaking down each phase learners can easily switch from one zone to another during a session.



*Ideal zone for personal/
professional development*

Personal Comfort Zones (cont)

As a coach you should aim to stretch and challenge but support that learning to stay out of the panic zone.

Reaching the panic zone will make the session unproductive and anxiety will prevent learners from learning.

Stretch and challenge with steady goals.

Remember every person will react differently within each zone, during certain tasks. You will need to adapt your methods and approach.



Confidence in and out of the saddle

When working with a staff member over a period of time it is important to consider their historical timeline.

This will allow the coach to pre-frame sessions to support and develop the rider. They should also consider if the rider's coaching journey would benefit from referral support such as Racing Welfare or Sports Psychology.

It is not a coach's responsibility to provide all the additional support, but to work alongside additional support if required, to unlock the key to assist each person in meeting their goals.

The coach must remember all rider information should be confidential and abide by GDPR and the BHA Coaching Code of Conduct.



Goal Setting

Goals should be SMART and it is important the goals come from the rider.

- Stop
- Listen
- Ask questions
- Reflect
- Draw conclusions and set goals or adjust goals.

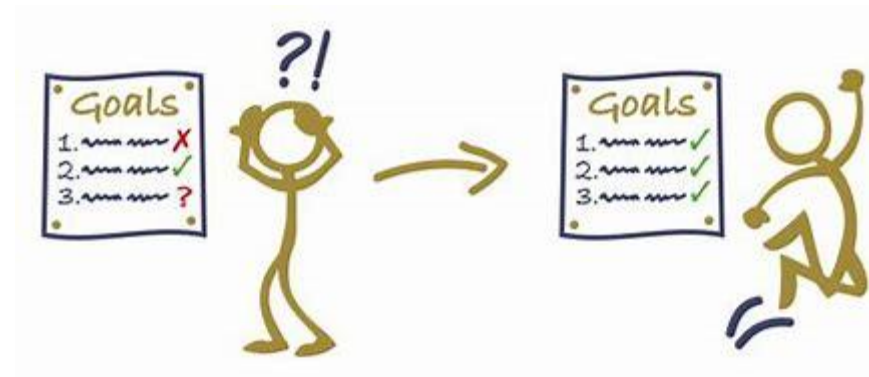


Goal Setting (cont)

Over ambitious goal setting leads to a feeling of being overwhelmed by the task and ultimately a lack of motivation

- Keep it simple - commit to being the best you can at 1-3 things.
- This way the brain will have a positive reference.
- Aim to create 2-3 goals.
- Ensure they are specific, can be measured and are under the rider's control

For example setting a goal that - **The horse you ride will win its race.**
This is unrealistic and not measurable it is out of your control.



Goal Setting (cont)

However you can aim to - **Ensure the horse is race fit**

- Ride with feel and be observant to the horse's actions and reactions
- Give constructive feedback on horse's health and fitness post gallop.
- Record progression and set backs prior to next race

You can learn to do this and make goals specific, realistic and achievable within a race meeting timeframe



Coaching conversations to promote confidence

The best coach is somebody who listens and then ask questions!

Reaffirming goals prior to a session will allow the them to focus on the correct things.

Ask the rider to write down what good looks like. Make a diary of the time when the task has gone well.

Ask them to visualise how it will feel when they achieve the task, then carry it out.

As a coach don't be afraid to go back a stage and allow the rider to be involved.

As a coach remember to identify the small things that can make a change on the wider target, rather than big targets.



Coaching conversations to promote confidence

Allow them to be task confident and do one thing well at a time two maximum.

Use language such as 'I believe you can do this' language that makes the rider feel you have confidence in them they can achieve it.

Allow the rider to be involved 99% of feedback comes from the rider, help them to work out their next steps and how to develop will enable them to grow in confidence, provided it is safe to do so.

Celebrate and praise them whatever the outcome and support them. Help them to develop their own minds.



Coaching conversations to promote confidence

What does a good coaching conversation look like?

Ask the rider:-

What are you trying to do? What does success to you look like? They may have forgotten the coach may need to reaffirm this.

What are you going to do and how do you need to be? Let them work it out, self awareness will bring positivity to them internal and external. Reinforce and give them space without judgement to reflect. Even if it comes from a negative emotion or mind-set.

What were you focussing on?

What would have to happen for you to do that every time? Be brave as a coach to allow them to answer and be involved will help them develop themselves and be effective at more positive experiences than negative.



Exercises to promote confidence in the rider.

When working with the under confident rider – empathy and communication is key.

The following exercises can be ridden in or out of an arena;-

- Describing the horses gait ie walk 4 time - the horse moves his legs in the following sequence right hind/right fore/left hind/left fore – by thinking and describing the footfalls the rider moves their focus from the horse to the task
- Counting the number of steps the horse takes between two markers. Using rider position to keep the horse in a steady regular rhythm
- Increasing or decreasing the number of strides will give the rider improved control of the horse



Exercises to promote confidence in the rider.

- Rider discussion on how they are going to complete a ridden task for example canter transition. Ask the rider to describe in detail how they will give the aids to canter, where the best place is to move into canter, the quality of trot that they need to be able to canter etc
- Have a professional discussion with the rider on their riding ability – ask them for two things they think they do well and one area they could do better. Get them to demonstrate and mark themselves out of ten. Discuss and ride through the exercise again to improve the mark



Improving a rider's confidence within a group of riders

When working with the under confident rider in a group it is important the session is inclusive but supportive.

If the rider doesn't feel safe and supportive within the group, the session could become unsafe.

It may also take more time to get the under confident rider back to the stage they started at, so care must be taken.



Improving a rider's confidence within a group of riders

Some tips include:-

- Allowing the rider to be in the middle with a confident lead horse.
- Ask other riders in the group to give some positive feedback on the person.
- Keep the group session exercise, or goals small and cater for everyone so the experience is positive.
- Give them a buddy or senior riding partner.
- If they can't do the task, allow them to observe and give feedback so they feel involved.

