

LOSE  
THE  
FEAR

# You can DO IT!

Last issue, we launched our 'Get confident' campaign to help and encourage riders to overcome their fears and achieve their goals. This issue, one *Horse* reader trials confidence-giving techniques

Once a fear takes hold, it can be difficult to shake off. Overcoming a confidence issue that has arisen from a traumatic event is an even bigger challenge.

Claire Hope suffered horrific injuries and lost the sight in one eye when she was kicked by a young horse.

Not only did Claire, of Thirsk, North Yorkshire, become nervous around horses, her riding was also affected. She suffered "palpitations" at the thought of jumping and riding at speed.

"My biggest fear was falling off and getting hurt again," Claire says. "I always came up with reasons not to ride."

"I have two horses, Costa and Oliver. Oliver is five and can be unpredictable."

We arranged for Claire to speak to confidence coach Jo Cooper, who uses Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Thought Field Therapy (TFT) to help clients overcome their problems. Read on to find out how Claire fared.

## The techniques

Jo uses **Neuro-Linguistic Programming** to help people recognise and change thought patterns that are no longer useful to them.

**Thought Field Therapy** involves tapping yourself on acupressure points on the face, hands and upper body using your fingertips (pictured). You can do it anywhere, whenever you want to.



Nobody knows exactly how tapping works, but one idea is it corrects a disruption in 'thought fields' that result in negative emotions.

### Accessing the memory

"Over the course of three weeks I had three phone sessions with Jo," says Claire. "She asked lots of questions to find out what my fears were and what could be triggering them."

"When we discussed my confidence issue, Jo asked me how worried I was on a scale of one to 10 and if I had a mental image of what had happened. She asked me to 'tap' on my face with my fingertips in a sequence.

"This makes the picture go away. You don't forget the memory, but the mind isn't able to access it so easily."

"We discussed my fear of cantering on hacks – I only walk or trot, because I'm scared I'll get bucked off my young horse, Oliver. Jo told me where to tap and the negative images changed."

"Amazingly, the next time I hacked out, I was able to canter. It was such good fun I was disappointed when we got back to the yard."

"Another thing that's changed is how I feel when I get to the stables."

"Prior to the therapy, I needed four cigarettes and two black coffees before I would even think about getting on. Now, I tack up and am in the saddle without giving it a second thought."

### A physical change

"Since my accident, I have experienced a constant tingling in my face," says Claire. "It is similar to when the feeling starts to come back after having an anaesthetic injection at the dentist."

"In one of our sessions, I did some tapping with regards to my injuries and the tingling sensation has gone."

"Before, it continually reminded me of my damaged face. Now, I am able to concentrate on what I'm doing instead."

"My vision has also improved. Most people have a dominant eye, a bit like



being left- or right-handed. My right eye, which I lost the sight in, would have been my lead eye, and my left eye had to adjust. My perception of depth and width has changed since the accident.

"The tapping work has given me a bigger range of vision in my left eye."

"Now, I spend less time thinking 'I'm injured, I can't do it', and instead enjoy the moment."

### Historical influences

"I have also discovered confidence problems don't just stem from things that have happened recently, however traumatic they have been," says Claire.

"Falls or incidents that occurred years ago can influence how you feel."

"Talking to Jo, I recalled falling off a pony and breaking my arm when I was three years old. At the time, I was told to stop crying and get back on. Images like that build up over a period of time."

"Working with Jo releases all the skeletons in your cupboard. She is a lovely lady, easy to talk to and good at explaining everything."

"She has given me a tapping sequence to use on Costa, too."



## 'Working with Jo releases all the skeletons in your cupboard'

"He is quite fidgety when I get on, and spooks at the mounting block, which I don't like because of my restricted vision."

"We hope tapping on Costa's body will make him more relaxed about standing next to it."

### Tapping and animals

Jo Cooper says TFT can be used with horses and dogs to help with fear issues.

"Unfortunately, you can't ask a horse what is bothering them," she explains. "But I have seen good results using TFT."

"My view is that animals have thought fields, too, even if they are not identical to those of humans."

### Overcoming trauma

After suffering such a traumatic experience, it was understandable for Claire to have suffered issues afterwards.

According to Jo, what surprised Claire is that her confidence could also have been affected by previous events.

"I believe there is a 'threshold' effect and the most recent trauma can be the last straw and takes them over the threshold," Jo says.

"It is finding and resolving other contributory factors, which may not all be horse-related, that can make the most difference to restoring confidence."

Jo says she often works with people who have past injuries that, like Claire, still affect them physically, such as experiencing numbness or imbalance.

She has found a combination of NLP and TFT can lead to beneficial changes.

"One hypothesis is these approaches may affect the way the brain maps the body," says Jo.

"When physical trauma is suffered, the brain changes its map of the body. Some people believe the brain doesn't always update that change when healing has taken place."

● If you would like to find out more, visit: [www.equestrianconfidence.com](http://www.equestrianconfidence.com) or tel: (0116) 299 1081.

## OVERCOME THOSE NERVES!

Top riders share their best confidence-boosting tips

"If you are prepared, it is easier to concentrate on riding rather than being distracted by nerves. Listen to relaxing music, or visualise yourself doing well, then keep that feeling while riding."

Before a competition, I usually have a power nap, then think through the test while playing calm music on my iPod."

Laura Bechtolsheimer, dressage rider



"I kept having four faults, so I talked to a psychologist. They told me to jot down all the best rounds I've ever done, then think about them when getting ready to go in the ring."

I always do this and it seems to help."

Ellen Whitaker, showjumper

"Going to clinics and training days will help overcome any nervous issues outside of the ring. These sessions are great for boosting confidence, because you have someone experienced to give constructive advice."

Katie Jerram, show rider and producer



"One thing I find daunting is getting on an unknown horse for the first time. In this situation, I make sure I know as much about him as possible, including his quirks, so I am prepared."

Laura Renwick, showjumper

"I get nervous after working my horse in at a show, when I'm back at the lorry waiting for the grooms to make any last-minute touches. Going for a walk until the horse is ready takes my mind off being nervous. Once I'm back on board, I'm OK."

Lorraine Homer, show rider and producer



"When people get nervous, bad habits creep in, but if a trainer tells them not to do something, they are more likely to do it. For example, if someone over-checks into a

fence and I tell them to relax their hands, they will probably tense up. Instead, I give them a task, such as shouting out the alphabet – this stops them taking a hold."

Harry Meade, eventer

● For more tips on overcoming competition stress, turn the page →