

ENGAGING THE CHILD RIDER

With
Chameleon Coaching



Elena Shved

BY ANNYKA OVERTON

FOREWARD

This book is designed to give you some ideas on how to pass on your own personal knowledge, experience, wisdom and skills you have to children in a fun and engaging manner. It here to offer more insight on HOW to teach what you already know. How to express you knowledge and ideas in such a way, your learners take up your information like a sponge, and know it in their gut. They take your knowledge and skills away from a session with courage and enthusiasm. They come to you each week growing in ability and self. As you scroll through these pages you will get a deeper insight into how our young people learn, and how we can best serve their needs

Everybody has slightly different schooling techniques and cues to educate horses. Whether your coaching young riders in a dressage, cutting, natural horsemanship, eventing or trail riding background, what drives our little learners doesn't change - only the saddle might. Our young riders are looking for connection and belonging. They want to develop relationships, challenge themselves, go on adventures, strive for success and gain respect and recognition. Young riders might find that in a dressage arena, on the racetrack or on a cross country course, our job is to mentor, challenge and nurture our little peoples learning in any environment. When we use our skills in a specific discipline where we have large amounts of personal experience and expertise, our learners will grow immensely.

I believe, you can not teach children well by telling them what to do, instead children need to be placed in a safe environment where they are given tasks or challenges that call for the rider to learn a new skill in order for the task to be completed. Children need to be put in situations where they process information in their own time and in their own way. Some need verbal cueing, some need to see someone do it before they have a go, and others need to go away and play with the new information at home when no one is watching and nut stuff out themselves.

Our job is provide environments where information is readily available and in different forms so your little people can access what they need to learn, and then feel comfortable to try new things without the pressures to perform or conform!

As soon as we accept, understand and become aware of a problem, and we have enough leverage to WANT to solve the problem, our subconscious starts looking for a solution. The same applies for children. So why can't you put the answer right in front of their nose...where they can find it for themselves?

Enjoy!

Annyka Overton.
January 2019

Chapter 1

Let them know mistakes are markers of success

“The best way to succeed is double your failure rate”

Thomas Watson

This is huge! And, why I have placed it first in order. We all make mistakes, no one is perfect, and quite frankly, who would want to be anyway. We can't avoid ever making them, as in order to try something new we need to initially go through a period of learning. In the learning stage not only do we start to cognitively process the consequences of our actions, both good and bad, but we also link loads of information to certain actions. This information is what we fall back on each time we attempt that new skill, exercise or task. The more information we have surrounding that action, both what works to make it successful and what doesn't the more likely we are to do that action well in the future.

In order to not make mistakes in competition, we need to make them while schooling

Allowing ourselves or our riders to be OK with making mistakes can be hard. We have grown up with the belief that making a mistake means “You're not good enough”, or “You're a failure”, or “Others are better than you”. To see them in a new light where each and every mistake has something to teach you, something to give you it can only make you a better rider in the end means that you are growing and willing to do whatever it takes to improve.

If riders are scared of making a mistake, they will either procrastinate, blame something or someone else, or not do it at all!

By accepting the fact that we don't know everything, and there is always more to learn, but in order to learn we need to go through a period of discomfort, creates a willingness to keep getting back on even when it feels hard. We start to look for that discomfort when we realise that at the end of that uncomfortable period is understanding and growth

Like Thomas Edison said. *"I have not failed. I've simply just found 10,000 ways that won't work"*.

How you can help

After the initial mistake or perceived "failure", let them discuss how it made them feel, judge not their feelings, simply let them talk it through. Then ask them -

- What else could we make that event mean?
- How is this moving you towards where you are wanting to go?
- What do I know now that I didn't know before?
- How does knowing this help me?

They can be tough questions to answer initially, especially for teenagers, but with a bit of practice this can be an enjoyable experience. You'll have to trust me on this one :)

I often tell my students:

*You are **not** paying me to tell you all about the wonderful things that you already know you can do, I'm here to find the gaps, find the bits that have been hiding, and then support you through the process of bringing them into the light so we can make them better.*

That means, I'm gonna find the gaps! And when we do, we're going to get excited!!! Together we are going to keep looking for as many gaps in our understanding and ability as we can, in order to improve.

We are on the lookout for when they are about to learn something they didn't know before, and be able to do something they didn't know they could. How wonderful...

Throughout this process it is important to support and champion the students as they work through a difficult skill, and acknowledge effort as much as achievement.

It's also important that your little riders know, that everything you know and do now, was learnt by making mistakes, listening and absorbing information from others, and repeatedly attempting skills taking mental notes each time.

You weren't born knowing all this stuff. You had to learn it too.

Tell them about your role models and coaches from when you were younger. If you learnt something by making the mistake, tell them about that too. It helps them to know that making mistakes, and being OK with not knowing everything is what is going to make them a better rider in the future.

Discuss some of the people who really influenced your riding journey and how.

- Who were your Role Models - why those people?
- What did they offer you?
- What Mistakes did you make - what did you learn from them?
- How are you grateful for them now?
- What did you make mistakes mean to you?
- When did you have some tough times? Show grit, resilience?
- What turned out to be one of the best mistakes you ever made?

I will at times set students up in a safe environment to make a mistake, and then use that opportunity to link straight to “What did that teach me?” as opposed to “Crap, I suck at this”. The more you can link the positive while you are there with them, the more often they will go there when you are not.

You can set up simple mistake, by placing two canter poles 19 metres apart and then ask for 5 strides in between. The riders will initially struggle to do it, and will more than likely get 4 and a little bit. Once they go through it the first time, you can make a note outloud. Oh, hang on, I think my distance is wrong. It seems a bit short, don't you think? (Use this time to discuss a horses stride length). Ask:

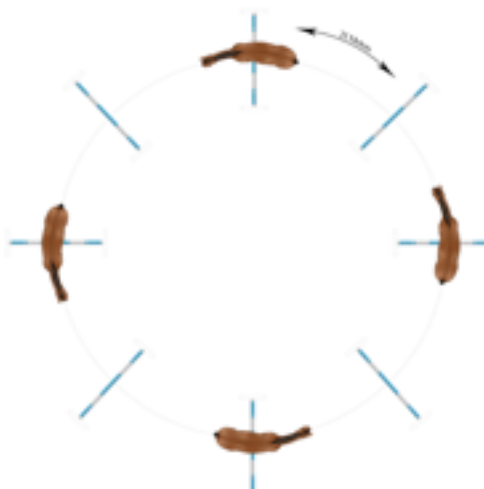
- How much longer do you think I should make it?
- How much of a shorter canter do you think you can create?
- What is your horses stride length?

Then re-adjust your canter poles to 21m and let them go through again. Talk about the difference and what we needed to change in order to do the exercise well.

This exercise is more one to teach the riders HOW to learn from mistakes then the actual exercise itself of being able to ride an even canter stride between poles, however this is one of my favourite exercises.

I also love to use this exercise in a group scenario where I place 8 poles on a circle 21m apart. Using between 4 and 6 riders, I ask them to each stand with a pole between the horses front and back feet. (This can be a good exercise in itself). I then ask them to trot to the next pole on the circle looking to have all 4 riders arrive at their pole at the same time. Once they have the hang of that I increase the number of poles to trot over and if they are able I then ask the riders to do this in canter. The main aim is to have each rider arriving at their pole at the same time.

This is great for when you have a couple of boisterous boys in a group and need to help them focus and chill a little, as the challenge of the exercise is not to go faster, but to stay even with the group. To make it a game I might say trot over 3 poles and stop on the 4th. Whoever is either the first or last rider to the 4th pole is out and another rider can come in a replace them.



Chapter 2

Validate their fear

“What would you do if you weren’t afraid”

Spencer Johnson

Get excited for your little guys when they are scared.

Let them know that if it all goes pear shaped, you will still be there for them. You won't abandon, or shame them if they get it wrong, you'll be there for them whatever happens, because it is often not the success that grows us as riders, it's in the failure when the magic starts to really happen.

Let them say to you - I am getting a little bit scared now! Champion them for that, re-word scared to say “brave”. Let them know that in order to be scared you must be doing something that is pushing your comfort zone out a bit, AWESOME!!! That's how we get better. No one gets better by doing nothing. So really you're not scared...you are braver than most because you're doing it anyway!

Let them know the courage doesn't come until AFTER you have done what scares you, so there is no point waiting until you feel ready. You are ready NOW.

Let them be vulnerable, vulnerability is not a weakness. To be honest and acknowledge how you are feeling is not a sign of weakness. I'm sure anyone who has told a loved one how they are feeling, knowing it may cause some unwanted feelings to come up, can attest to the fact that acknowledging, and verbalising feelings is hard. But in doing so, it allows them to accept, and embrace them, and then move on.

If a rider is NOT willing to accept, and bring awareness to emotions they are feeling, then they hide them, leading to inactivity, excuses, and blame. Finally it all gets too much and a blowout occurs. Hiding your emotions, and fears is not being tough, or brave. But acknowledging them, and then taking action anyway is!

How you can help

Ask the question -

- What is the worst thing that can happen?
- Is that likely to happen?
- How do we know?
- What proof do we have to back that up?
- When did we decide to start listening to this voice saying, “You won't be able to do it”?

Then ask them -

- Well if that happens, can you handle it?

Discuss how we can look at our fears, and decide if “x” really did happen,

- What could you learn from it?

Help them to become aware of what happens in their bodies when they become fearful – what patters are they currently using. Where do they feel it?

Then offer them more empowering alternatives, so when they notice even the smallest bits of fear sneaking in, they are able to acknowledge it. Thank the fear for looking out for them, then make a choice to BREATHE, change what they are focussing on to what they CAN influence.

What can they focus on that will empower them? The canter, the fluidity in their body, their line, keep reminding them that this fear is good. If you never had it, you would be going nowhere. Don't try to make it go away, just let it sit and change your focus, it will fade when you take action towards you goal.

We can't make fear go away, and we don't want it to, but we can decide what we are going to do when it shows up!

Ben Netterfield has a really good podcast on horse chats, working through fear. Well worth a listen! Episode 231

Chapter 3

Get to know their Core Drivers

“Look to the future, because that is where you will spend the rest of your life’

George Burns

What is it that lights your fire? What will you do almost anything to move towards?

We are not looking at a specific goal here. We want to know what values our students hold dear. This will often differ from our own, and can sometimes be in conflict, so if we are truly looking to be very present and the best coach we can be for our little learners we need to know what is important to them.

It's not about us.

This allows us to use language, and set up sessions towards their way of thinking and learning.

For example, you had four riders in a lesson, one was driven by a challenge, another by completion, the third by connection and the last by safety. These are all common drivers, and the rider's attitude towards an exercise will vary greatly.

Let's imagine you have asked them to jump down a line of fences, then over a narrow water tray that you have schooled in the lesson earlier, but have since added rails on top and now included it as part of a combination of fences.

One rider will be thinking, “yee-ha!” let me go first, the second, all I have to do is get over it, the third will want to do it exactly how you have asked them to and make the coach happy and the last will be thinking that they haven't schooled the tray with rails on top, and perhaps they should say something to you about it.

These are innate characteristics, and need to be nurtured. If you shame a rider for any of the above, or many other core drivers and values because they are not the same as yours, you will ultimately lose respect from your student. They will feel misunderstood, and not be willing to go to those tough places that they would if they had a good rapport with you.

How you can help.

Listen to the language the rider uses. This will help to get to know what drives them, but you can also ask them out right.

What is more important to you? Adventure, challenge, connection, fun, success, calmness, compassion, curiosity, completion, growth, respect, safety, certainty, uncertainty, variety, consistency, significance, procedure, order, outcome, courage, determination?

Then create exercises, and set them up to entice and engage your students. For example...your challenge is...., this exercise develops a stronger connection with your horse..., to complete this exercise you need to..., Sound like fun?..., You will need to be determined to make this happen.., this is the order of how the lesson will run..., this exercise will help to increase your horses courage...

You get the point!

Whenever I am working on an exercise I like to ask these questions, as it covers many of the common drivers - I call it the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW and WHY of knowing that the movement, transition is ready to be performed and is likely to be of high quality.

WHO is responsible for the transition? This horse, or the rider? What percentage is yours and what percentage is the horses? What are each of your responsibilities?

WHAT needs to happen? What exactly are you wanting to achieve, and what are the aids required to perform the transition?

WHEN do you need to prepare for the transition? When will you ask for it?

WHERE does the horse's body need to be in order to perform the transition? Where does your body need to be?

HOW will you know that the horse is balanced and in the right position to perform the skill?

WHY is this important?

Chapter 4

Use the Senses.

***“Memories establish the past;
Senses perceive the present;
Imaginations shape the future.”***

Toba Beta, My Ancestor Was an Ancient Astronaut

I am sure most of you are aware of the concept of different learning styles in regards to Auditory, Visual, and Kinaesthetic (feel) learners.

A quick summary for those who aren't. Auditory learners like to listen and talk when learning, Visual learners like to watch what they need to do before they have a go themselves, and Kinaesthetic learners need to feel it to understand it.

When working with groups of riders it is important to give instructions and information that appeals to all learners. For example, if I am describing a half halt, I will discuss the aids, preparatory steps, and the purpose etc. for the auditory learners, preferably allow the visual learners to see another rider performing the movement, and/or show it on a white board or on a video clip on my phone, and then allow the kinaesthetic learners to ride the movement as I am there, helping them be aware of what they are feeling as it happens.

If I am in an arena with rubber lining I like to use chalk and draw on the rubber. I might draw the footfalls, the German Training Scale, shapes, concepts, anything that I am wanting my students to remember at that time. If they look at it each time they ride past for a week, especially if you have had a session learning about what you have written, they are able to absorb and process it in their own time.

Often, the “Ah Ha” moment doesn't come at the initial time of learning, but rather a few days later when the rider has had a chance to play with, experiment, and experience the skill/exercise or movement. I have had plenty of phone calls after a day or two with an excited rider on the end of the phone saying; “I've got it. I get what you mean now. It's so simple”

How you can help

Whatever I am teaching, I will always do my best to discuss it in a way that talks about;

How it would sound (ie; footfalls, rhythm, breathing etc),

What it will look like (from my point of view, from the rider's point of view, from a birds eye point of view)

What it would feel like (for the rider and for the horse).

That way I am giving my riders the best opportunity possible to absorb the information in a multitude of ways.

This is great when talking about transitions. While you are first discussing the aids, and the process by which the horses changes gaits, you may use questions like. How would it sound, if you were to listen to a recording of the transition? (I have actually done this before. It is great fun to ask the riders to guess what transition or movement the horse is performing simply by listening to the audio. I had quite a few "Ah Ha" moments)

What would the footfalls sound like?

What would you see or be looking at as you move through the transition? What would it look like from my perspective?

How would it feel if it was done really well?

How would it feel in your hips, your hands, your elbows, your breath?

You may even ask them if they have seen, or felt a really good transition like that before.

A fun exercise is to ask the riders to move from walk to trot, but they have to come up on the correct diagonal. They may sit trot for as long as they need in order to feel the timing and know when to come up. This is actually a great exercise for straightening horses that tend to drop the shoulder in, as in order for the rider to come up on the correct diagonal easily they need to have moved the horses ribcage back to the centre. You will often find that one direction the riders always come up on the correct diagonal, and the opposite direction the riders really struggle due to the horse falling in.

During this exercise you are discussing, listening for the forelegs hitting the ground, looking at the shoulder if need be and feeling for the forelegs and ribcage as the horse moves through the stride.

Chapter 5

Give them the Right and the Wrong Options to try.

“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals”

Henry Ford

Little people *don't* learn well by doing what they are told.

They need to experience it and then make the decision for themselves as to whether this is a good thing to do or not. I often give the rider the right and wrong options to try and then let them make the decision on what one worked best.

For example, a simple turn for a beginner. You can ask the rider to ride in a straight line towards and object, turn around it and then come back in a straight line. Ask them once, to turn by pulling the inside rein in towards the midline of the horse, and relax the outside rein. Let them lean in towards the peg/cone and when they return talk about the size of the turn, what part of the horse moved, how smooth it felt etc.

Ask them to go again, this time keeping a feel on the outside rein, opening the inside rein slightly and closing the outside leg and looking in the direction they are going and then come back. Talk about how the second turn varied, and then let them decide what way was better.

I will make some subtle hints, and throw some pre-suppositions in to help the riders come to the right conclusion, but if they ultimately feel they came to the decision themselves they will have more clarity behind it.

During this process, I discuss the mechanics of horse movement, and help them to understand to concept of the power coming from the hind quarters etc. I like to do this in a group as they can see each other's horse for the visual learners, we can discuss it together for the auditory learners, and they also get to feel it in their body for the kinaesthetic learners. Win/Win for everyone.

How you can help.

When first teaching a new exercise/skill/movement, or looking to change how a skill is executed, make sure you have given the rider clarity around the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW and WHY.

As we are starting to practice the skill, you may notice that there is some confusion, or inability there. This is where chunking down is so good.

Break the skill up in to several pieces. For example; if a rider was looking to ride a turn on the HQ's but the horse was resisting, you may chunk it down into several steps.

1. Ensure the half halt is ridden correctly, and with the horse offering to engage without resistance
2. Ensure the rider is able to change the horse's flexion on the circle in the walk from inside to outside without resistance
3. Ensure the horse moves forwards freely off the leg
4. Ensure the rider is able to ask the horse to move his foreleg one step to the side and then relax whilst in the halt

These are only some examples of where you may chunk down the Turn on the HQ's, as depending on where the resistance is, there are several other "chunks" that will improve the turn. However once you have got the above 4 sorted, or others if you feel the improvement needs to come from developing another skill, you can then go back to the Turn on the HQ's as an exercise. Often I find, when I am chunking a skill down, I get to a chunk, and find I need to then chunk that down a little more, and sometime a little more still. There have been many a time where we have started an original skill, and found gaps, leading us to spend an entire session working on several other skills. It is always worth the time to make sure the horse understands what is required of him, the rider is aware of what he/she needs to do to produce that skill, and then taking the time to for the horse and rider to communicate in such a way that the partnership is able to execute each chunk with confidence and understanding.

I believe we are far better off taking the time to find the gaps, unravel and re-establish any old patterns that may have evolved, and then replace them with correct responses. If we do a good enough job on strengthening the base, even if it feels as though it is taking forever, we will produce a far better result in the end.

Let them question everything

“By doubting we are led to question; by questioning, we arrive at the truth”

Peter Abelard

Go ride a “big” circle
Don’t forget to look up

Riders will often interpret what we say very differently to how it was intended. For example, simple directions like ride a “big” circle will vary from rider to rider. From a 0.2m three point turn, to half a paddock. This is a very simple, but poignant example.

I remember having discussions with my husband while renovating our kitchen a year or so ago. We were trying to decide on the size of a particular shelf space. My husband and I are both reasonable people and rarely get flustered by much, but this shelf was starting to cause some tensions. It wasn’t until about 5mins in, and a lot of confusion that I stopped and said; “Hang on. When you say open space, describe exactly what you mean? I see open space being able to step across from one side to the other.” My husband laughed. HIS open space meant just enough room to fit a toaster and a kettle. Once we could see what the other was thinking, it was easy to come to a conclusion.

If you notice your rider is getting lost in translation, talk through your description again, and make sure you are both on the same page on all the small things.

Often, all a rider is asking for is better clarification on what the outcome is. The rider is not questioning your knowledge, they are simply saying, I am missing something here. Can you please give me this information in a way that I can better understand?

I remember once being asked; “Why do I have to look up at the tree when I’m not wanting to jump the tree?” The rider was literally trotting to the jump looking up at the sky. I explained “look up” simply means to NOT look down at the ground. Instead, take in the whole picture/image as you are approaching the fence. The fence itself, where you are intending to land, where you are planning on going immediately after the fence etc.

That was a big “Ah Ha” moment for both of us!

How you can help

Encourage questions. Ask the rider to tell you what they are feeling ie: weight in the hand, leaning, balance, rhythm etc. and then either tell you what they are doing to correct it and why, or ask you what they think would be a good thing to improve x,y,z.

Give the movements that this exercise is leading the rider towards achieving in the future.

Most importantly allow the rider to discuss what is happening, be ready to acknowledge them when they are heading the right way, and be there to keep them on the right track if they are lost.

Validate their efforts.

How fast or slow a rider picks things up is not dependent on how quick you did when you were learning it, but how well you are able to pass those concepts on in a way that the rider needs to be able to process the information.

Be OK with not always knowing the answer. I will often stop and google something, or call someone if I am not sure. Especially when it comes to what equipment is allowed, changes to rulings, and competition requirements.

For those coaches and riders, I love to scale the German Training Scale. I might ask the rider at the start of the session to scale each level from 1-10 based on how well they feel they are achieving it.

How is your rhythm? 1 being inconsistent, 10 being even.

How is your horse's looseness? 1 tense -10 relaxed and malleable

Contact? 1 inconsistent/heavy/none -10 steady/even/adjustable

Impulsion? 1 running or behind the leg -10 powerful with control

Straightness? 1 leaning/drift/unbalanced -10 even on both sides/forwards/straight

Now add them all together. What is your total out of 50?

I don't tend to scale collection as I find that collection needs far more understanding to achieve well. I do say though, that once we are scoring a total of 40 or above, we are already showing some form of collection, and are ready to move towards more collection.

Chapter 7

Use Technology

“Getting information off the Internet is like taking a drink from a fire hydrant”

Mitch Kapor

There are so many Apps out there now that are useful in coaching. One of my favourites is an App called Technique. It allows you to video a rider and then draw straight, or squiggly lines over the image. You can also place two different video clips side by side and put them on slow motion so that for example, both clips have the horse jumping at the same time.

This allows the riders to see a clear difference.

Often a rider won't believe you until you show them the evidence. Once they have seen it, it's no longer on you as the coach to make the change.

You have shown them the evidence, explained why this is a problem, offered them a solution, and then it's up to them to make the change. If they have taken it all on board, your riders will be much more willing to make the changes needed as the ball is in their court now, and there is a sense of responsibility and accountability.

I also have a bank of movements etc. that have been ridden exceptionally well on my phone. When teaching a new skill, I like to show the riders what it can look like in time. We watch it a few times, and discuss why it is so lovely to watch. I will at times ask the rider to close their eyes and visualise themselves riding the movement well. This accesses subconscious parts of the brain that effect muscle memory and movement, engaging the body to keep up with what the mind is producing.

I also have a file on my computer with past videos of my riders. If we have made a significant advance, or if I feel the rider is in need of some motivation I will show them footage from 12months ago to let them see how far they have come. It is easy to lose awareness of improvements when they feel incremental, so having something to gauge your improvements on can be hugely beneficial.

How you can help

I use the App a lot when I am teaching lateral movements, as it is easy for a rider to weight a seat bone or stirrup too much to one side, lean or collapse their ribcage or drop a shoulder when asking the horse to move sideways.

By standing directly in front of behind the rider as they are performing the movement and videoing allows them to look at it afterwards and see it from your perspective.

I often find when I am straightening a rider's position, they tell me they feel all crooked and feel as though they have now gone too much the other way but when I show them the improvement, and how straight they now are on the phone, they can't deny the truth, even though it may feel odd to begin with.

I discuss the concept of muscle memory, and how when we make changes to our position it is always going to feel foreign and awkward to begin with.

Chapter 8

Use Tangible evidence.

“Laughter is a tangible evidence of hope.”

Michael Jnr

I go everywhere with 12 of my little yellow squishy cones, 2m lengths of poly pipe painted like show jumps, and a 2m piece of 8mm rope.

Ideally, if I am at a Pony Club grounds, or other facilities I also like to have actual show jump rails and some drums or “BLOK’s”.

I find that having something visual to go to, as well as a clear indicator to an exercise having been achieved encourages young riders to put more effort into the skill, as they have more clarity around what is being asked of them.

When I see riders getting frustrated with their horse, or restarting an exercise from the beginning repeatedly I first ask them if they are clear on

- what is the outcome they are looking to achieve
- how are they getting there

Meaning, usually frustration comes from not really understanding what it is they are supposed to be doing (I find this comes up a lot in classrooms).

It is actually rarely that a rider can't achieve a skill, it is simply that they don't yet know the process of HOW.

The simpler, and clearer you can explain, chunk down, and step out an exercise, the easier it will be for the rider to process the how. It is kind of like the WHO, in WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW AND WHY.

YOU are WHO here. You are responsible for the explanation.

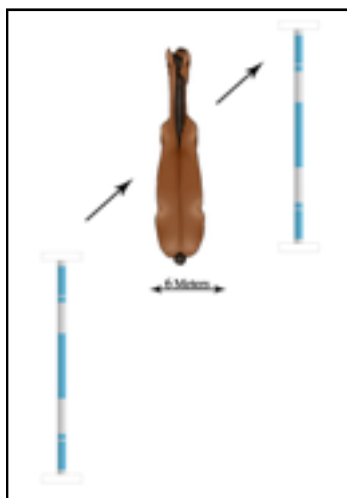
How you can help

Use stickers and dots on the toes of their boots, depending on whether you are encouraging the rider's lower leg to stay further forward or further back. Ask them at various times through the lesson to have a glance down to the sticker. Can they see it?

For example, riders who stop by bringing their hands back towards their hips, lean forward, and straighten their legs, I ask them to gently stop and then glance down, and check they can only just see the stickers on the toes of their boots. This is a good time to talk about engaging the core etc in the transition, let them repeat the transition several times, using their body in different ways and see how this affects how easy it is to see the sticker on their boots.

Another fun one for kids that fiddle with their hands. I give them a bit to hold in their hands and see if they can keep it still. I ask them to hold the reins as normal, but place the rings of the bit over their thumbs so they the bit is spread out like it would be in the horse's mouth.

The challenge is to be aware that how much the bit is moving in their hands, is also how much it is moving in the horse's mouth. Ask them to imagine that the bit in their hands is in their own mouth and ask them how they would respond if that were the case. Would they keep their head still or try to get away from it?



Even simple things like being straight/parallel is better understood using two poles. Moving sideways one step at a time between two poles that are parallel, but with the "go to" pole slightly further ahead than the "going from" pole, helps them to notice if a shoulder or hind quarter is closer to the "go to" pole. You can even go as far as measuring in Chicken Steps the distance from the pole to the HQ's and the same from the pole to the Shoulders. Anytime there is an opportunity to let a pole/cone/drum do the teaching for you (especially for little guys) the quicker they will work out the concept. Wait for the "Ah Ha" moments.

I also like to use scoring here. For example: if a rider is looking to improve the quality of the trot you may, for example during the schooling process, score out of 10 where the trot is. Be there and ready to acknowledge **what an 8 or 9 looks and feels like**. If the horse loses impulsion you may say "You're back to a 4 again". This helps the riders to associate what an 8 trot does actually feel like so they can start to work there by themselves.

Chapter 9

Give them homework.

“We don’t have the right to influence a horse until we are in rhythm with him”

Annyka Overton

This is where we can really challenge those riders who are coming to you because they are wanting to improve in order to achieve better results in competition.

I expect those riders to be working on skills in between lessons, and coming back with questions and/or insights. If not I’ll simply ask them:

On a scale of 1 -10.

- How much do you want to improve?
- How important is this to you?

1 being, “It’s not that bad but I should probably change” to
10 being “I am sick of this. This MUST change/improve”

If my rider is not at a 7 or above then I can’t help them in that area, so I give them homework to come back and tell me next week what are the consequences of not changing that behaviour? If they are able to stack enough pain to NOT changing then they will be more willing to do the homework needed to make the improvement.

We will do more to avoid pain than to gain pleasure - Tony Robbins

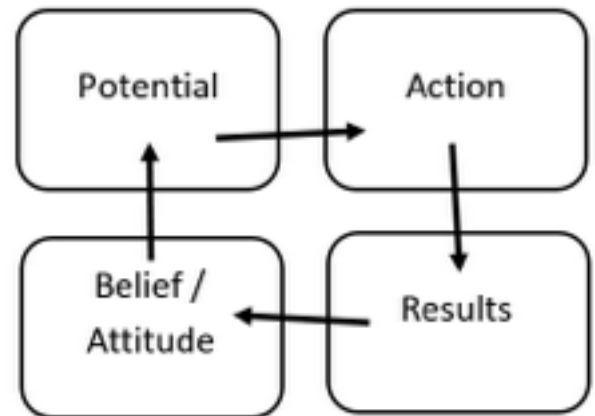
If my rider says they are at a 7 or above, but still aren’t doing the work at home, I ask them; “What are you willing to sacrifice in order to achieve this?” We might go through, would you be willing to:

- Miss out on an afternoon with friends?
- An extra hours sleep in the morning?
- Watching a particular TV show?

By directly holding them accountable for their choices and actions, they are required to look into themselves and ask the question internally.

“What AM I willing to sacrifice in order to achieve my goal?”

More often than not, in young people this can be enough to get into doing the homework necessary through the week to see those improvements and changes they are looking for. Making those changes, provides the motivation and momentum to keep it up leading to further success, leading to further effort, to further improvements, to further success, to further, effort etc. etc. You see the pattern.



How you can help

Homework can come in the form of:

Links of video's to watch on a subject/skill/movement you are currently working on.

This also helps your riders remember you had to learn from somewhere too, and that is important we keep updating our knowledge. Ask them to write down any questions that come up during the video so you can discuss them during your next session. Often during these chats is where the missing link is found and the riders can move on with more assurance and understanding than ever before.

During schooling sessions for competition riders, we begin to create a “warm-up routine” designed for each individual horse. During this process we look out for exercises that the horse can do well, and relaxes while doing so.

This is what I call the “Go to” exercise, where if the horse is anxious at a comp, the rider can slip into that exercise to allow the horse to settle, get confident again before going back to the warm-up routine.

But, we do need to TRAIN the “go to exercise”. Meaning I ask the riders at home, after a physically demanding, or mentally stretching exercise, rest the horse in the “Go to” exercise until the adrenaline drops, and the horse stretches, yawns, let out a big breath or sneeze/snort. This doesn't always mean in a walk, this exercise can vary, and in some horses it can be cantering a figure eight on a looser rein, with a flying change in the middle. Others might be a leg yield, followed by a 10mtr circle, riding a small (6mtr) circle every quarter of a 20mtr circle, some are trot-walk-trot transitions that are a little hazy in the definition of walk/trot, riding zig-zag leg yields. There are gazillions of different exercises that a particular horse might find easy, and relaxing.

Chapter 10

Use Analogy's/ Metaphor's and Imagery

“Change your mental imagery, and the feelings will take care of themselves”

Maxwell Maltz

I have to admit, this is one of my favourite topics, and probably why I left it till last. Anyone who has had lessons with me, will be well aware that I am a little “quirky” in how I teach, and some of the metaphors I may use can often be a little close to the boundaries of appropriate.

However, they do get results and if I am wanting an image to sit in your head while practicing an exercise, trust me, I have just the metaphor!
The crazier the image, the more likely you will remember it.

This is a great way to engage riders who are orientated to Right Brain Processing. For example, if you are describing feel on the horse's mouth you might talk about dancing with someone.

Would you rather dance with someone who keeps going out of step, pulling you off balance, who won't hold your hand, and feels like you're dancing holding a wet fish?

Or dance with someone who is happy to lead, and makes you feel important but who also allows you to move and adjust the dance steps with a willingness and connection.

You can even ask them to sing a few words of a song they would like to dance to.

If you are talking about staying tall and balanced through a turn you might talk about having a Merry Go Round Pole going through your head, down your back, through the horse and to the ground. If you lean to far over the pole would detach from the roof and the whole ride would come to a halt, and a whole lot of kids would start screaming.

For riders who tend to look down after a fence, you can use the analogy of a cat strutting away in front of you with his tail up and his backside looking right at you. Your laughing at the cat because he is about to get run over. You can tell your rider to look at the backside of the cat. Yes - It's a bit full on, even kind of wrong but you can guarantee your little riders will be looking ahead at the cats pucker instead of the ground!

I do like to run with metaphors that the riders come up with, as I know it has a personal connection to them, and will yield good results. For example, I had a rider last week describe a flexion exercise we were working on, as like when you turn

your head to breathe when swimming freestyle every few strokes. I told her I really liked it and would make a mention of her in the book - On ya, Kate Cruickshank!

Another one I use loads at Pony Club is the bubble. How often are we saying to a group of 10 yr old kids on a circle; "Keep one horses distance between each horse" to no avail. Instead I started asking each rider to imagine being surrounded by a big bubble of either Hubba Bubba chewing gum, or a bubble made from a wand. I ask one rider to halt, then I walk a circle around the horse approx one horse length away from it to give the kids an idea for how big their own bubble needs to be.

When back out on the circle, as we are walking I ask each rider to briefly describe their own bubble, what colour it is, if it is shiny, etc. etc. We describe that if we run into someone else's bubble it may pop, or we might bounce off it and get knocked backwards.

All I need to say then, if riders are getting too close is; "Watch your bubbles" and everybody spreads back out again. However usually each rider takes responsibility for their own bubble and they remain a good distance away from each other for the rest of the day. I now have clubs that I go back to time and time again and not one of them gets too close anymore, as all the big kids have taught the little kids about the bubble so I don't need to anymore. It is simply ingrained in the kids.



How you can help

Teach the kids the art of Visualisations.

This is really a whole new chapter, and in fact I could write another book on the benefits of visualisations, however I will endeavour to give you the basic concept in a few short paragraphs.

I ask my riders to visualise at some point, almost every session. I want them to become confident, and competent in doing so.

For example, if I give my rider a series of 5 fences to jump I'll ask them to imagine riding the exercise and then have them verbally talk me through the ride.

While they are doing this I am acutely aware of the language they are using and will pull them up anytime I hear a pre-supposition of a negative outcome, or a "try" in there somewhere. If I hear, I'll fix my canter lead (whoa, that is pre-supposing you have landed on the wrong lead), or I'll try and slow him down before...(pre-supposing he is already too fast, and that you may or may not achieve the outcome) then I will have them re language themselves until able to visualise it being ridden well.

You will be shocked at how hard it is for many of us simply to imagine, and then verbalise, riding a course well.

Our default is far too often on the negative.

If you aren't able to imagine it, then the subconscious mind won't bother sending messages to try and create something that isn't even a possibility in the mind's eye.

The simple action of imagining that there is a possibility of riding this really well, allows the subconscious a greater ability to put into effect the memories and actions needed to create a good outcome.

Another great way that as an instructor/parent you can help your little learners is to load information to a simple word or sentence.

You can then use that word or phrase to remind them of sessions in the past helping to link information when building on sessions, i.e: remember when we had the "jacket" session, and we were teaching him to stay straight even though he was spooking at the jacket, or remember the "tennis" session, when we were linking how our past memories create our emotions to new experiences or the "barrel" session when we were moving your horse's ribcage and increasing his ability to bend in both directions.

I personally love this as a coach, as I can be working on something quite challenging with a student knowing that they are heading away to a competition on the weekend that I won't be attending. By attaching that whole session to one word/label or sentence I can ask a parent (or someone else travelling with the rider) to remind the rider of ...x...(what ever your label is) and the whole session we were working on will come flooding back to the rider.

That way I don't need to be there to still be a positive influence on the outcome, and there isn't the risk of another person misinterpreting the lesson had between the rider and I, confusing it with their own interpretation of what needs to be said in the warm up.

The rider and I know exactly what that word or phrase means. How he/she needs to be thinking, feeling and doing to produce the best result.

My goal as a coach is definitely NOT to be indispensable. The better my riders get the more I move from a hands on role, to more of an advisory, mentorship role. I like to think the better job I do, the less they need me.

My goal IS to create riders who are aware of their own and their horse's thinking and behaviour patterns, what they mean and how they can change their thinking to produce a different result, move towards fear, have ownership on their own actions, know where, when, how and be willing to gather more information in order to continue growing, and to see the process as a continual, enjoyable journey that keeps them curious, inspired and fulfilled.

Sounds like fun to me!

KIDS

Let them -

Be Bold. Be Silly

Be strong and Confident

Independent and Intelligent

Take risks. Make Mistakes

Laugh

Take that extra step. Take that initial step

Feel the Fear and do it anyway!