

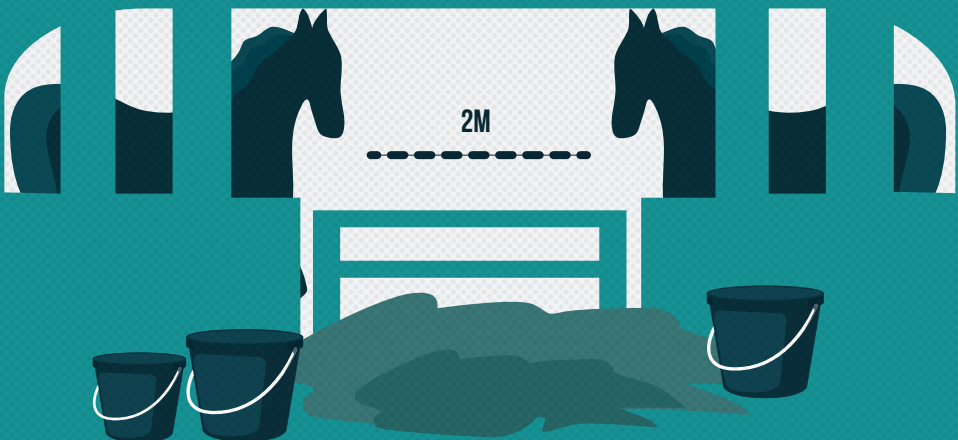


SOCIAL ISOLATION AND ANXIETY

Strength and Learning Through Horses help people to understand their own emotions and behaviours by working with horses and thinking about how human and horse behaviour and emotions are similar.

If a horse gets injured or sick we often have to separate them from their herd and confine them to their stables for weeks or months until they are healed (we call this box rest).

We've been thinking about how this separation from other horses can cause distress in horses and how this is similar to the experience of people all over the world at the moment during COVID19 lockdown. We hope our thoughts are useful in helping you cope with social distancing and stay connected during lockdown.



WHY IS FEELING CONNECTED TO OTHER PEOPLE IMPORTANT?

HORSES

Horses are herd animals, which means they naturally live in groups with other horses.



This keeps them safe from predators, as they can all keep an eye out for danger and run away together as a group.



Horses make friends with other horses, and choose who they would like to spend time with.



When a horse feels connected to another horse or a human (e.g. through grooming) it releases calming hormones which helps them feel relaxed.



It is important for a horse's wellbeing to have social contact with other horses (and humans can help too!), especially when confined to their stables.

WHY IS FEELING CONNECTED TO OTHER PEOPLE IMPORTANT?

PEOPLE

People are social animals too. Social contact is a basic human need, like sleeping and eating.



Feeling connected to other people we trust (like friends, teachers, or family) helps us to cope with difficult situations and feel safe and calm.



When we feel connected to others our body releases calming hormones that help us feel happy and relaxed.

(e.g. a chat or a hug with a friend, stroking a pet, or even looking in its eyes!)



It is important for our wellbeing to feel connected to other people (and animals can help too!), especially during lockdown.

WHY IS IT STRESSFUL TO BE SEPARATED FROM OTHER HORSES AND PEOPLE?

HORSES

Horses can feel stressed when they are confined to their stables because they have less social contact with other horses.



On their own, they can feel exposed to danger/lack protection from danger, and feel anxious.



When they are away from their friends they can become stressed and find it hard to relax.

PEOPLE

In lockdown we have less contact with people like teachers, family and friends. This can make us feel stressed because:



Coronavirus can make other people and the world feel threatening and unsafe



We can feel alone and less able to cope with difficult situations or feelings



We can't be with people who help us feel safe and relaxed

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS ON MOOD, BODY AND BEHAVIOUR?



HORSES

MOOD

Feeling anxious, depressed or agitated.

BEHAVIOUR

Difficulty staying still, 'spooking' (feeling very anxious) when dealing with new situations, feeling too unsafe to lie down to sleep.

BODY

Tense muscles, physical health problems (colic - stomach pain, laminitis).



PEOPLE

MOOD

Feeling anxious, depressed, overwhelmed, or irritable. Maybe you can't describe how you're feeling, or you feel 'nothing'.

BEHAVIOUR

Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much, difficulty sitting still or concentrating on work or activities, or having more or less energy than usual.

BODY

When people feel alone and anxious, the body produces stress hormones that cause increased heart rate, sweating, upset stomach, butterflies, tingling sensations, 'jittery', or feeling 'numb'.

WHAT ARE SOME LESS HELPFUL WAYS OF COPING WITH SEPARATION FROM HORSES AND PEOPLE? WHY ARE THEY UNHELPFUL?



HORSES

When horses are confined to their stables, they might develop repetitive behaviours like walking around their stables or rocking back and forth. These behaviours release calming hormones but can cause long term health problems.



PEOPLE

When we feel disconnected from others, we might do other things to try to feel calm. Sometimes these behaviours actually make us feel less connected and more anxious in the long term, like scrolling through social media, or avoiding people or situations that make us feel anxious.

WHAT ARE SOME HELPFUL WAYS OF COPING WITH SEPARATION FROM PEOPLE AND HORSES?



HORSES

Find different ways to help horses feel connected to others

1

Humans can be good company for horses in some ways. Grooming the horse on can be a nice way to calm them through physical touch and build trust in the person grooming them.

2

Bring other horses into nearby stables so at least they can see one another.

3

A stable mirror - horses do not recognise themselves in a mirror, so some can be fooled into thinking they have a friend with them if we put a mirror up in their stable.

4

Distraction - keeping them busy so they don't spend too long thinking about what their friends might be doing without them, we might hide food around the stable, or leave the radio playing.

5

Make the space as comfortable and safe feeling as possible, they are more likely to feel like they need their friends if they don't feel safe.



PEOPLE

Feeling connected to one person (or even a pet) can help us feel safer and more relaxed. We can connect to other people in lots of ways, even with social distancing. Try:

- 1** Phone or video calls – we feel more connected if we can hear someone’s voice or see their face.
- 2** Talking about your feelings. Some people find this easier over the phone or when they’re doing something – walking, making something, or doing the dishes.
- 3** Doing something fun with another person – like playing a game or dancing to a song (online or offline).
- 4** Physical contact – like hugging a person or stroking a pet.
- 5** Reach out to someone you’ve not heard from in a while. This can feel scary, but can be very rewarding - they might be feeling bored, worried or frustrated too.
- 6** Taking care of yourself to feel more connected with your body and more relaxed – stick to a routine and look after your basic needs to eat, exercise, sleep, and shower. Do something nice for yourself each day, like giving yourself a head massage.



WATCH OUR VIDEO HERE

<https://youtu.be/g4Q4vWwckX8>