

Natural Horsemanship

With Traumatized Horses



What **is** Natural Horsemanship?

Understanding the NATURE of the horse

Using equine behavior & communication to develop a relationship



What **Causes** Trauma?

Anything that severely stresses a horse mentally, physically, or emotionally.



Isolation



Harsh Treatment



Starvation



Restraint



Roundups



Traditional Training Methods



Treatment Contrary to Their Nature

Understanding that horses are a prey species, sensitive, reactive, claustrophobic, social, and flee from fear helps us understand the potential sources of trauma.

How horses respond to mishandling can vary from horse to horse due to innate characteristics, environment and experience.

We need to treat each horse as an individual and understand that what he's feeling is legitimate.

Horses are incapable of "faking it". They do not have a well-developed frontal portion of the brain that would allow them to do so.

(Dr. Steve Peters in *Evidence Based Horsemanship*)

We need to step away from many institutionalized (traditional) treatments of horses and use methods that do not exacerbate an existing trauma or create a new one.

Eliminate any techniques that rely on fear, intimidation, or mechanical devices.

How do Horses Respond to Trauma?

1) Become Afraid

Flee

Shut Down



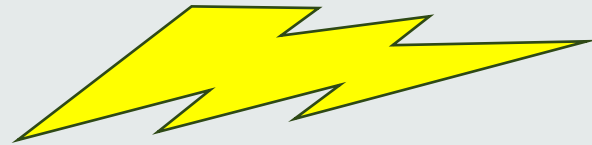
2. Become
Aggressive



Fight



3. A Combination of Fear and Fight



These are the MOST dangerous horses as they can flip in a fraction of a second.

The coping methods a horse uses has worked for them on some level.

They have created neural pathways that serve as "defaults", which will continue to be used unless we can intervene.

How Do We **Help** Traumatized Horses?

We need to work with horses to create new, appropriate neural pathways.

It may take 100's of repetitions to create a pathway that has more myelin than the old one. The horse sets the timeline. (Reference Martin Black in *Evidence-Based Horsemanship*.)

We MUST become experts at reading horses or the best techniques in the world will not yield the results we want.

What are the eyes, ears, nostrils, neck, lips, tail, legs, overall posture, and body movement telling you?

Which Word(s) Would You Assign to Each Photo?

angry

frightened

distracted

contented

worried

stubborn

curious

confused

1



2



3



4



5



6



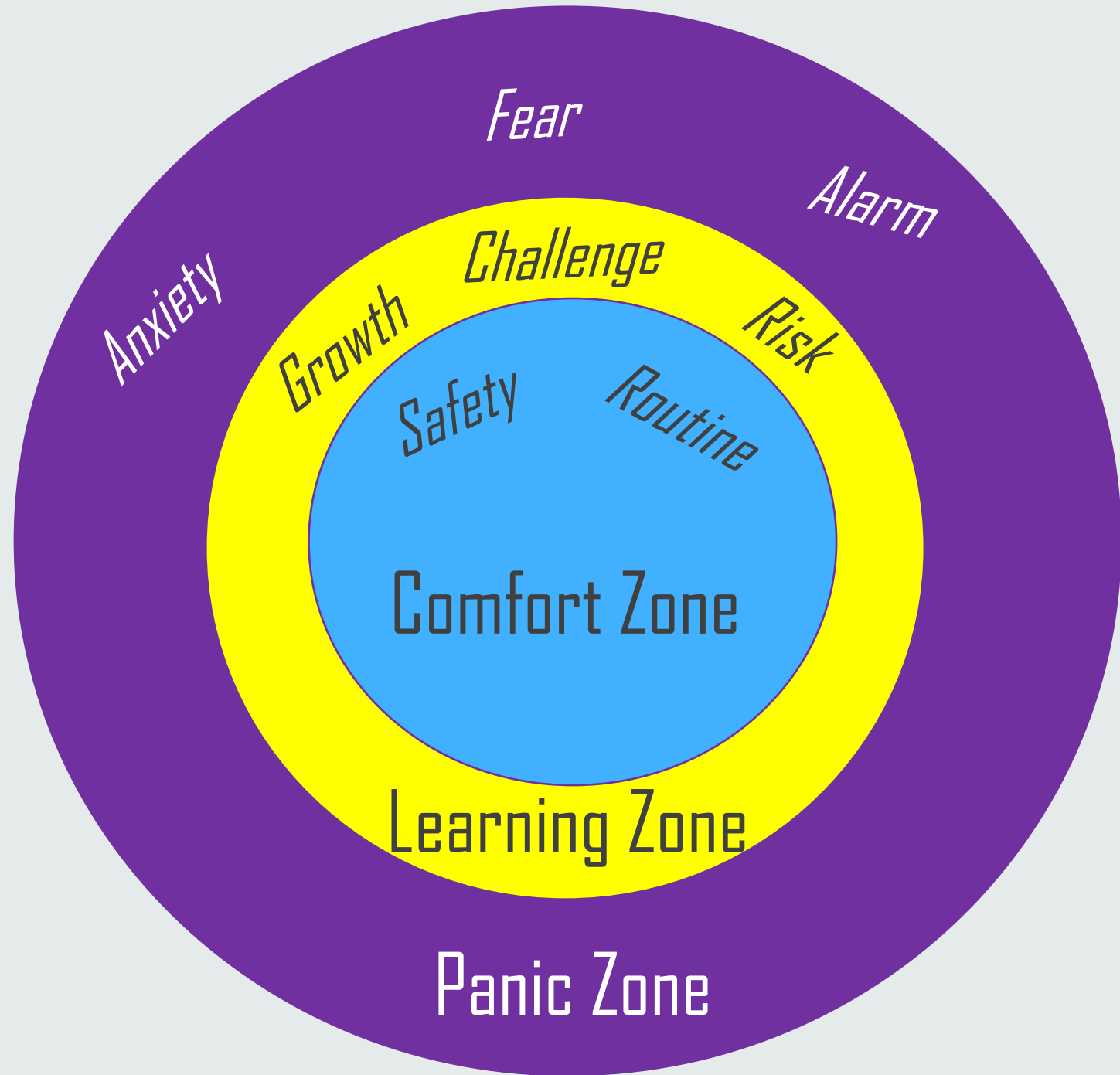


We **MUST** become experts at recognizing a horse's response to our attempts ~ is the horse giving you a green light (proceed, all is good)
a yellow light (proceed with caution)
a red light (STOP NOW!)



Why?

Because learning takes place *just* outside the comfort zone



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



We MUST become experts at understanding, improving, and controlling ourselves in terms of the following:

body positioning

energy level

facial expression

emotions

feel

timing

skill set



knowledge

Tools of the Natural Horseman

To make your work with horses safer, easier, more effective, and more comfortable for the horse.



10' telescoping pole

Soft rope halter



4' stick with string



flag

12' & 22' yacht ropes

Techniques of the Natural Horseman

1

Spend Undemanding Time with the Horse



Techniques of the Natural Horseman

2

Determine Proximity vs. Touch



Isolate to test



Techniques of the Natural Horseman

3

Utilize the "Horseman's Handshake"





Techniques of the Natural Horseman

4

Pressure & Release

Pressure: a stimulus designed to elicit a response

Caused by many things:

movement, energy, body language, proximity

Release: Removal of the pressure

This works because the removal of the pressure acts like a reward.

“This phenomenon suggests that habit-learning happens when dopamine reinforces synaptic changes in nerves activated just before the reward was presented.” Dr. Steven Peters in *Evidence-Based Horsemanship*

When a horse perceives pressure, his sympathetic nervous system is activated. Adrenaline kicks in, the fight or flight response is triggered.

When the horse perceives a release, the parasympathetic nervous system takes over.

Relaxation occurs.

What **Types** of Pressure Are There?

Steady ~ generally requires touch



Rhythmic ~ comes and goes ~
can work from a distance



How **Much** Pressure Should We Use?

As little as possible to cause the change
you're looking for.

Increase the pressure by small degrees if needed.

You can **ALWAYS ADD** pressure, but you can't
SUBTRACT it once it's been applied.

How Do We Release the Pressure?

Look away or down

Turn your back

Walk away

Remove the stick

Drop the rope

Remove your hand

Exhale

When

Should We Release the Pressure?

When the horse has made the slightest try.

Better TOO SOON than TOO LATE.

Techniques of the Natural Horseman

2

Approach & Retreat/Retreat & Approach

Move/Act toward your goal

Move/Act away from your goal

Be aware of thresholds



Move away, move away, move away,
then move toward



Can you "Move Closer and Stay Longer"?





Signs of Relaxation to Watch for:



blinking

showing curiosity

lowering the head

standing still

blowing out

licking and chewing

cocking a hind leg

yawning

making eye contact

softened ears

responding to a horsey handshake



Final Thoughts

With an aggressive horse, take the time to convince him he doesn't need to use that neural pathway.

Don't push him over his threshold so he goes there, reinforcing that undesired behavior pathway.

You can accomplish a great deal from outside the horse's pen so he feels even less pressure.

HOWEVER ...

Never forget a horse can kill you.

Don't be a "hero" (most of them are dead people).

Always have an escape plan.

Do NOT be reluctant to block an aggressive horse if you don't have time to get out of there.

It's NOT the horse's fault he's in this position.
It's our responsibility to teach him there is a
better way (better for him and us)!

**MAY THE HORSE
BE WITH YOU**

