



PEOPLE & HORSES

SIGNS OF *Discomfort*



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➔ **What are the Problems in Communication**

- Anthropomorphism
- Overcomplication of emotional and cognitive processes

➔ **How we perceive a Behavior dictates how we react to it**

- We tend to punish or 'train away' misunderstood behavior
- When we understand the real cause, we can relate easier
- The only way to correctly assess the Horse is to look at the body and behavior



Steps



Step 1 - Intuition

- Spend time with your horse, do a body scan, relax and feel into it
- Look at your horse's overall expression

Step 2 - Observe for physical and behavioral Signs of Discomfort

A relaxed Horse: when a horse is relaxed, it has long nostrils and a relaxed lower lip, ears pointing sideways, lined up with its forehead. You can see little to no wrinkled brow. A relaxed horse also has a soft eye. Slow blinking is a sign of pleasure and affection. Sometimes licking and chewing or loose lip touches can be a sign of relaxation, it can also mean processing past experiences.

A stressed Horse: When a horse experiences stress, it can cope with it in 2 ways, some horses are proactive copers who use active responses such as fight or flight responses to escape or remove the stressor, and reactive copers who tend to freeze. These horses may show no obvious signs of being affected or stressed but may in the long term become withdrawn or depressed.

Proactive & Reactive

- **Proactive Copier:** is likely to show clear behavioral signs of both acute and chronic stress.
- **Reactive Copier:** become withdrawn or show indicators such as ears pointing backward, neck at the same level as their back, decreased eye contact, and a 'glazed' expression.

➔ Although reactive copiers may appear calm and relaxed when they are withdrawn, unresponsive, and emotionally blunt, they are equally or even suggested to be more stressed than a proactive copier who is physically trying to control the situation.

- **Learned Helplessness:** is where an animal learns that they have no control over unpleasant conditions and that their actions do not stop the problem. This causes them to give up trying to escape the stressor and essentially shut down behaviorally. These include showing a decreased response to pressure, lowered levels of aggression, dullness, and loss of appetite.

Signs – NOSTRILS & MOUTH

Nostrils: Are the nostrils round and pointing towards the front; do they look strained, and the profile of the nose is flattened? That's a sign of either a lot of stress or pain.

Mouth: When horses clamp their jaw, they are either fearful, stressed, or in pain. Licking, chewing, yawning, sniffing the ground, or biting into objects can mean insecurity, appeasement, or processing. **Tongue exposed** and or moving in and out of the mouth, or the bit pulling through the mouth are signs of coping with stress. When they start to tense up the mouth area you can see the chin begin to wrinkle. If they become really tense, the area around the mouth becomes noticeable narrower. Foals do snapping to appease older or stronger horses.

Also, look for **scars** in corner of the mouth. Some horses, when ridden with harsh bits, also have visible markings on the lips from the pressure that was applied over the years. Also, never cut a horse's whiskers, they use it to 'see' what they touch. Horses cannot see directly below their noses; they need their tactile whiskers for sensory awareness.



Signs - EYES



Half-closed Eyes: this can be an appeasement sign to avoid confrontation. Closed or semi-closed eyelids can also signal pain. If you can see the **white of the eyes**, it might be that your horse wants to leave or is in pain. If we want to e.g. mount the horse, and its eyes are closed, ears more back than sideways, horizontal neck and the tail twitched can signal helplessness in some cases.

Wrinkles above the Eyes: that's usually a sign that something is worrisome, it could be that the horse is not sure about something, that's happening, or that there is a deeper worry, e.g. it lost a friend, feels helpless, overwhelmed, unsafe, or is in pain.

Bone Structure above the Eyes: Is there a hole? That is often a sign of chronic stress, that the horse had to work hard and/or experienced pain. It's as if the horse moved inwards. It can also mean, that the horse was starved at some point or doesn't have enough forage on a regular basis.

Puffiness under the Eyes: signals discomfort (or clogged tear ducts)

Signs - EARS

If the **ears are just slightly back** and the eyes are soft and no wrinkles above the eye, can just mean attention is to the back, but it can also mean submission, fear, or pain if other signs of discomfort are present in the horse's face or body. When the ears are turned away from us, it can mean they indicate they are not ready to pay attention.

Are the ears **pinned backward and maybe teeth bared**? The interpretation depends on the situation. It can mean too much pressure, annoyance, anger, maybe towards another horse, or that it wants treats. It can also mean pain. Sometimes horses pin their ears when they try to drive you. Pinned ears never mean concentration, they can concentrate very well with their ears pointing forward.



Signs – HEAD & NECK



Face: A prominent chewing muscle is a sign of coping with previous stress. When one side of the forehead is more developed, that means they need dental work.

Head position: Head high shows that the horse is alert or anxious. But if the ears are forward, and the horse walks confidently that means the horse is just anxious to start something. Head in the middle and the ears lowered can be a sign of learned helplessness. Head mid-high, ears sideways but coming forward can mean curiosity. Holding the head low and showing off the neck is often an appeasement sign. A lowered head can also be that the horse plans to show defensive behavior, like striking (or threatening to), charging, and also 'snaking' can happen with a lower head. Head movements like twisting, shaking, tilt, and wide eyes often indicate pain or stress. A head shake can also signal impatience or 'finally'. If the head is lowered during the shake, it means the horse is shaking something off. Looking, leaning, or turning the head away, e.g., when we're in the round pen and the horse looks to the outside is an appeasement sign.

Neck: A narrow, pushed-through neck is a sign, that the horse was not ridden correctly and that it push against or avoided contact with the rider.

Signs - BODY

Back and saddle area: Are there **white spots** in the saddle area? That is usually from an ill-fitting saddle, indicating past pain. If the back is tight (**swayback**), that can be a sign that the horse was ridden too hard, and or that the rider or tack was too heavy.

Tail: A **swishing tail** can mean annoyance, irritation, maybe we're too close and the horse needs more room? A **tucked tail** can be stress or an appeasement sign, expecting punishment. A **stiff tail** can be a pain indicator, especially when the hip is also tight.

➡ **Approach:** When horses approach us in a circle and not directly, they try to appease us.

Gait (when ridden): a **rushed gait**, irregular rhythm, hind limbs not following in the front limbs' tracks, repeated wrong lead and or change of lead, spontaneous gait changes, stumbling or toe dragging, sudden change in direction, spooking, reluctance to move freely, stopping spontaneously, earing, bucking with or without kicking out are all signs of either stress, pain or behavioral injuries.

Stereotypical behavior: Cribbing or Windsucking, box walking, weaving can be caused by a combination of factors including frustration, repeated attempts to cope with a suboptimal environment, genetics, or dysfunction of the nervous system. It's best to remove the underlying causes of the stress.

Other signs of stress or pain: gastric ulcers, a reduced immune response (immunosuppression), and weight loss.

A photograph of three horses standing in a field of tall, dry grass. The horses are of various shades of brown and chestnut. The text 'RELATIONSHIP Style' is overlaid on the image. 'RELATIONSHIP' is in a bold, white, sans-serif font, and 'Style' is in a white, cursive script font.

RELATIONSHIP *Style*



RELATIONSHIP

Style

How did we create Discomfort, Stress, and Pain in our Horses?

Our social system is based on fear and control and being a part of it creates unhealthy beliefs, emotions, behaviors, and relationship patterns within us that we live out with other people and yes, our horses.

Healing

Healing starts with the awareness that there is something that needs healing. We also need to understand, how all these thoughts, behaviors, and relationship patterns developed so that we can reclaim our power and heal ourselves.

The relationship style we live with our inner child, with other people, and our horses, often comes from early childhood experiences, when we did not find a safe environment or also if we made other traumatic experiences later in life.

If that happened, then this has a huge impact on our ability to form healthy relationships with other people, and also with our horses. And when we are with our horse, we have emotions, and display behaviors that are based on our belief system and relationship style. And our horses can read these emotions and they experience our behaviors, like anger or fear, and will now, in turn also develop certain behavior patterns to protect themselves from our behaviors and emotions.

So now, let's take a closer look at our unhealthy emotions and relationship styles and what our horses show.

Controller

Controller: need to control others to feel safe and are used to solving problems on their own. In a relationship, they don't usually show empathy for their partners' emotions and react with anger or withdrawal if they can't avoid being exposed to them. They have problems accepting boundaries and enmesh in other people's lives.



History: Controllers were often controlled through shame, guilt, other manipulation tactics, or too strict boundaries and no one protected them from harm. Or they were completely left on their own. At some point, they told themselves they had to get tough and to take care of themselves. They feel that having control means being able to keep the feelings of fear and helplessness at bay, that they had to endure, while they were kids. Anger for them is the only emotion, that is not vulnerable and that helped them in the past, so they continue to use it to keep in charge.

What kind of horse does the controller have? Controllers often have very pretty, well-bred, and valuable horses and they make sure, the horse is always obedient. They tend to use punishment and harsh equipment and don't have a feeling for the horse's physical or emotional boundaries. They can often be found in the higher ranks of competitions or as trainers.

How does the horse react to a controller? A sensitive horse will become insecure and can e.g., trip over every stone, as the horse stopped thinking for itself. At some point, the sensitive horse will completely give in and often enter a state of learned helplessness, which makes them appear like the perfect and bombproof, hard-working horse, the controller wants. A more strong-willed, physical horse can become very aggressive, it can pull away, rear, and even start attacking.

Future: The controller's desire for an obedient horse is based on the need for power and the underlying fear that - if they don't control the horse, it takes over control and stops doing what they ask, and with that will turn away from them, our demands and needs. If you find yourself in this description, you can gently ask yourself a few questions, for example, who in your life made mistakes you had to suffer from? Who wasn't able to handle life, but you depended on that person and their actions? Who judged you when you made mistakes? Who left you alone, where you would've needed help? Controllers have the hard task to learn to accept that everyone makes mistakes. And that mistakes are inevitable and ok.

Antimentor

Antimentor: Antimentors want to be in control, just as the controller wants, however, the antimentor doesn't use open aggression but is a 'well-meaning' manipulator and sabotages other people close to them, like their partner, or children. They use microaggression, love bombing, gaslighting, shaming, belittling, ridiculing, feigned ignorance, guilt-tripping, or projection. Their goal is to keep the other person 'small' and dependent on their approval. They have no trust, that others achieve goals without them. They have no boundaries for themselves and others and constantly enmesh in the lives of others. They believe others make mistakes or have no energy and need them. They also have unreasonable expectations of what the other person should do or achieve.

History: Were often controlled themselves - through shame and guilt, etc., or through too strict boundaries. Their themes are repressed anger, insecurity, anxiety, and shame. If you find yourself a bit in this description, you can ask yourself: Who manipulated you into success? Who judged you when you made mistakes? Who left you alone, where you would've needed help? If you feel this has to do with you, please find support in your healing journey.

Horse: Antimentors strive to make their horses 'successful' in their discipline. However, since their preferred manipulation tactics are only working on people, they sometimes struggle with harsh training methods to achieve their goal of an obedient horse and leave the horse training (and 'tune ups') to professional trainers, A sensitive horse will become nervous as it senses, that the antimentor is not authentic in their approach, and might become overly fearful. The more strong-willed horse can become very resistant and even aggressive.



Chronic Caretaker



Chronic Caretaker: A chronic caretaker seeks harmony and feels good when they can take care of something or organize and rescue the 'helpless' as this gives them the notion of being needed and important. In order to achieve their goals, they often enmesh in the lives of others and sometimes try to take control over their dependents and their decisions. Chronic caretakers often neglect their own physical and emotional health because they are so focused on caring for someone else, often for people or animals who don't actually need that support or not anymore. They have weak boundaries for themselves and others and can't say 'no' when they see someone in need. Chronic caretaking can lead to physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion and many are struggling with anxiety and the fallouts of repressed anger. They often feel sad or hopeless themselves and experience frequent body pains, such as headaches, and are not getting enough sleep. They are vulnerable to the use of alcohol, drugs, or prescription medication and get sick often.

History: Chronic caretakers often grow up with an unhealthy (physically or emotionally) family member and needed to take care of a parent or sibling. Or they were unwell themselves and received either too much or too little support.

Horse: Chronic caretakers often have very young, very old, or rescue horses. Or a horse, that is 'too much' or injured. If they have a more sensitive horse, it will often have (or develop) some health issues, injuries, or chronic diseases. These horses can become lethargic, almost depressive. A more physical horse might show signs of frustration, it can pin its ears, have a tense mouth area, or will even become pushy and aggressive, as if it needs to defend itself from this energy.

Future: If you find yourself in this description, it is important to find a balance between your need to help others and to take care of yourself. You can gently ask yourself e.g., who in your past needed your help? Was it ok to ask for help or was this an overreach? Or what did you need to do to get help? When was a time, when you needed help, but nobody showed up for you? Do you also take - maybe - too much care of your horse? Do you maybe pet it too much? Just feel into your energy while you're petting it. Try to imagine that you are more your horse's mentor rather than doing things for it (or others), this can help them to find their own strengths and power. And yes, this is easier said than done - because there is a very good reason you developed that pattern and of course, it can't be changed overnight.

Avoider

Avoider: Avoiders restrict their feelings and suppress their emotional needs. They are overly independent, need privacy, space, distance, and are hard to take care of. They present themselves as strong, are often high achievers, and are task-oriented. They resist connection, minimize, or avoid conflicts, don't often think about their own feelings, and don't want to feel them, if possible. Since they're emotionally distant, the affection they offer comes across as special or unique. They are not comfortable with the 'strong' emotions of others. They are sensitive to criticism, and rejection. They often feel inadequate, not enough, or unattractive. They can be shy in social situations and personal relationships. They fear nothing more than disapproval, embarrassment, or ridicule. Therefore they also often avoid work activities, that require personal contact. In relationships, they feel safest where they feel loved, and when someone is seeking out their approval. It's more important for them to be loved than being in love themselves, especially, since they often don't have access to these strong emotions. They offer validation and affection to keep their counterpart tethered. But they'll withdraw that affection before things feel stable, to ensure that their counterpart will continue going out of their way to "fawn" and secure that affection again. They don't usually miss their partner or family if they are away.

History: Avoiders come from homes that were often low in affection but placed a high value on independence, self-reliance, and achievements, so they had to learn to take care of themselves. Since they had so little emotional support and nurturing from their parents, they have learned to restrict their relational needs. Often, their parents or caregivers used shame and guilt to 'help' the avoider to achieve their goals.

Horse: Avoiders often have high achieving, successful, and very pretty, expensive (show) horses. Since control is the norm in horse training, they follow these principles without questioning them but prefer having others do the actual training. Therefore, much of what is true for the horse of a controller also applies to the avoider. However, often the horse notices, that the avoider doesn't fully stand behind the means he uses, so the horse will more likely to be pushy.



Pleaser



Pleaser: A pleaser works hard to make everyone happy and to avoid conflicts. They over-deliver, over-apologize, and always anticipate and meet the needs of others first. They give and expect little in return. They also continually monitor the moods of others around them and try to keep everyone happy. The pleaser is 'searching' for emotionally unavailable people and hopes that they prove their worthiness. They're avoiding relationships where love is free because it doesn't feel 'earned'. They are the peacekeeper in a relationship and fear rejection. A pleaser has difficulties saying no or setting healthy boundaries, as they want others not to be upset. Conflict makes them uneasy, and they prefer to deal with disagreement by giving in or making up for it. They can be resentful though.

History: Pleasers usually grow up in a home with either very critical or overly protective parents and were often controlled through shame or too strong boundaries. They tried to be the 'good kid' to avoid a reaction from their manipulative, or anxious parents. Their way of dealing with their situation is by appeasing and comforting others.

Horse: Pleaser often keep their horses as friends and companions. They try everything to make their lives better and often don't want to tell them what to do and hence become unclear in their communication. However, if we can't say 'no' and if we have difficulties setting our boundaries to not push our horse 'away', we're sending this out in our energy and that might lead to conflicts. That could be that our horse feels unsafe with us and become overly nervous, or it might not be as interested in spending time with us, because it thinks she doesn't look after herself, so why should I be interested in her? Or our horse thinks, she can't seem to say no, so then I will say no to and for her.

Future: People (or horse) pleasing is extremely exhausting because the constant scanning of other people or horses and their wishes leaves almost no room for authenticity. Shame, insecurity, anxiety, helplessness, and repressed anger are some of the emotions that are playing a big role for the pleaser. Pleaser first needs to find themselves, figure out, who they really are, what they really like. They need to deeply understand that they are enough, just as they are, that they don't need approval or other people to be complete. They also often need to learn to set boundaries and to endure and deal with conflicts. That is true for the relationship with people and horses.

Skeptic

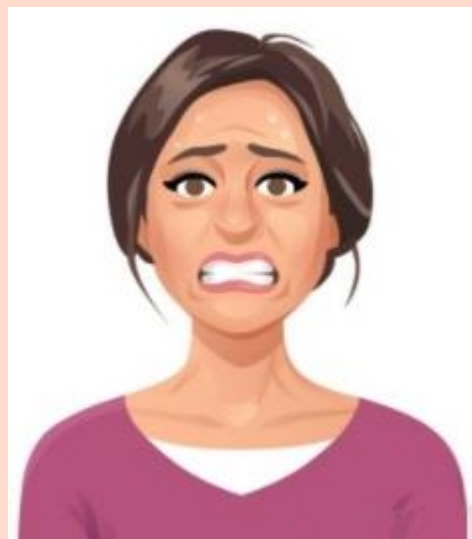
Skeptic: Skeptics have a deep lack of self-esteem and an unstable self-image, and often a feeling of emptiness. They are others-focussed, highly emotional, and highly sensitive. They long for close relationships, and reassurance, but always feel people let them down. They experience internal conflict and high levels of emotional stress in relationships and feel they are especially sensitive and perceptive and can tell when others seem to pull away from them. They idealize others, but then feel disappointed and rejected when the other person is not living up to their expectations. As a result, they often have unstable and on-and-off relationships - push and pull. They are anxious when they are close with their love interest and anxious when apart. They have a fear of being alone and mistake intensity for intimacy. They feel like no one has really understood what they really need. They reflect more on others hurting them and then they experience frustration and anger, not sadness. After an emotional response, they are often confused themselves with their own, conflicted reactions.

History: Skeptics grew up with an unpredictable parent or caregiver. Without consistent attention or affection from their parents, they develop a strong feeling of abandonment. When affection is then offered again, they are already frustrated and not ready to accept the offer. They feel that their parent has never really seen them or understood what they need.

Horse: Skeptics are between trapezes and can be horse pleasers at times, but when things don't seem to work or the horse walks away or seems not interested, the skeptic can then use means of strict control, sometimes over top punishment, switching his behavior from one second to the other, as he feels like he got hurt first. The horse in return can also show both these emotions and behaviors, if it's a sensitive horse, it will likely be submissive and obedient, and a physical horse will likely be pushy and aggressive.



Victim



Victim: Victims keep their own needs quiet and are often not even sure, what their own needs are. They depend on the approval of others and often fear having to fend for themselves even more if they are left alone, and that's why they often put up with how they are treated. They have an intense lack of self-confidence and need reassurance from others to make even small decisions. They have a fear of disapproval and of disagreeing with others. Victims have a high tolerance for poor treatment, are often overwhelmed and just barely keep their day going. In a relationship, they fear, that if they would speak up or have stronger opinions, their partner would get more manipulative or angrier. So, they protect themselves through passivity, being quiet and submissive. They often view relationship problems as their own fault and are often scared of reactions from partners, so they don't assert themselves.

History: Growing up, victims often experienced intense anger and stress from a parent and are used to chaos, so they always try to stay under the radar. For them, no strategy they tried in their childhood like avoiding, appeasing, or fighting back has ever really worked for them so they disconnect from their emotions or enter a state of hope- and helplessness. Even, if things seem to be calm, they are still anxious and scan their environment for the next attack.

Horse: Victims are looking for real friendship with their horses and to have someone, who truly belongs to them. Reactions from horses would be e.g., that when the person approaches, the horse turns its head away as if it wants to look to the side or almost to the back. The person's energy is so uncomfortable for the horse, that it feels it has to turn away. When leading, the horse is very sluggish, walks far behind its person, and sometimes even turns its ears back. This is because the energy of rejection feels heavy and destructive. And the horse also doesn't know at that moment who is meant by this rejection. It only perceives the energy. And because it does not understand this, it relates it to itself. So, it perceives that the victim rejects it. If the person also disapproves of their appearance, then the horse can mirror that with skin diseases like eczema, etc. It can also change its whole morphology over time. So, as if the horse literally collapses into itself, it no longer shows all its beauty, it just shuffles along. It does not show itself with other horses and gets a slightly bitter or sad expression. Something seems to be covered up and hidden and one has the feeling that the horse cannot really show itself in its beauty and full power. The horse's face seems closed, the eyes less awake. If you recognize yourself a bit in this pattern, please find a person who can support you in your healing journey!

Independence

When we come to our horse with a certain need, may it be companionship, adventure, success, or affection, we have a void so to say, that we would like to fill through being and doing things with our horse. And we also set ourselves under pressure, because what we want from our horse is something that we need. Maybe we even have the horse in our life for this specific reason and we might feel disappointed or angry if we don't get it.

However, if we're dependent on getting the feeling or experience we are looking for from somewhere outside of ourselves, then we're much more likely to be unhappy because we cannot create the feeling we want to experience without our horse or at least not as easily. But then, we will always depend on others (in that case our horse) to create this feeling in us, which takes our power of being fulfilled away from us.

So, ideally, when you come to your horse and it moves away, then allow it to happen (of course, you can ask for a second time). But if the answer stays the same, then try to be ok with it. Just wait for as long as it seems right for you and then say, ok, if you don't want to interact today, then I fulfill my need for ... differently.

And when you notice an unpleasant emotion coming up, like impatience, anger, or sadness, then it is best to just walk away, take a deep breath, and try it again later. You can also come up with other ideas about what to do, for example, you can do a short meditation, you can dance all by yourself, or maybe write in your diary. With that, you give your horse space and the choice to come to and be with you. Voluntarily.

A photograph of two brown horses standing in a field of tall, dry grass. The horses are positioned in the lower half of the frame, facing right. The background is a vast field of similar grass, extending to the horizon. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting. Overlaid on the image is the text "People & Horse's NEEDS" in white. "People & Horse's" is written in a cursive font, while "NEEDS" is in a bold, uppercase sans-serif font.

People & Horse's **NEEDS**

Horse's NEEDS



We are our horse's mentors and best friends; we are the ones who are creating their lives. And it depends on us if it's a happy life where all needs are met or one that is a challenge, where it needs to protect itself from. Especially during the part of the day when we are together, we create either positive or unpleasant experiences for our horse. But there are 23 more hours in the day when the horse is not with us.

So, in a nutshell, what do horses really need?

- Safety through a safe environment (e.g., protection from predators, enough room to 'escape')
- Safety through being a member of a herd (where protection comes from being with others)
- Having the chance to rest comfortably and to play in an enriched environment (e.g. in a paddock paradise or Equicentral System)
- Safety through clear communication when being with its human
- Being allowed to express emotions, and to have a say when being with its human
- Getting inspired to be in the 'seeking mode' (as our horses are not free, where this happens naturally)



People's NEEDS

It is important that a peaceful relationship never means, that we try to only meet our horses' needs, it's important, that we take our own needs very seriously and fulfill them. Only if we're happy, and fulfilled and can set our boundaries well, and only then it will be possible to meet the horse at eye level without creating new, or different conflicts. So, that our horse seeks and can enjoy our company, we need a good inner state of being, a good energetic foundation. That our intentions and vibe beneath everything we do, say or experience comes from a state of fulfillment and purpose.

So, in a nutshell, what do people really need?

- Safety through a safe environment, enough resources, and a sense of belonging to our tribe
- Security that we as a person matter, are loved, known, and are allowed to be as we are



For those of us who not always had the first two points met, we need:

- Reduce overthinking and start feeling again, and to strengthen our inner and outer boundaries
- Learn to be mindful, to recharge and to release traumatic experiences
- Learn to communicate with others and to solve conflicts in harmonious ways
- And for a good relationship with our horses, we also to learn the natural way how horse communicate, so that we can be a peaceful friend and mentor.



A photograph of two horses, an adult and a foal, standing in a field of tall, dry, golden-brown grass. The adult horse is on the left, and the foal is on the right, both facing right. The word "Videoanalysis" is written in a white, cursive font across the middle of the image, overlapping the horses and the grass.

Videoanalysis