

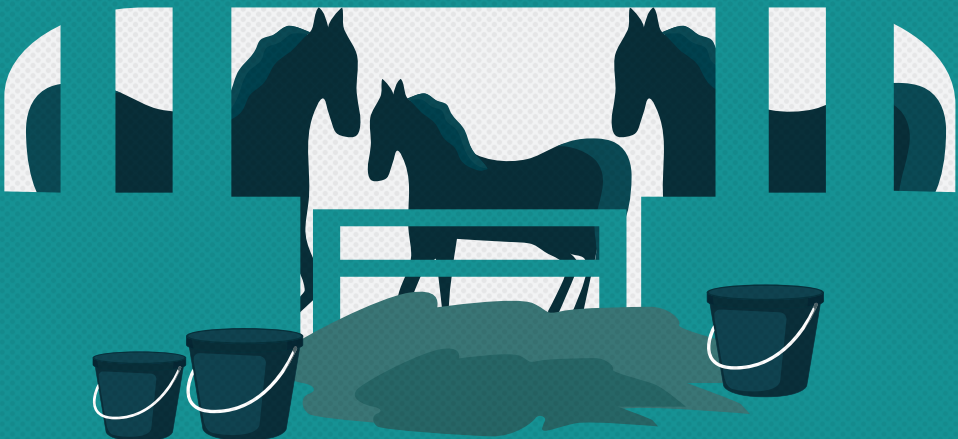


MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS

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 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 confinement can cause tension and conflict between horses and between horses and people, and how this is similar to the experience of people all over the world at the moment during COVID19 lockdown. We hope the thoughts are useful in helping you think about and manage any tension and conflicts with people you live with during lockdown.



WHAT MAKES OVERCROWDING AND LACK OF SPACE STRESSFUL IN LOCKDOWN?

HORSES

Horses are herd animals and live in groups. This helps them feel safe from predators. However, horses are used to being in big open spaces where they can:



See danger coming



Run away from threats (flight response)



Choose who to spend time with and when

Spending a lot of time in a stable can be stressful because:



They can't see through stable walls



They have less choice about who to spend time with and they can't get away from other horses or humans



They can't run away from danger

WHAT MAKES OVERCROWDING AND LACK OF SPACE STRESSFUL IN LOCKDOWN?

PEOPLE

People are social animals too. Being around other people and animals that we trust can help us feel safe and motivated. However, interacting with other people can also take a lot of energy, and can lead to tense situations and arguments.

People can find lockdown stressful because:



They have less choice about who to spend time with and when



They have less space, and more people wanting access to things like food, TV or internet at the same time – this can lead to tension



There is lots of information coming in about the outside world that is scary, making them feel unsafe to go out even if they can



It's more difficult to get away from tense situations with other people - this can lead to more arguments and conflict



They can't do the things that normally help them deal with stress – like routine, or doing things that are fun, relaxing or rewarding

WHAT MIGHT WE NOTICE ABOUT PEOPLE'S MOOD, BEHAVIOUR AND BODIES?



HORSES

MOOD

Feeling claustrophobic, anxious, and irritable

BEHAVIOUR

More aggressive behaviour (kicking, biting, shoving), or pushing into pressure or people and horses (fight response to threat). OR 'zoning out' from social interactions, standing at the back of the stable, showing no interest in interacting with horses or people.

BODY

Fight response - Heavy breathing, tense muscles, diarrhea, tense jaw, ears back.

Freeze response - horses stay at the back of the stable and don't interact with others as their response.



PEOPLE

MOOD

Feeling more anxious or irritable than usual, or feeling numb or depressed.

BEHAVIOUR

More aggressive behaviour (fight response to threat), OR interacting/talking less, 'zoning out' (freeze response to threat). Staying indoors more (because the outside world is more threatening than usual).

BODY

Fight response - clenching jaw or fists, grinding teeth, increased heart rate, sweating, feeling hot, shaking or trembling, feeling dizzy, headache or stomach ache

Freeze response - Feeling cold or numb, muscles feel stiff or heavy, holding breath, heart beating faster or slower. Feeling less able to talk or move. Sometimes people feel like they are watching themselves from the outside.

WHEN PEOPLE'S BODIES RESPOND WITH FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSES, IT IS THE BODY TRYING TO PROTECT THEM FROM THREAT, WHEN IT CAN'T USE THE FLIGHT RESPONSE (RUNNING AWAY)

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LESS HELPFUL WAYS OF MANAGING OVERCROWDING AND TENSION? WHY ARE THEY UNHELPFUL?

HORSES

Horses might try to protect themselves and their personal space by:



Intimidating or aggressive behaviour, like biting or kicking or threatening to bite or kick – this might make others give them space but might lead to negative consequences for the horse like punishment or getting kicked or bitten back by another horse.



Withdrawing, avoiding or ignoring people and horses completely – this might help avoid interactions, but the horse might feel lonely or depressed and might miss out on activities it does enjoy or need such as eating if it's food is near other horses or people and looking out of the stable window.

PEOPLE

People might try to protect themselves and their personal space by:



Withdrawing, avoiding or ignoring people completely – this might help avoid arguments, but might leave you feeling lonely



Being snappy or irritable with others



Intimidating or aggressive behaviour, like shouting or hitting or kicking out – this might make others back off but usually leads to people getting upset or hurt.

WHAT ARE SOME HELPFUL WAYS OF COPING WITH OVERCROWDING AND TENSION?



HORSES

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Take the horse for a walk if possible - aggressive behaviour always reduces after exercise

BOUNDARIES

Make some rules to respect horse's space – draw a chalk line outside stable door that people aren't allowed to cross (so the horse can put its head outside the door without people walking into its space)

Be aware of our own body space and respect their space. Horses might be grumpier when confined in the stable, and it might be better not to crowd them when we are moving around them doing stable chores.

Increase number of viewpoints in the stable (windows and doors)

Lower our expectations of horses behaviour and learning when confined to the stable. Now is not the time to insist they engage with learning a difficult new task or learn to interact with a new horse or person who they don't get on well with or trust.

DE-ESCALATION

Constantly observe the horse's behaviour and body language for signs it is getting unhappy about social interactions and aim to do something about it BEFORE the horse feels like it has to resort to aggressive behaviour.

E.G. Aim to move out of the horse's space and give it a break as soon as it shows tense muscles instead of waiting until it is trying to bite or kick you.



PEOPLE ARE BEST ABLE TO MAINTAIN POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WHEN THEY:



- Have some choice about who to spend time with and when
- Can get away from interactions with other people when they feel frustrated, anxious or upset (flight response to threat)
- Have some access to a quiet space where they can relax and recharge

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

1

Try to do some exercise every day. When we feel stressed, our body produces stress hormones that get stuck inside us and make us feel anxious and/or depressed. Exercise allows your body to get rid of stress hormones and make hormones that help us feel happier and more relaxed.

2

Breathing exercises are a great way to help your body feel safe and calm. Try breathing in normally and then breathing out as hard and as much as you can – this forces stress hormones out of the body and can reduce anxiety and irritation.



BOUNDARIES

1

Make a rota for TV, cooking, cleaning - this helps prevent arguments about who does what and when.

2

When everyone is calm, agree 1) a word or phrase anyone can use to let others know they need some time out 2) a space they can go where other people will respect their space like a room, a chair facing a window, or out for a walk if you can.

DE-ESCALATION

3

Try to look out for signs of frustration or stress in your body and other people's bodies, like tense muscles or being snappy. Try changing the topic or signaling time out BEFORE people start shouting. This can help take the heat out of the situation and stop it getting worse.

4

Try to give other people space when they are feeling frustrated

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

5

Call, text or email a friend or a helpline, especially if you feel unsafe The **YoungMinds Crisis Messenger text service** provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK.

If you are experiencing a **mental health crisis and need support, you can text YM to 85258.**

Or call Childline on for free support on 08001111



WATCH OUR VIDEO HERE:

youtube.com/watch?v=6bPuo1y9adU&feature=youtu.be