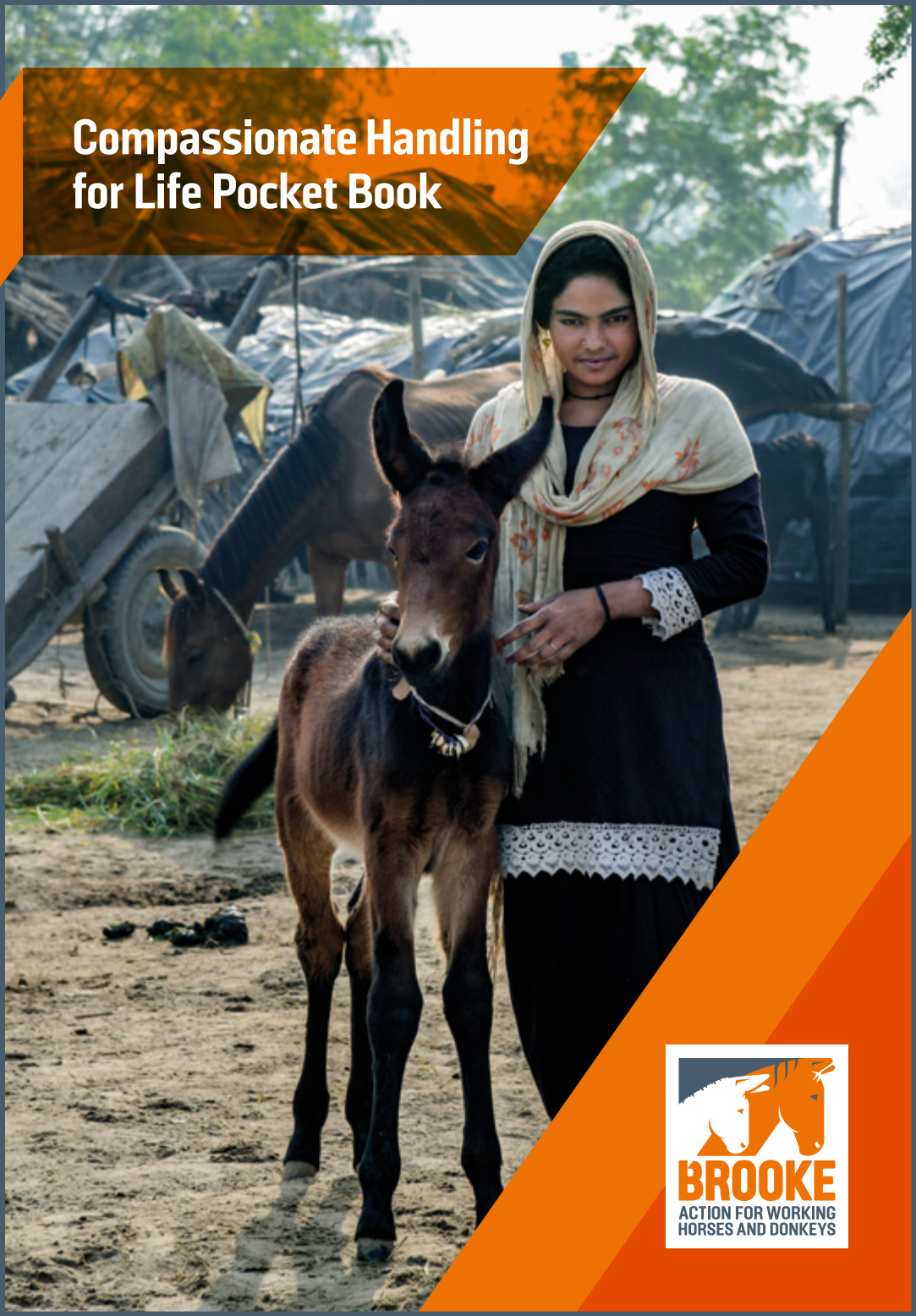
Compassionate Handling for Life Pocket Book



BROOKE
ACTION FOR WORKING HORSES AND DONKEYS

Contents

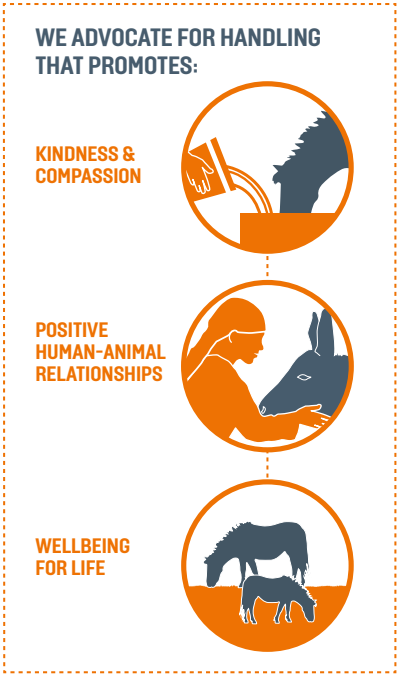
Introduction

This resource supports compassionate handling practices, positive human–animal interactions and better animal welfare.

It includes key equine behaviour and handling information. It is designed to support in-person training and mentoring. It expands on Brooke's Guiding Principles to Handling with Compassion and can be used to support Brooke's Compassionate Handling Mentoring Framework Welfare Advocate, Equine Behaviour Expert and Compassionate Handler competencies.

The pocketbook includes guidance on how to:

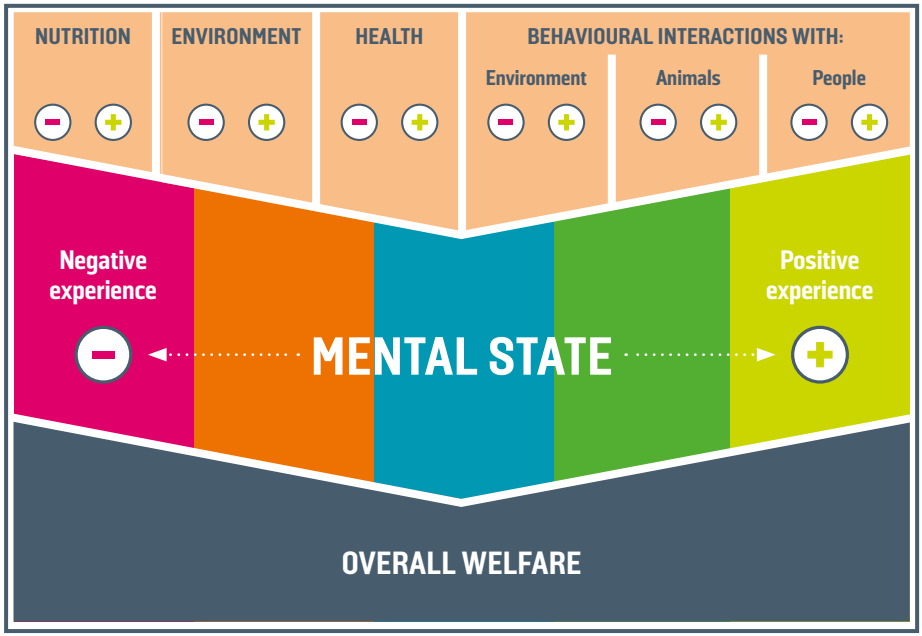
1. **Appraise welfare and quality of life**
2. **Recognise behaviours associated with equine emotions**
3. **Identify root causes of equine behaviour and welfare compromise**
4. **Choose from a toolbox of options for resolution**



Welfare appraisal

An animal's welfare is defined by their mental state – how the animal feels. Whether or not an animal's needs are met determines their mental state.

Five domains model



MENTOR TIPS

Does the mentee address, as far as possible, animal welfare including environmental, nutritional, physical and behavioural components?

Does the mentee appraise both situational welfare needs and the extent to which welfare needs are met outside the interaction?

Quality of life

Balance of life experiences

A Life Worth Avoiding

Balance is negative:
can be remedied rapidly by veterinary treatment or change in husbandry practices.

A Life Worth Living

Balance is positive, but less so:
full compliance with minimum standards that include significant enrichments.

A life NOT worth living

Balance is strongly negative.

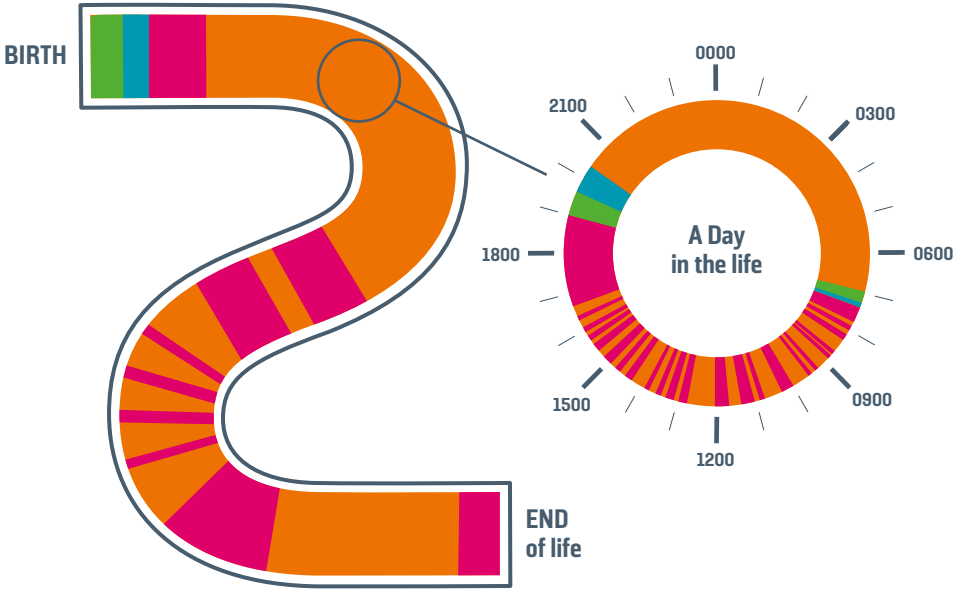
Point of balance

Neutral positive-negative affective balance.

A good Life

Balance is strongly positive:
full compliance with best practices recommendations. Well above minimum standards.

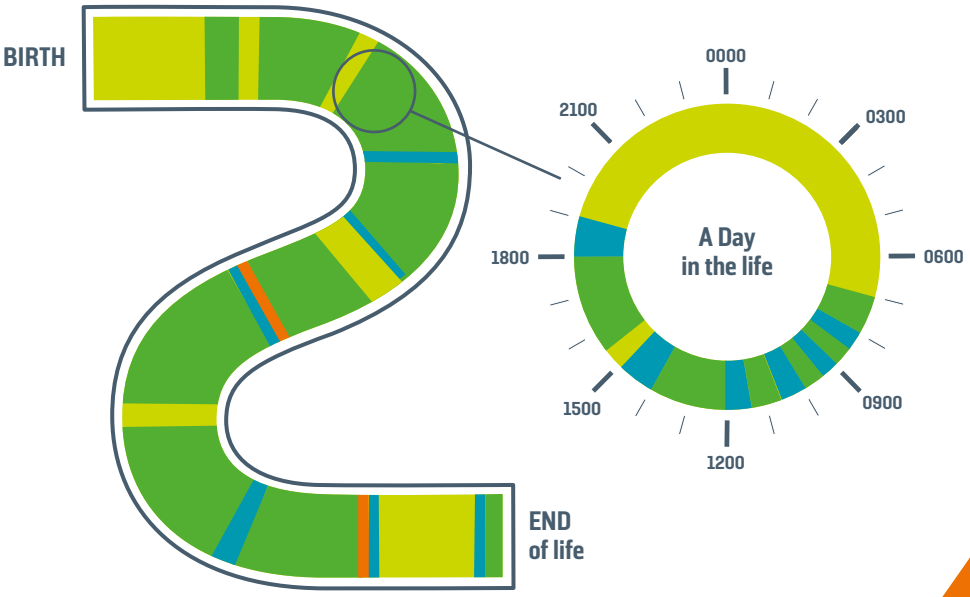
A life worth AVOIDING - an example.



MENTOR TIPS

Does the mentee evaluate the daily & lifetime quality of life of the animal and consider the impact of this on the present situation?

A life worth LIVING – an example.



Equine Behaviour Expert

Introduction

Reading animal behaviour helps us:

- Assess animal welfare – how an animal is feeling and experiencing the situation.
- Understand animals' points of view, thoughts, and emotions.
- Predict animal behaviour, allowing us to intervene to prevent dangerous or unwanted situations.
- Recognise relaxation and respond to early signs of fear or anxiety.
- Maximize positive experiences and minimize negative ones.

Animals experience a wide range of emotions, and this pocketbook includes guidance on recognising some of the most relevant states during handling.

These emotional responses are closely linked to both immediate welfare and long-term wellbeing.

Ignoring signs of negative emotion creates negative experiences which has long lasting effects.

Ignoring signs of negative emotion risks safety.

MENTOR TIPS

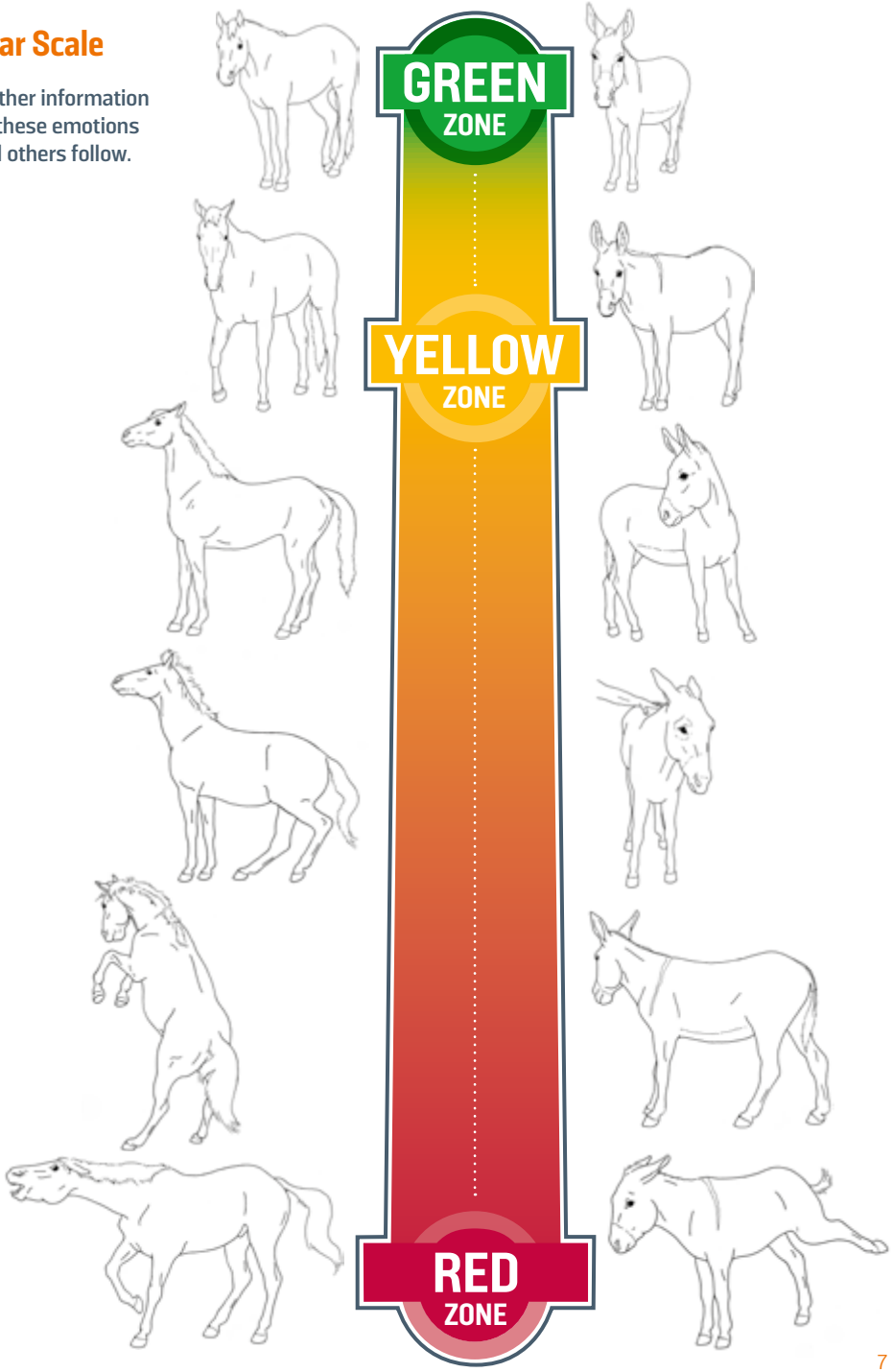
It is common to focus on overt signs of high arousal and overlook subtler indicators of emotional state. Can the mentee recognise more subtle behavioural indicators?

Does the mentee assess the animal's emotional state THROUGHOUT the interaction?

Discuss reasons why the animal may experience observed emotions.

Fear Scale

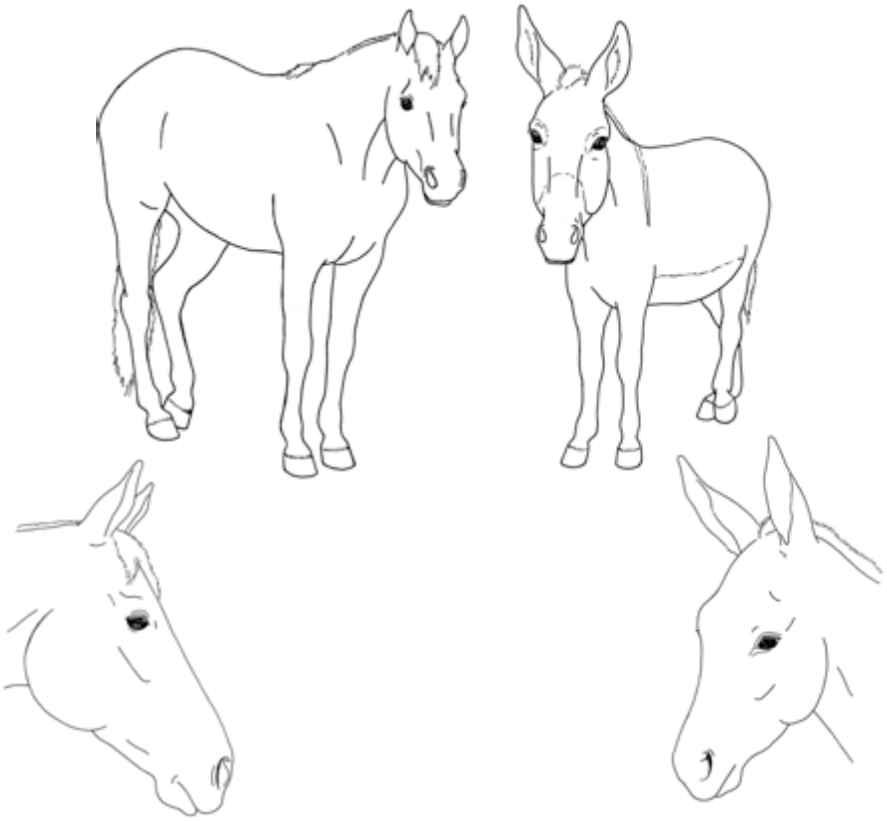
Further information on these emotions and others follow.



Illustrations: Cade Torciva / © Brooke

GREEN ZONE

Relaxed



Illustrations: Cade Torcivia / © Brooke

- **Posture**
  - Weight balanced over four legs; may rest a hind limb
  - Relaxed body and face
  - Slow fluid movement
- **Neck/Head**
  - Head lowered to ground, or level or slightly above withers
  - Neck muscles relaxed
- **Tail**
  - Base of tail low and relaxed
- **Ears**
  - Forward or slightly to the side
  - Relaxed at base
- **Eyes**
  - Soft and round
  - Skin smooth above eye
  - Blinking

GREEN ZONE

Curious / positive interest

Illustrations: Cade Torcivia / © Brooke

- **Mouth/Nose**
  - Relaxed lower lip
  - Lip without wrinkles
  - Lip extended to explore
  - Sniffing
- **Attention**
  - Easy to shift attention
  - Takes food readily

(Foster, 2016)

MENTOR TIPS

Strive to create and maintain a state of relaxed attention (green zone behaviour) during interactions.

This supports learning, cooperation and positive human-animal relationships.

It contributes to good welfare and builds trust over time.

Positive reinforcement fosters positive anticipation, which is similar to curiosity but with higher arousal.

GREEN ZONE

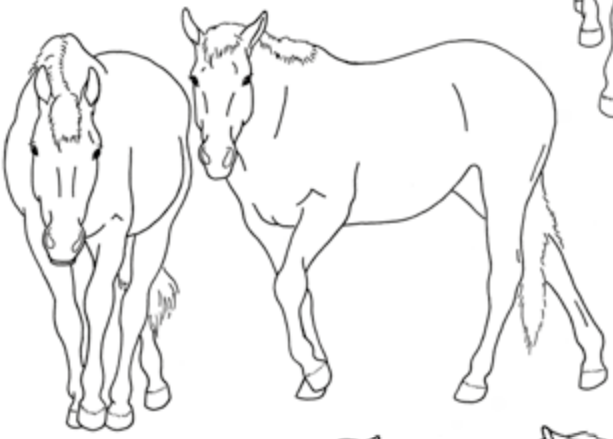
Affiliative non-play

Positive emotions such as contentment and enjoyment are experienced during affiliative non-play interactions. These are accompanied by calm, low arousal (green zone) behaviours.

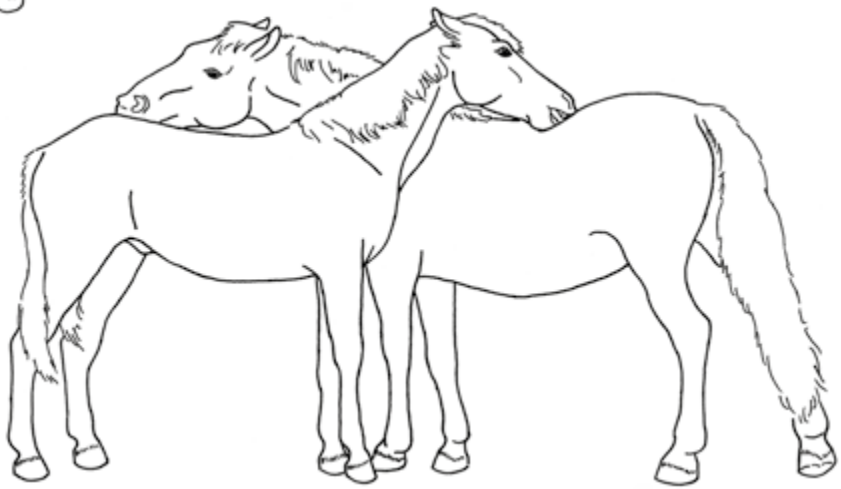
Affiliative non-play interactions are important for equid wellbeing.

Contact

Follow



Mutual groom



Illustrations: Cade Torcivia / © Brooke

(Lewis et al, 2025)

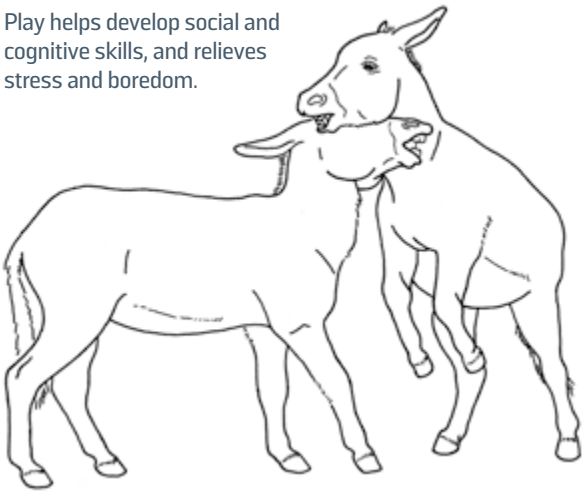
GREEN ZONE

Social play

Behaviours include: frolic, leap, run, chase (play), buck, prance, nip air, nip, bite (play), reach, grasp, neck wrestle, push (play), stamp, rear, kick threat (play), kick (play) balk (play), evasive jump, evasive spin, head snatch, open mouth play face. *(Lewis et al, 2025)*

Positive emotions such as joy are experienced during play, accompanied by high arousal (non-calm).

Play helps develop social and cognitive skills, and relieves stress and boredom.



Illustrations: Cade Torcivia / © Brooke

MENTOR TIPS

Make the distinction between play and aggression – during play actions are reciprocated and no harm is intended or caused.

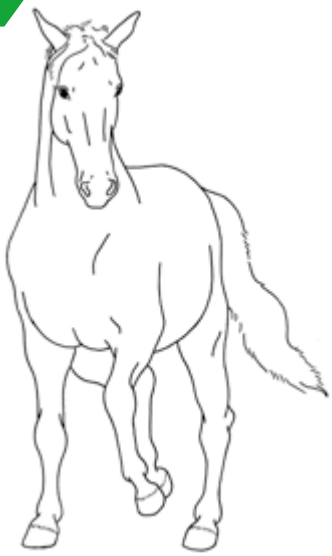
High arousal states are not conducive to handling activities. Does the mentee facilitate calm before progressing with handling activities?

Positive excitement

Examples include play behaviour directed towards other animals or handlers, return of friend, mating-interest behaviours.

Not accompanied by aggression.

Positive emotions are experienced during positive excitement accompanied by high arousal (non-calm).



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MENTOR TIPS

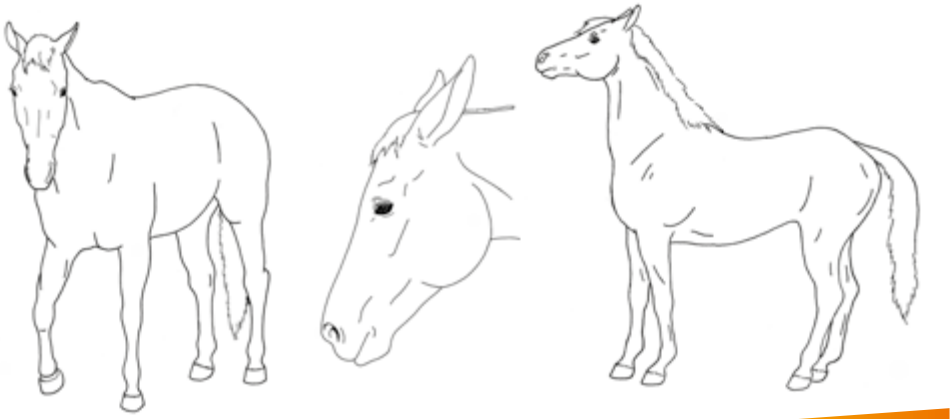
Make the distinction between aggression and excitement. Excited animals are not trying to threaten.

Negative excitement (see below) also has high arousal, but is accompanied with negative emotion.

High arousal states are not conducive to handling activities. Does the mentee facilitate calm before progressing?

YELLOW ZONE

Anxiety & mild / moderate fear (frozen/fidgety)



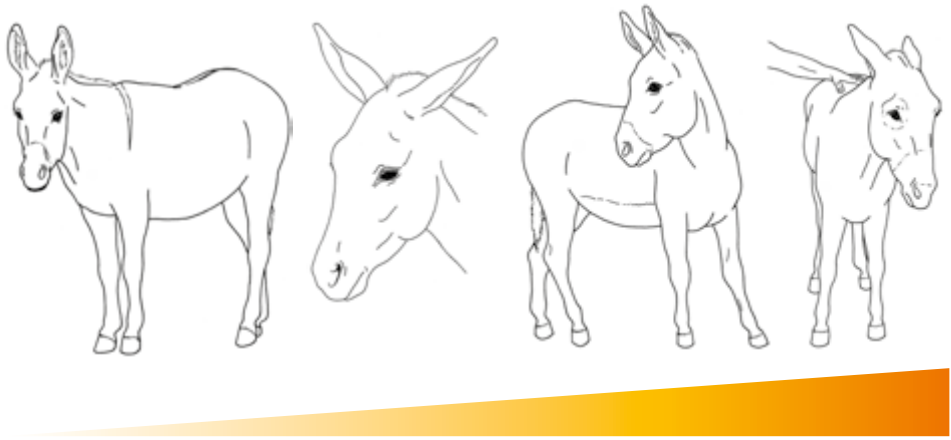
Illustrations: Cade Torchia / © Brooke

Mild fear ..... *Moderate fear*

- **Posture**
  - Weight leans forwards, backwards or sidewards
  - Frozen and braced
  - Rear leg anchored back
  - Backs up slowly
  - Hesitant movement
  - Quick, small movements of feet
  - Paws ground
- **Neck/Head**
  - Muscle tension in neck
  - Neck arched
  - Head and neck raised above withers (horse)
  - Head and neck may be raised above or below withers (donkey)
  - Bobs head (quick up and down movement) (horse)
- **Tail**
  - Tail raised at base (horse)
  - Tail clamped / tucked under
  - Tail swishes
- **Ears**
  - Stiffly erect and forwards
  - Backwards – not pinned
  - To the side – tips wide apart
  - Move back and forth
- **Eyes**
  - Triangular shape
  - Wrinkles above eye
  - Pupils dilated

YELLOW ZONE

Anxiety & mild / moderate fear (frozen/fidgety)



Illustrations: Cade Torcivia / © Brooke

Mild fear ..... *Moderate fear*

- **Mouth/Nose**
  - Closed
  - Lips tight with wrinkles
  - Muzzle flat
  - Nostrils tense, elongated or flared
  - Air scents
  - Lick and chew
  - Nips / mouthy
- **Attention**
  - All senses on alert
  - Hard to break focus or shift attention
  - Loss of appetite or snatches at food

Note: the animal may not display all these signs

(Foster, 2016)

MENTOR TIPS

Draw mentee's attention to yellow zone behaviours to enable earlier recognition of anxiety and fear.

Does the mentee adapt handling practices if signs of anxiety or mild-moderate fear (yellow zone behaviour) observed:

- Facilitating calm attention before continuing with handling or training.

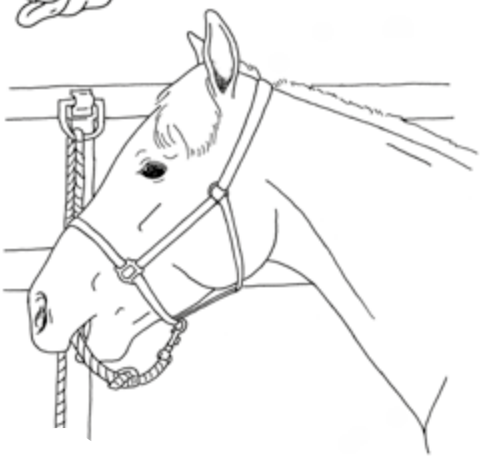
And recognise:

- This helps prevent escalation to avoidance, flight or fight defensive responses
- Responding early protects welfare by reducing stress and maintaining confidence in handlers.

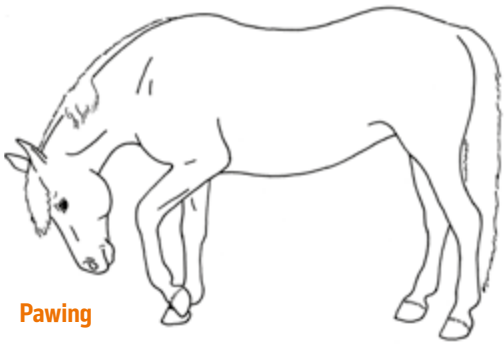
YELLOW ZONE

Displacement / stress behaviours

Licking



Non-nutritive chewing



Pawing

Licking and non-nutritive chewing, mouthing, yawning, pawing, head turn away (not shown).

Displacement activities occur when an animal is highly motivated for two or more conflicting behaviours or is blocked from performing a strongly motivated behaviour.

These behaviours indicate stress.

Yawning

MENTOR TIPS

Discuss triggers which may be causing these behaviours.

Frustrated animals may show similar behaviours.

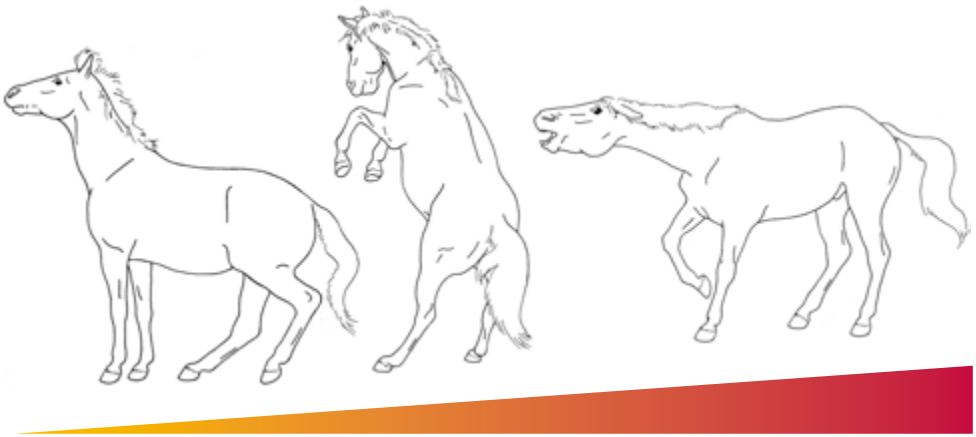
Frustration can arise unintentionally during compassionate handling if positive anticipation expectations are blocked – e.g. delaying or withholding a food reward during positive reinforcement.

Illustrations: Cade Torchia / © Brooke

Everyday actions shape lifelong welfare – every working equid needs to feel safe in human hands.

RED ZONE

Severe fear (flight/fight)



Illustrations: Cade Torchia / © Brooke

Severe fear ..... *Severe fear with aggression*

Posture

Spins and moves away
Animated movements
Barges forwards
Rushes backwards
Lunges forward
Rears
Kick threats / kicks

Neck/Head

Tosses head
Head held very high – nose pointed upwards
Head held low – tucked and forward
Tense neck and facial muscles

Tail

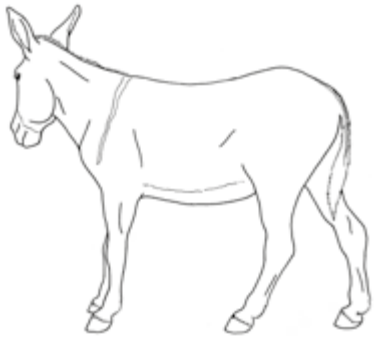
Tail raised at base and held high (horse)
Tail clamped
Tail swishes violently

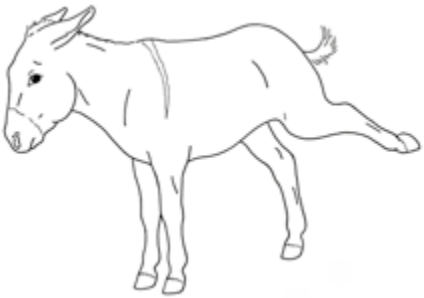
Mouth/Nose

Closed with tight lips
Corners of mouth pulled back with mouth open (NOT a bite threat)*
Teeth exposed
Bite threat
Nostrils wide or narrowed

RED ZONE

Severe fear (flight/fight)





Illustrations: Cade Torcivia / © Brooke

Severe fear ..... *Severe fear with aggression*

- **Ears**
  - Held stiffly back or to the side
  - Pinned back to the head
- **Eyes**
  - Sclera (white) visible
  - Wide open or partially closed
  - Muscles above eyes tense
- **Attention**
  - Takes action to flee or fight
  - Unable to eat

Note: the animal may not display all these signs

(Foster, 2016)

MENTOR TIPS

If red zone behaviours are observed, it is likely that yellow indicators were not observed or responded to appropriately.

Stop and re-evaluate approach if signs of severe fear (red zone behaviour) observed.

- This reduces the risk of injury, distress and breakdown in trust.
- Repeated exposure to fear can lead to chronic stress, learned helplessness and long-term welfare compromise

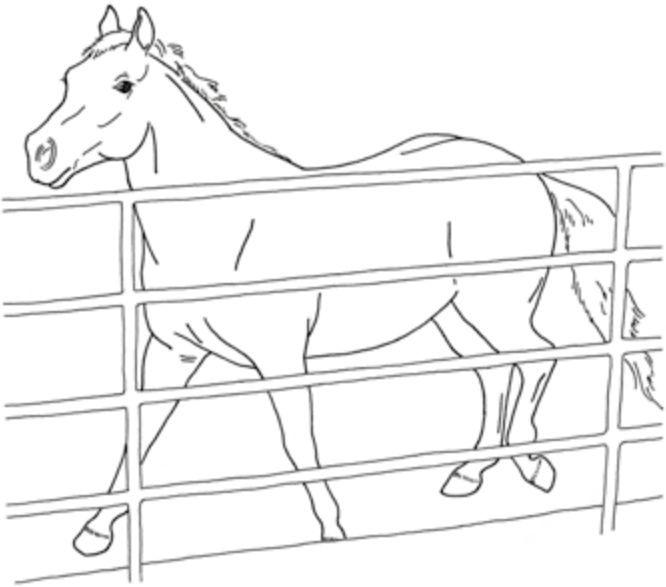
Does the mentee recognise the difference between fear and other high arousal states e.g. excitement and play?

RED ZONE

Negative Excitement / Distress

May show restlessness, tension, vocalisation, escape attempts, attempt to seek comfort (usually with other animals)

When equines cannot evade pain or aversive experiences such as separation from foal / friend they become distressed.



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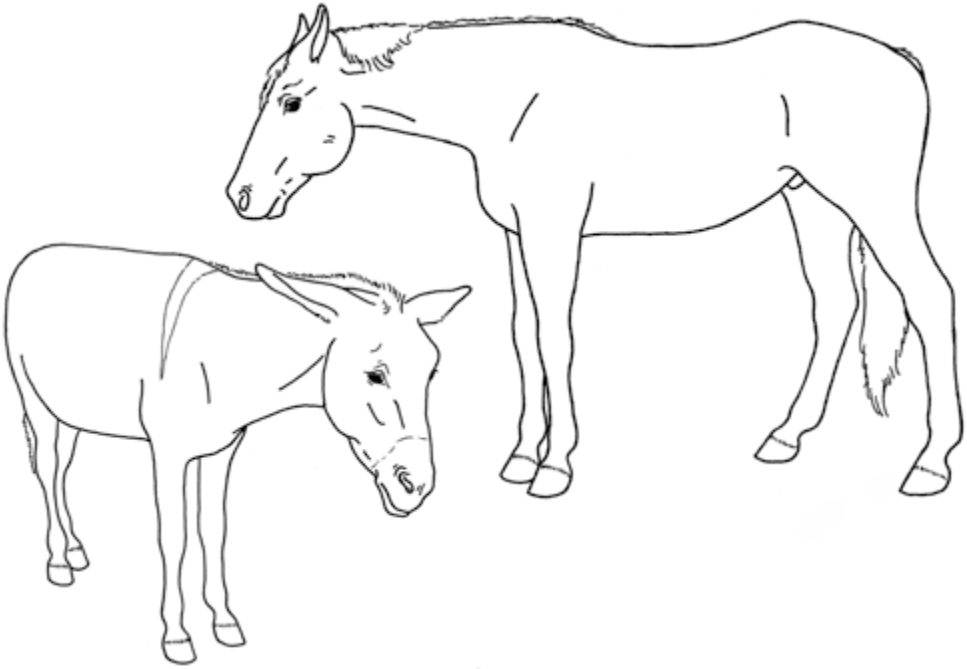
MENTOR TIPS

Make the distinction between aggression and distress. Distressed animals are not trying to threaten.

RED ZONE

Learned Helplessness



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A long-term mood state.

Learned helplessness is a psychological state where an animal learns they have no control over unpleasant or harmful conditions, their actions are futile, they are helpless.

The animal is passive, withdrawn, de-motivated and depressed with unnatural disinterest and reduced reactivity to their surroundings. Although the animal may appear compliant, these behaviours indicate poor welfare.

Animals experiencing learned helplessness show motivational, cognitive, and emotional deficits.

MENTOR TIPS

Does the mentee recognise the high negative welfare impact associated with learned helplessness?

Does the mentee recognise that practices which induce or are likely to induce learned helplessness are unacceptable?

Discuss how the appearance of compliance is very different from a happy animal who is relaxed and participating willingly in tasks.

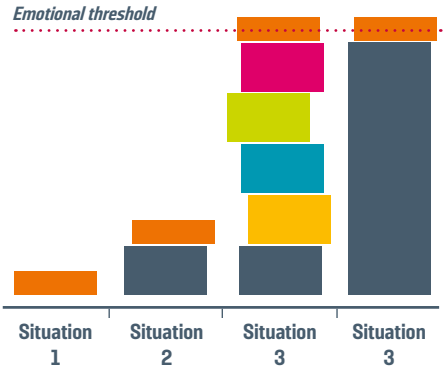
Trigger Stacking

Trigger stacking happens when multiple stressors (even mild ones) occur close together, adding up to overwhelm an animal's ability to cope.

Emotional threshold is the point at which an animal shifts from tolerating a situation to reacting — often with flight, fight, or freeze behaviours.

Recognising early signs of stress and reducing triggers can help prevent escalation.

Each animal's threshold is individual and shaped by health, history, and context.



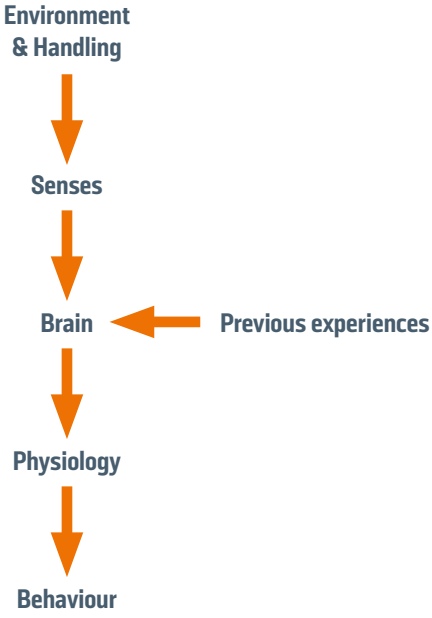
MENTOR TIPS

Does the mentee identify triggers and act to reduce them?

Human, animal and environmental factors

Root causes of behaviours in handling contexts should be identified by considering **human**, **animal** and **environmental** factors.

Understanding the 'why' behind behaviour supports effective, compassionate interaction to both addressing unwanted and facilitating wanted behaviours.



Human

Consider impact of:

Human attitude

- Calm, patient, kind, emotionally regulated
  vs. Impatient, insensitive, fearful, domineering, reactive
- Sees equines as sentient, capable of emotion and pain
  vs. Views them as tools, disregards emotional needs

Human aptitude

- Skilled, experienced, safe handler
  vs. Unskilled or inexperienced
- Ethological needs understood
  vs. Ethological needs overlooked or misunderstood
- Links behaviour to life experience and holistic welfare
  vs. Misses context of behaviour or focuses only on physical signs

Human actions

- Clear, consistent signals
  vs. Mixed, confusing cues
- Gentle, minimal pressure
  vs. Force or coercion
- Reward-based handling
  vs. Punishment or intimidation
- Minimal restraint
  vs. Aversive restraint
- Takes time
  vs. Rushes or forces
- Calm voice, space
  vs. Loud, threatening, crowding
- Predictable, steady movements
  vs. Sudden or erratic actions

Human emotional regulation

- Stays calm, patient, consistent
  vs. Acts on frustration, impatient, reactive

Animal

Consider impact of:

1 / Cognition
2 / Motivation
3 / Ethology
4 / Trauma history

1 / Cognition

Cognition describes mental capacity and includes sensing, perception, attention, learning, memory, decision-making, and action.

Understanding the mental capabilities of equines helps inform our interactions and training to be effective and humane.

Cognition - Sensation and Perception:

Senses

Equids receive information about their environment through their senses: vision, hearing, olfaction, taste, and touch. How this information is interpreted and experienced is called perception. Perception is shaped by experience, knowledge, and attention.

Brain ← **Previous experiences**

Vision

- **Wide panoramic view – broad but restricted above and below (visual strip).**
- **Narrow binocular field and depth perception.**
- **Head movement adjusts visual field**
  - Allowing head movement can reduce full-body movement in response to visual stimuli.
- **Excellent motion detection.**
  - Equine may orientate towards motion to evaluate, and/or may show rapid flight response.
  - Sudden actions may be interpreted as threats.
- **Good low light vision; difficulty transitioning between light/dark.**
  - Allow time when moving between light/dark environments.
- **Recognise pattens and outlines.**
  - Changes in environment increase vigilance.
- **Poor acuity.**
- **Red-green colour blind.**

Hearing

- **Ears move independently ~180˚ to locate multiple sounds.**
- **Hear higher frequencies and lower volumes than humans.**
- **High acuity.**
- **Sudden/loud noises may trigger stress.**

Olfaction

- **Highly developed; detect low/non-volatile molecules.**
- **Strongly linked to emotion and memory.**
- **Unfamiliar/predator odours may elicit vigilance or flight.**

Taste

- **Detect sweet, sour, salty, bitter (umami unclear).**
- **Nutrient content main driver for diet choice.**

Touch

- Skin is the largest sensory organ – highly sensitive.
- Respond to unpleasant touch with tail swishing, skin twitching, ear flicking, head shaking, stomping.
- Common communication method between handler and equine
  - Positive tactile contact can reinforce behaviour – but varies by individual and context.
  - Rough handling causes pain, fear and distress.
  - Repeated aversive contact can lead to learned helplessness.

Cognition - Attention, Learning and Memory:

Equids learn through experience, observation, and emotional context. Ethology (natural behaviour – see next section) informs how and what they learn.

- Relaxed, focused attention supports learning.
- Use short manageable training sessions.
- Focused attention on threat narrows perception and blocks other stimuli – blocking learning and handling cues.
- Learn both intended and unintended associations (events close in time).
- Stress increases fear conditioning.
- Stress, tiredness, malnutrition or pain reduce attention and learning ability.
- Emotional states significantly influence behaviour and learning.
- High arousal may hinder learning during handling, even if emotion is positive.
- Equids are sensitive to human and equine emotional states.
- Fear can rapidly spread between equids.
- Strong memory of individuals, locations, and past events.
- Long memory for both positive and negative experiences. Negative past experiences can cause lasting fear of places, people, or procedures.
- Can generalise (e.g. fear of all vets) and discriminate (e.g. subtle cues).

Cognition – Decision Making and Action:

- Determined by perception of situation, psychological and emotional state, and prior experiences.
- Influenced by reward or cost, environmental factors, individual differences.
- Difference in brain structure sizes mean we should not assume human-like reasoning.

MENTOR TIPS

Does the mentee:

Adapt handling and training to equine mental and sensory abilities.

Avoid harmful assumptions about cognitive capabilities.

Recognise sensory thresholds and responses vary between individuals.

Recognise equines interpret human attention and intent using multisensory information.

Read equine behaviour to assess whether an interaction is perceived as positive, negative, or neutral.

Recognise welfare depends on equine perception – well intended handling can cause harm if the animal experiences it negatively.

Stay mindful of the equid's past experiences and current emotional state.

2 / Motivation

Motivation drives behaviour to meet needs or avoid threats. It includes biological, emotional, social and cognitive forces. It is influenced by arousal, environment, emotion, past experiences, and species-specific needs. Motivation varies by task, context, and prior experience.

MENTOR TIPS

Does the mentee:

Consider what the equid may want to gain, protect, or avoid.

Consider how past experiences shape motivation.

Evaluate motivation to engage in handling interaction and how to improve it:

- **Use motivation to influence behaviour positively.**
- **Recognise negative influences and address them.**

Factors influencing cognition and motivation:

Physiological & Psychological Factors

- **Life experience outside handling interaction.**
  - Sleep deprivation, chronic stress, pain, diet impact performance.
- **Experience during interaction.**
  - Pain, discomfort, or confusion reduce motivation and attention.
- **Emotional state.**
- **Psychological state.**
  - Shaped by gene-environment (including handling) interactions.
  - Mood determines how animals perceive and respond.

Handling & Reinforcement

- **Reinforcers only work if the equid is appropriately motivated.**
  - There may be high motivation for a specific reinforcer (e.g. green fodder).
- **Positive reinforcement:**
  - Builds positive emotion.
  - Enhances learning and reduces stress.
  - Strengthens long-term relationships with handlers.
- **Negative reinforcement or punishment:**
  - Can trigger negative emotions and anticipatory stress.
  - May cause animals to fear handlers or environments.
  - Can block problem-solving and learning.
- **Increasing restraint escalates fear and avoidance.**

Task complexity

- **Match training / task to cognitive ability.**
- **Confidence and motivation build with gradual, achievable tasks.**

3 / Ethology

Ethology is the study of natural species behaviour. It helps assess welfare and understand how natural behaviours influence handling. Mismatches between management and behavioural needs cause stress. Equids show flight, fight, or freeze behaviours as survival responses — all are signs of fear.

Horses

- Non-territorial, grazing prey animals.
- Use flight first; fight if escape is blocked.
- Neophobic, quick to react.
- Complex social lives with long-term bonds.
- Cooperative, show reconciliation.

Donkeys

- Territorial, grazing prey animals.
- Subtle flight; may freeze or fight more readily than horses.
- More solitary; strong domestic pair bonds.
- Stoicism helps avoid predation – but does not mean donkeys feel less pain or distress.

Mules

- Hybrid vigour physically and mentally.
- Show hybrid behaviours of horses and donkeys - may switch between behaviours quickly.
- High self-preservation.
- Highly trainable and quick to learn.

MENTOR TIPS

Discuss how natural behaviours affect handling.

Explore how unmet behavioural needs in daily life cause handling problems.

Discuss how to work with, not against, natural equid behavioural tendencies.

4 / Trauma history

Trauma involves exposure to emotionally painful and distressing experiences, that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope *(Rousseau 2019)*.

Types of trauma:

- **Acute – one traumatic event threatening wellbeing.**
- **Chronic – ongoing over time.**
- **Complex – multiple, varied traumatic events over time.**

Trauma, especially if prolonged or repeated, causes neurobiological changes in the brain. It can alter how fear is experienced physiologically, making it more intense, prolonged, or easily triggered. Behavioural changes often include hypervigilance, heightened anxiety, fear of new triggers, learned helplessness.

MENTOR TIPS

Draw attention to likely or known traumas when mentee considers the impact of quality of life and lifetime experience on current interaction.

Environment

Create a safe and calm environment before starting any handling. Equines use cues in the environment to predict whether something pleasant or threatening may occur. Animals learn to anticipate events and will start to react sooner, in response to antecedent cues.

Make any necessary changes or move to another area to improve safety and reduce exposure to aversive stimuli.

Aim to keep the equine as calm as possible by:

- Eliminating stressful antecedent cues.
- Adding calming antecedent cues.
- Avoid sensitising the animal to new environmental cues.
- Desensitising the animal to feared environmental cues (see next section).

The best area to work in is a large, enclosed space with good footing and headroom.

Consider the following: Absence of threats, impact of space, sensory inputs, light intensity/ changes in light, shade, noise, distractions, unfamiliarity, traffic, crowds, other animals – emotional states are socially facilitated (contagious) between equines.

Set up the environment to minimise negative consequences if fear is experienced i.e. to avoid collisions, slipping, falling, unsafe positioning.

MENTOR TIPS

Discuss environmental factors that may cause undesirable behaviours.

Discuss opportunities for the environment to generate positive emotional states or facilitate handling by promoting desirable behaviours.

Discuss modifications of the environment and/or handling interaction.

Compassionate Handler

Introduction

We influence animals' experiences to train them. Training typically involves encouraging behaviours humans consider desirable and reducing those humans consider undesirable, even if these are innate to the animal.

Emphasis is placed on establishing desirable behaviour patterns for the animal (and sometimes the human) rather than focussing on eliminating undesirable behaviour.

A stimulus is any detectable change in the animal's environment. An aversive stimulus is described below as a 'trigger'.

A response is any behaviour or physiological event.

Core behaviour modification techniques described below may be used both for short-term impact and long-term, sustained change.

Decision making is guided by individual assessment of:

- Human – observation skills, practical skills (e.g. timing), psychological regulation.
- Equine – previous learning, fear reactivity, motivation.
- Situation – needs, environment, timescale.
- Consideration of short-term and long-term solution options.

Setting up for success

Behaviour modification techniques described below should be used in conjunction with Animal Welfare Advocate and Equine Behaviour Expert sections above. Techniques are described are not exhaustive.

It is important for the handlers as well as observers to remain patient, calm, relaxed, and methodical.

The animal's ability to move, even slightly, typically reduces the risk of escape or defensive aggression responses.

MENTOR TIPS

Encourage handling interactions to be a conversation with the animal, not application of a method.

Does the mentee understand that equines are sentient and capable of suffering and experience positive emotions?

Does the mentee know handling options and when to use them?

Do they have the practical skills to enact them?

Can they assimilate all information and make a judgement?

Systematic Desensitisation (SD)

How SD can help:

- Reduces learned fear and neutralise negative emotional response.
- Reduces sensitivity to a trigger.

How to use SD:

- Expose relaxed animal (green zone) to low doses of trigger.
- Uses gradual low intensity stimuli exposure in small steps – stay in green zone.
- Does not require food (or other reward).

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MENTOR TIPS

Requires good observational skill of equid behaviour.

Increase one criteria at a time (distance, intensity, duration).

If anxiety or fear behaviour is triggered, return to an earlier step where the animal is relaxed (green zone behaviours) and progress more gradually.

Poorly applied SD can result in flooding and learned helplessness.

To avoid flooding: use titration (very small steps) during shaping, and pendulation (frequent returns to a relaxed state by repeating an easy step or allowing eating / movement), rather than continuously increasing difficulty.

Counter-conditioning (CC)

How CC can help:

- Replaces a negative response to a trigger with a positive response.
- Changes in emotional response creates a behaviour change.

How to use CC:

- Pair trigger and food (or other pleasant stimulus) at same time.
- Use gradual low intensity stimuli exposure in small steps – stay in green zone.

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MENTOR TIPS

Attention to emotional thresholds imperative which requires good observation skill of equid behaviour.

Likely more powerful than SD.

CC is different from distraction. During distraction a trigger is not noticed by the animal because there is a more noticeable distraction is the environment. Distraction can be used as part of an emergency technique. During CC the animal is aware of the trigger and is learning it is paired with something positive.

Reinforcement (R+/-)

How R+/- can help:

- Helps animal learn new behaviours / maintain learned behaviours.
- Behaviour that leads to pleasant consequences is more likely repeated in the future.
- Enables animals to associate events over which they have control.

How to use R+/-:

Present reward or omit pressure when the animal makes a specific response. The likelihood of an association arising depends on the timing between the behavioural response and the reward.

Positive reinforcement (R+)

Addition of a positive outcome (food / scratches) to strengthen behaviour response, given soon after the behaviour is performed.

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Negative reinforcement (R-)

Removal of a negative outcome to strengthen a behaviour response. E.g. pressure-release – removing a signal (cue) such as lead rein pressure the moment an unwanted behaviour stops or a desired behaviour occurs.

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Consideration of the type of reinforcer is important (e.g. palatable food that is not often part of the equid's diet). It is necessary to obtain the same results in multiple locations for the behaviour to become generalised and for context specificity to be overcome.

Once a behaviour is consistently elicited as a response, the desired behaviour can then be rewarded (R+) intermittently.

Often combined with shaping when training.

Animals trained with positive reinforcement:

- Learn more quickly.
- Retain the learned tasks longer.
- Experience less stress.
- React to humans more positively.

Negative reinforcement can be an effective strategy for short term quick behaviour modification.

MENTOR TIPS

Encourage setting situation up for success to make it easy for the animal to do the right thing.

Timing and consistency are key.

Minimise delays in reinforcement.

Use light signal during pressure-release.

Discuss clarity and equine's perception of the cue, response, reward.

If desired behaviour does not develop when using R- check timing of release of pressure.

A high rate of R+ can help avoid errors during learning.

If a reward (R+) is omitted entirely once a desired behaviour is established, extinction of the behaviour is risked. This can be avoided by rewarding chains of behaviours.

Problem behaviours can persist because they are accidentally reinforced.

Constructional Approach (CA)

How CA can help:

- Helpful with fearful animals.
- Helpful when the animal is threatened by approach.

How to use CA:

- The trigger of fear is presented under the equine's level of anxiety – at a distance where they are aware of its presence but do not feel the need to move to attain greater distance.
- Then wait for the equine to offer an alternative behaviour (relaxing, disengaging with the trigger).
- Then reward by removing the trigger or moving away from the trigger.
- Adaptable – can be done in any situation.
- Do not need rewards like food.

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MENTOR TIPS

This is an advanced technique as handlers need to be very responsive to behavioural cues.

Extinction (not usually recommended)

How it can help:

- Removing beneficial result for an unwanted behaviour.
- Extinction of the unwanted behaviour occurs eventually if the learned behaviour occurs but is no longer followed by reinforcement.

Considerations for use:

- If association is strong this may require a long time period and consistency.
- Equine likely to become frustrated as they do not know what behaviour is required instead.
- Equine may trial more of the undesired behaviour before giving up (extinction burst).
- If used, works best in combination with environmental modification / other techniques.

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MENTOR TIPS

Counter-conditioning is more effective.

Extinction can apply to any behaviour that occurs and is no longer reinforced. Both desired and undesired behaviours will weaken in the absence of reinforcement.

Flooding (not recommended)

- Traumatic.
- Equid cannot escape and directly exposed to feared stimulus.
- Can result in:
  - Freeze behaviour.
  - Explosive flight or fight behaviour.

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MENTOR TIPS

Can happen accidentally e.g. during attempted SD.

Can be effective but not acceptable due to ethical concerns.

Punishment (not recommended)

Mistreated animals often learn to fear the handler or location, rather than associating punishment with a particular behaviour.

Confusion and flight responses are more common than useful learned associations.

Handler actions can be perceived as punitive even if not intended that way.

General principles

Shaping

How shaping can help:

- General principle that can be applied to multiple techniques e.g. SD, CC, R+, R–.
- Allows handler to move from a situation where it is impossible to reinforce a desired response (because that response never occurs) to one where the response is occurring, being reinforced, and increasing in reliability.

Considerations for use:

- Break down training into the smallest achievable steps and progressively reinforce each step towards the desired behaviour.
- Begin several steps before the point of the problem.
- Avoid too fast, too big steps.
- Don't always ask for more – use mini breaks and sandwich easier/earlier steps.
- Change the context one step at a time (people / place / signal).
- Reward target behaviour as soon as they appear. Any delay in rewarding the improvement will lessen the effect.

Timing

How timing can help:

- General principle that can be applied to multiple techniques e.g. SD, R+, R–, CA.
- Helps reinforcement of desired behaviours.

Considerations for use:

- Make sure reinforcement is associated with the behaviour you want.
- Be quick to respond to subtle shifts in the animal's behaviour.
- Consistency.
- Predictability.

Handling techniques

Cues

How cues can help:

- A goal of training is to establish signals (cues) that result in predictable behaviour patterns.

Considerations for use:

- Ensure the animal can distinguish one signal from another.
- Ensure each signal (cue) only has one meaning.
- Time signals with limb biomechanics.
- Avoid the use of more than one signal (cue) at one time.

MENTOR TIPS

Would refinement of shaping, timing or cues aid human-animal communication?

Human Psychological Skills

The ability to recognise and manage own feelings and recognise and respond effectively to those of others – people and animals.

Emotional regulation

- Modulate own actions triggered by emotions.
- Pursue handling goals flexibly.
- Adapt approach in response to equine / situation.

Equine awareness

- Active listening – to equine.
- Perceive equine emotion.
- Care what equine is experiencing.
- Empathy.
- May require changing perspective and / or actions.

People awareness

- Active listening – to people.
- Perceive other stakeholders' emotions.
- Confidence to communicate own and animal's needs.

Human Psychological Skills (continued)

MENTOR TIPS

A mentee's positive or negative feelings can encourage or discourage their behaviours, so it's important to support a handling experience that is positive for the handler.

Mentee noticing how they feel is a helpful step towards emotional regulation:

- Awareness of own emotional state.
- Recognise how others – human and animal - influence own emotional state.
- Recognise how own behaviour impacts others – human and animal.
- Breath control can aid calmness.
- Cognitive reappraisal skills can help emotional regulation, whereby stressful situations are viewed from a new perspective, e.g. from the animal's point of view.
- Self-compassion & emotional support can aid emotional regulation.
- COM-B model can support next steps (see table below):

Capability	Physical	- Physical skills
	Psychological	- Cognitive and interpersonal skills - Knowledge - Behavioural Regulation - Memory, attention & decision processes
Opportunities	Physical	- Environmental context and resources
	Social	- Social influences
Motivation	Automatic	- Habits, routines - Emotion
	Reflective	- Beliefs about capabilities - Beliefs about consequences - Role and identity - Intentions - Optimism - Goals

COM-B model

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