

If You're Having Trust Issues When You Ride Your Horse, Consider These Five Things



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Anyone who rides a horse reflects on the amount of trust he or she has in their horse from time to time. This is a natural part of riding.



Just as in any relationship, trust is a critical element of a healthy give-and-take exchange between two personalities.

As riders we need to trust our horse, and our horse needs to trust us for both parties to be at their best.

The dictionary defines trust as, “the reliance on the integrity and strength of a person or a thing,” or “a person on whom one relies”.

Sometimes, when things aren't going so smooth, and you're teetering a little about trusting your horse, it's hard to decipher if the issue is about trusting your horse, or if it's about trusting yourself. “Is it me; Is it him; Or is it a little bit of both?”

Instead of feeling like trust in your horse is a gigantic issue that you just can't quite figure out, try out the following five ideas. They are designed to help you sort through what's really going on.

1. What is your horse's training level, your riding level, and your experience level?

For all 3 areas, list things about which you feel super confidence, medium confidence, and low confidence.

If you are honest about all three, you should have a clear picture of where you and your horse are matching up, where you're not, and where adjustments need to be made.

2. Make sure your horse is well suited to help you build your confidence.

Horses who are too green, (“learn together,”) as well show-wise ones, are not ideal.

Those are just two examples of a potential mismatch.

Make sure you have not arranged an impossible match-up for you and your horse to succeed at this point in your riding career.

Find a trusted mentor to help you be objective. Set yourself up for success by making sure your goals and your horse's suitability are on track.

3. If you compete, clearly separate the difference in your job between when you practice and when you show.

Practice is for working on weaknesses.

Showing is for exhibiting your horse's strengths.

When you compete, present what you both do well. Do your part of the showing job. Showing is a time to trust. It's not a time to train. If you don't let go and trust yourself or your horse when you show, you will undermine both of your true competency levels.

After you show, evaluate which elements need future work. Address those things during your next practice.

The show/practice cycle is most productive when viewed as a process of constant improvement, and not perfection. Trust this process.

4. Consider if you are inadvertently causing issues with your horse because you are worried about what errors he will make.

There's a snowball effect when you worry about your horse doing something "wrong".

You get tight mentally and physically, which causes you to do other things that are not good. Your horse gets confused by your inconsistent communications, and reacts.

Now, you get even tighter. Then, because of your horse's reactions, you end up not trusting your horse.

Instead of thinking about problems, talk to yourself about what you want.

For errors, tell yourself, "Next time, I'll do _____". This technique gives you a way to replace negative thoughts with the positive things you want to achieve.

5. Regarding the less than perfect things about your horse or your riding ... be patient, and address them in small chunks.

Don't let challenges snowball into a big undefined, gut-wrenching, lack of trust in your horse.

Proceed with solution-based approaches.

If you and your horse just can't seem to reach your goals, regroup, and make some decisions. There is never a right or wrong decision ... each one just takes us down the road of that particular decision. It's always an adventure.

Use every opportunity to learn. Trust the process. If you're learning, you can only win.

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