

Clipping hell!

Tips for helping clipper-shy horses

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Presentation content

Session will cover

- Considerations around clipping: Need to do versus nice to do?
- The role of the owner
- The role of the clipper
- The role of the vet
- Psychopharmacotherapy
- Q&A



Nice to do versus need to do

- Clipping can prove challenging from numerous behavioural perspectives including client, horse and practitioner safety.
- Maximising safety, welfare and a positive experience are key to a successful clip and to the pattern of future clips.
- To maximise these three aspects, it is key that the horse is as comfortable as possible.

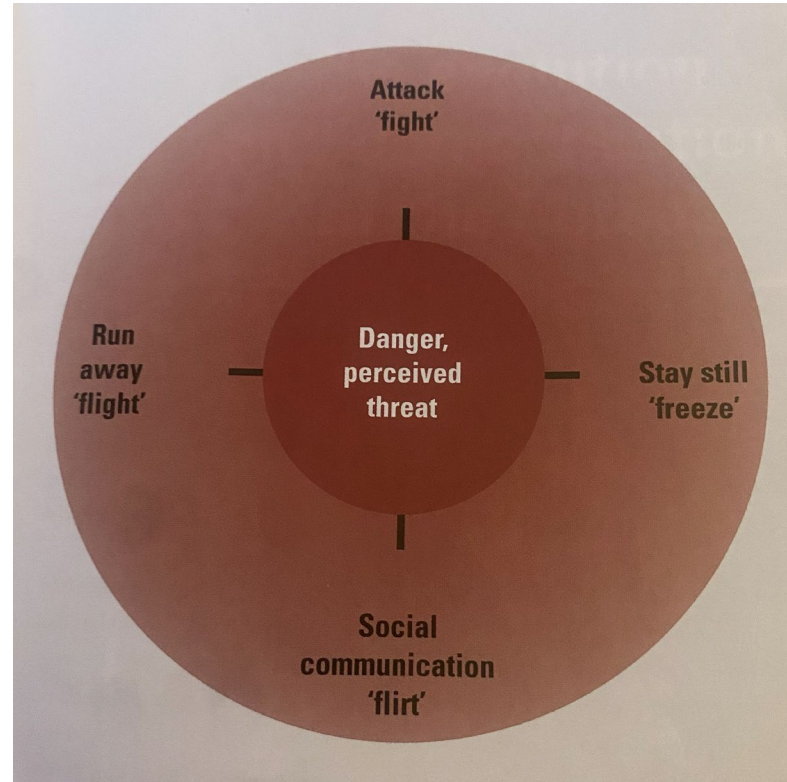


Considerations regarding deciding to clip

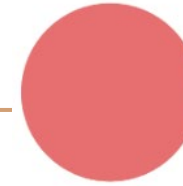
- **Is it needed?**
 - Why?
- **When is it needed?**
 - How many clip sessions per season?
- **What type of clip is needed?**
 - Work level, fitness, environment etc
- **Clipping for veterinary treatment?**
 - Care still needed



Consider their natural response to a threat



Consider the traffic light system



RED – STOP

Looking for:

- **Stress signals** such as mid-high head carriage, rounder eyes, sclera showing, tight muzzle and chin, extended upper lip and nose, rounder nostrils, actively moving ears, carried or clenched tail, increased defecation and/or urination, pacing, rushing, reduced eating or drinking, rapid movements, head swing, increased startle reactions
- **Distance increasing signals** such as chasing away, bite threats, kick threats, bucking, arched neck, posturing behaviour, attempts to move away from stimulus



AMBER – WATCH CAREFULLY, BE PREPARED TO STOP

Looking for:

- **Calming signals** such as increased blink rate, yawning, jaw stretching, neck/body shaking, half eye closing, showing hindquarters or flanks
- **Displacement behaviours** such as sniffing or pawing at the ground without eating, rubbing head or neck along own leg or on objects, self-biting, licking objects, rolling, head-swinging



GREEN – OK TO PROCEED

Looking for: relaxed muscle tone, can take treats in a relaxed manner, head is not high, ears relaxed and to the side or neutral, mouth and chin not tense, no displacement behaviours evident, eyes are relaxed with no obvious sclera flashing, steady pace with no abrupt posturing or startle response, tail is not clamped or raised and swings freely, no bite or kick threats





Owners - How can they help prepare the horse?



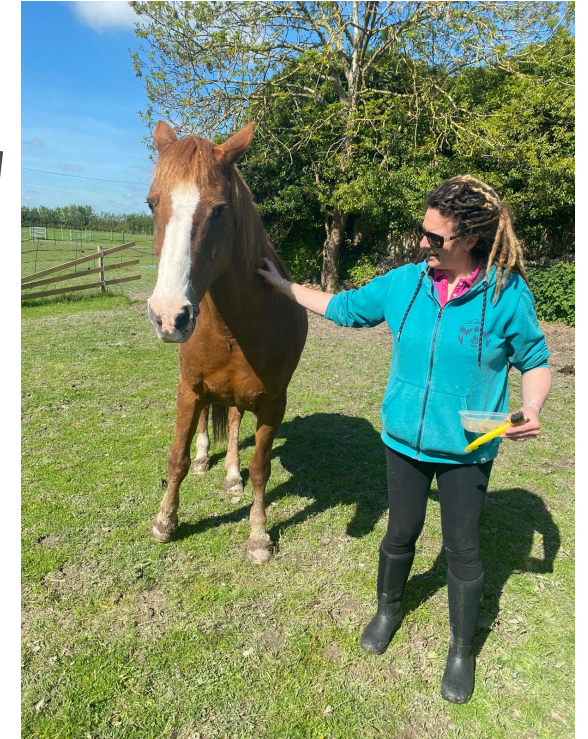
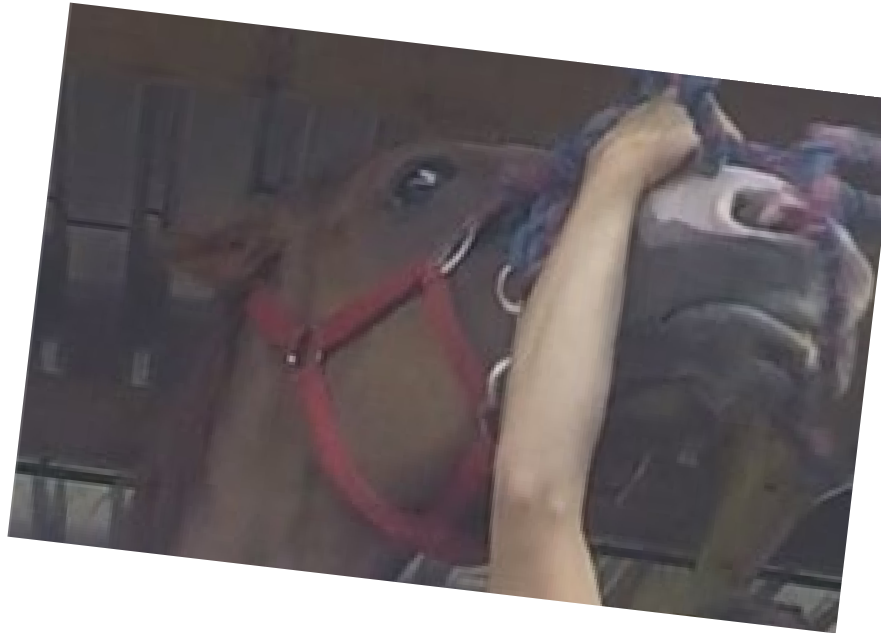
Advance preparation

- Ideally starting to work with the horse **at least 6-weeks** prior to the intended clipping
- May require **much longer** if the horse has had **prior negative experiences**
- Rescued, feral or other previously ill-treated equines can take many **months or years** to work towards feeling comfortable with this process.



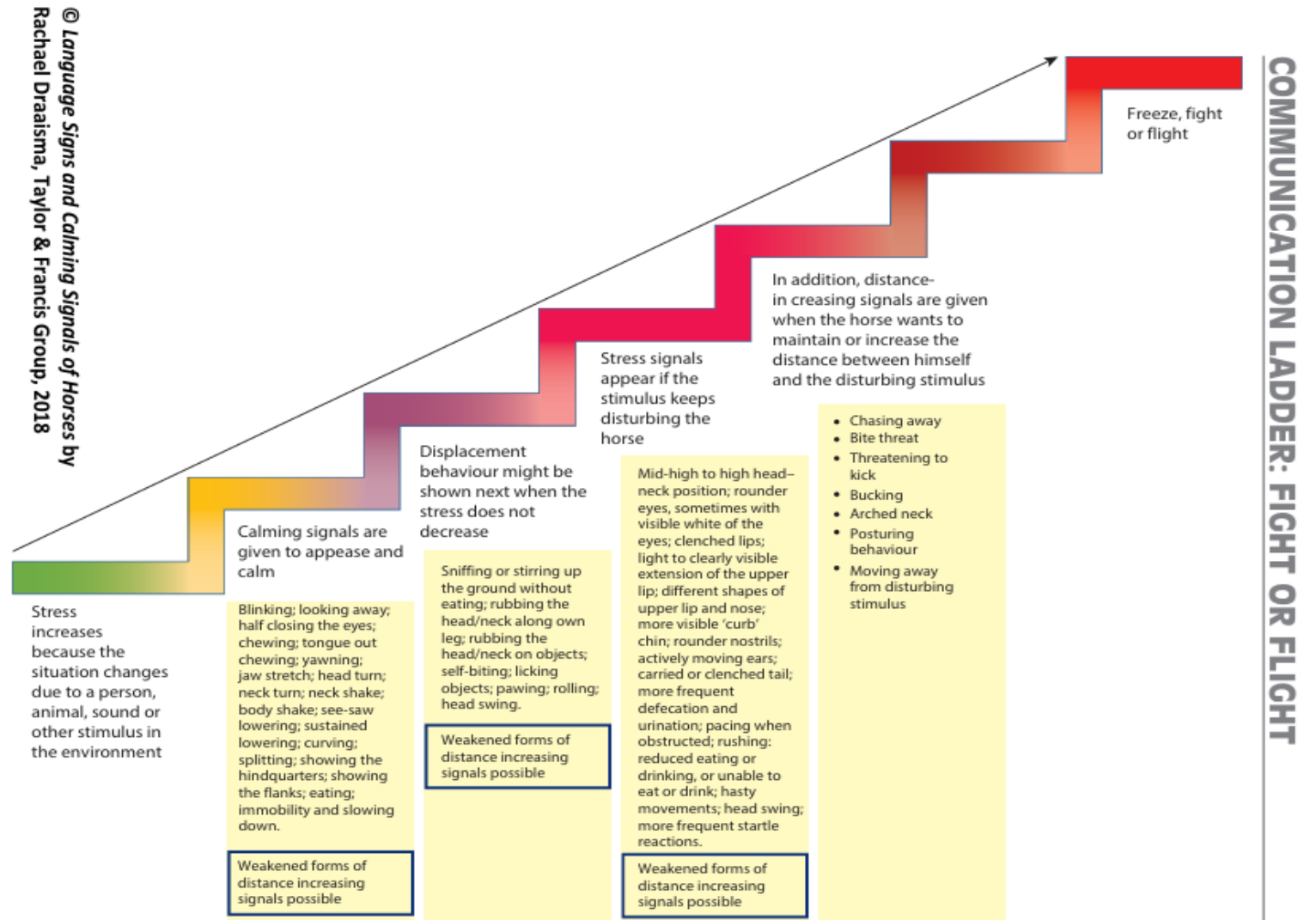
Understanding body language

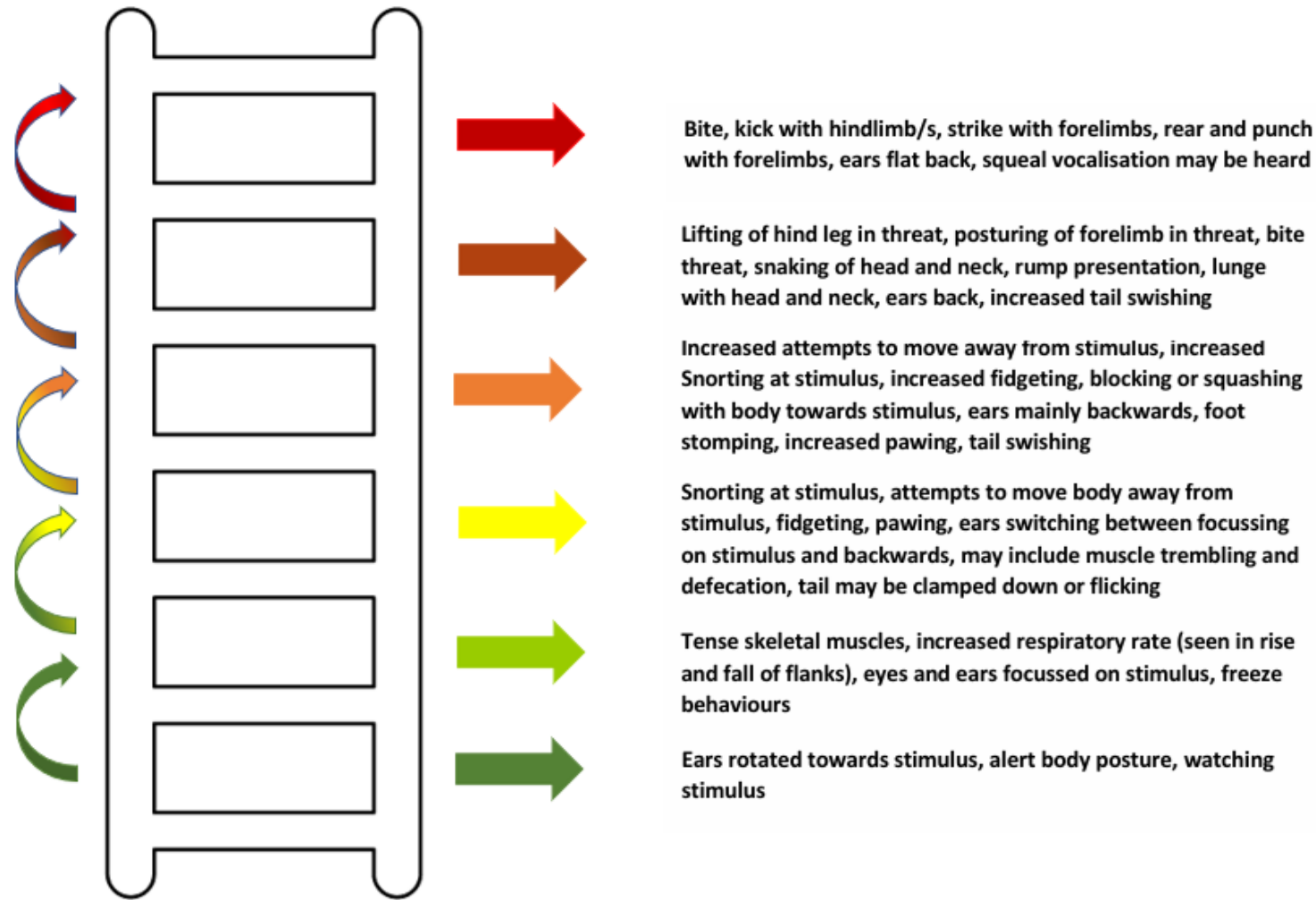
- The humans may not identify subtle body language cues prior to escalation
- It is vital that we can recognise **and** that we pay attention to subtle body language to prevent escalation and make better choices for the patient and client.



Communication ladder

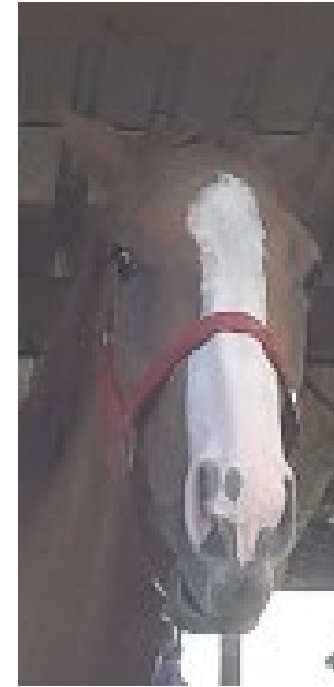
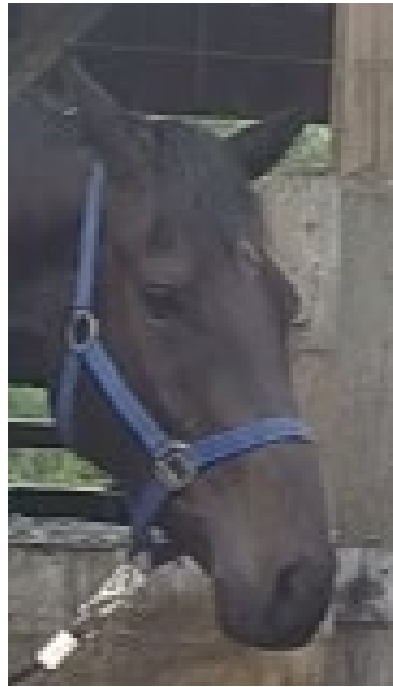
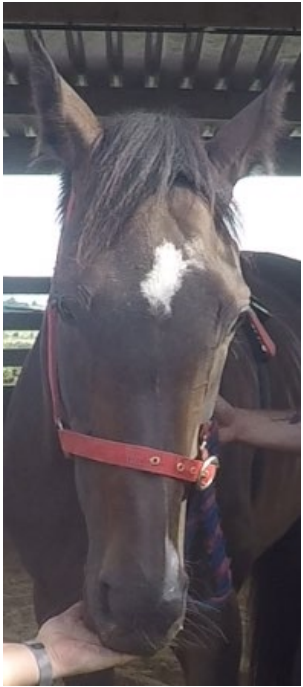
- Whole body communication
- Consideration of each area
- See the whole picture but notice the individual nuances





Ladder of arousal

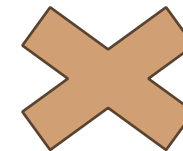
Body language awareness



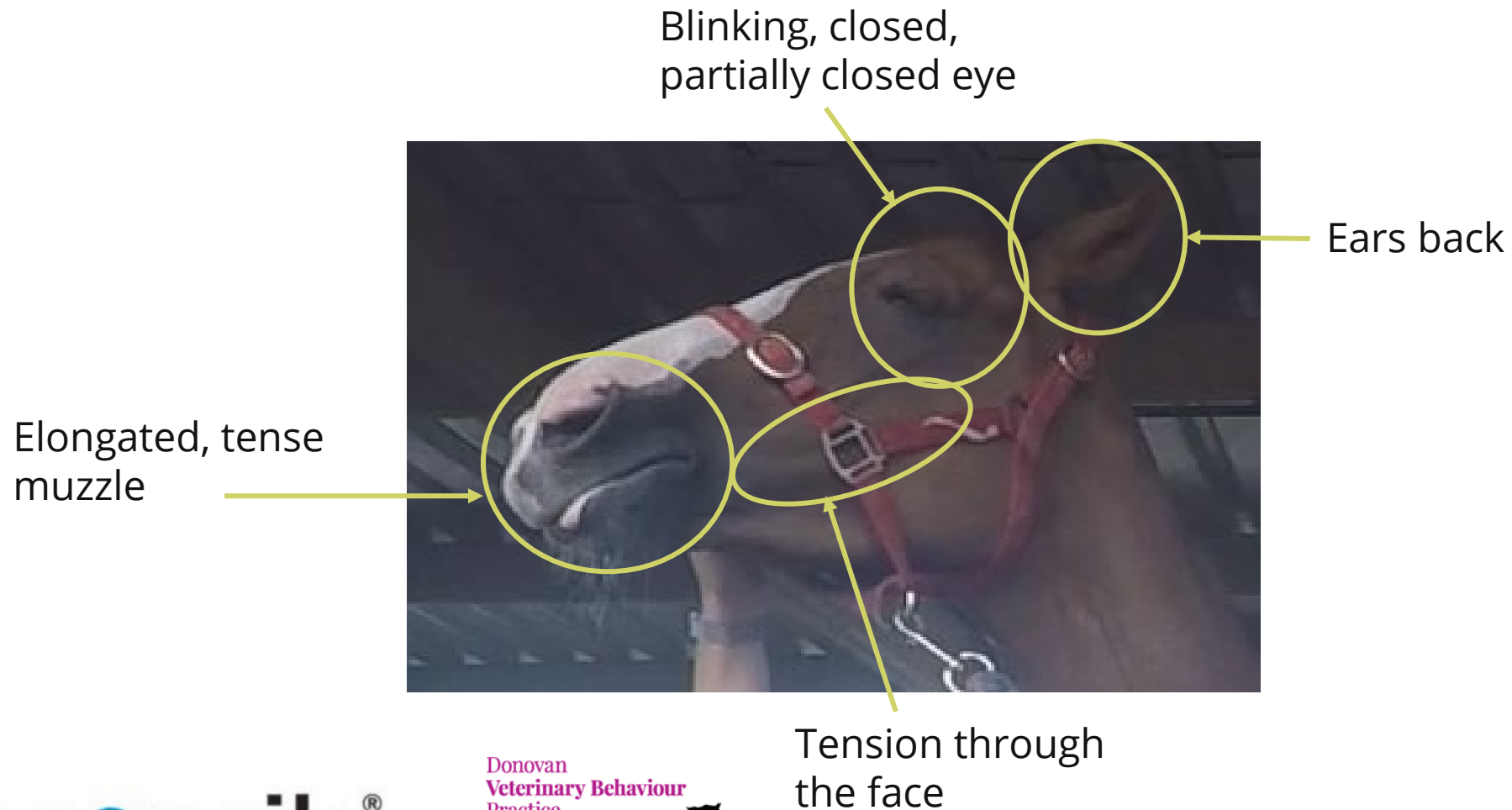
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Faces matter!



Habituation to the area



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Friends, forage and freedom to move

- Time relaxing in the 'clipping area' with friends, forage and freedom to move
- Enrichment in the area regularly
- **Consent mat training**
 - Choosing to be on mat = ready to be clipped
 - Moving off the mat = not ready/ needs a break
 - Can be relatively easily trained by the owner
 - Needs to be adhered to by the person clipping i.e. horse moves off procedure stops.
- **Stationary target training**
 - Progressed from initial target training



Specific training – e.g. target training



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Practice



Set them up to succeed

- Work together in a familiar place they find safe
- Have a companion present (social species - safety in numbers)
- Positive reinforcement - practise/train (clicker training)
- Use food
 - **Haynet to prevent frustration and increase chewing**
 - **Treats to use as rewards**
- Keep Clippers working well
- Modify according to the environment for that individual
 - Weather
 - Companion
 - Discomfort
 - Preceding events

Habituation to equipment and processes

- Practice mock clipping set up
- Start off with a small clip
- Make positive associations with equipment, handling and processes
- Undertake gradual work to reduce negative associations made previously with equipment
- Habituation to suitable techniques where this may be needed for a section
 - e.g. clipping around the elbow
- Allow the horse time to safely investigate new equipment where feasible
- Consider whether the animal has experience of parts of the process or not
 - E.g. clipping the face



Habituation to equipment and processes – Go Slow



Habituation to equipment and processes - Noise



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The clippers!

Essential to check:

- Function
- Sharp blades plus spares
- Cooling spray/lubricant
- Blade tension (pulling hair)
- Correct blades for coat/clip
- Smaller quieter clippers for face/head
- Food! Haynet and rewards



Essential to do:

- Start off with the clippers turned on away from the horse
- Let the horse smell them – they smell odd!
- Take regular breaks
- Spray/Cool the blades frequently
- Take time with trickier areas and places with loose skin – avoid catching the skin
- Brush blades regularly to avoid friction and heat

Gently working towards the goal Spot The Difference!



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Gently working towards the goal Spot The Difference!



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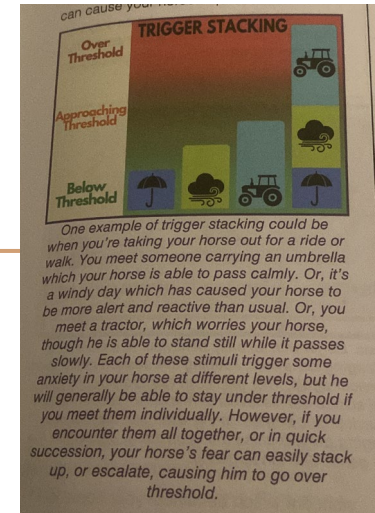
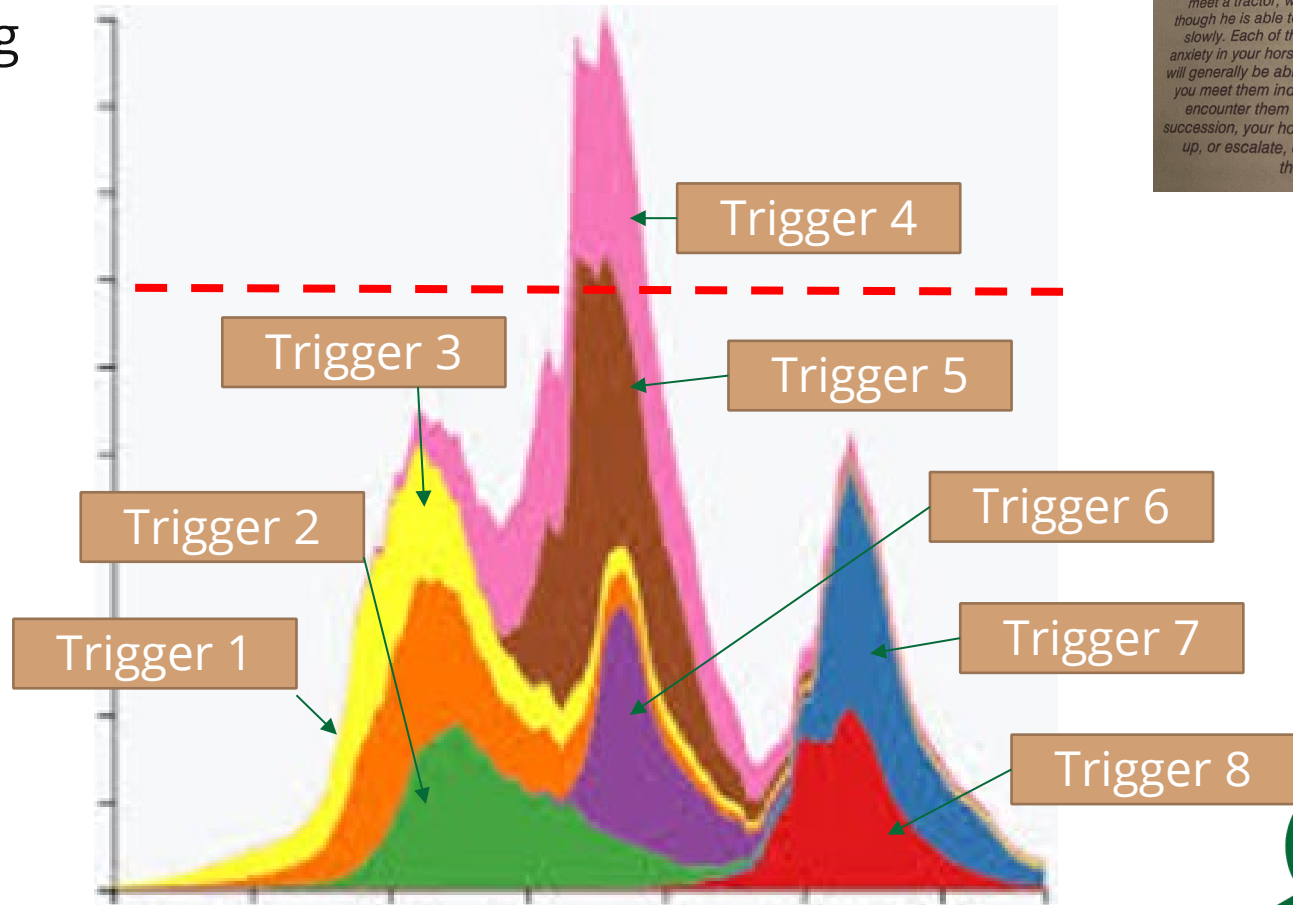


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Formally consider situation stacking

- Reduce trigger/situation stacking
- Which are primary triggers?
- Which are secondary, tertiary... triggers?
- Are the triggers related to each other?
- What is the animal's coping threshold for each trigger?
 - Intensity
 - Distance
 - Duration





The role of the vet?

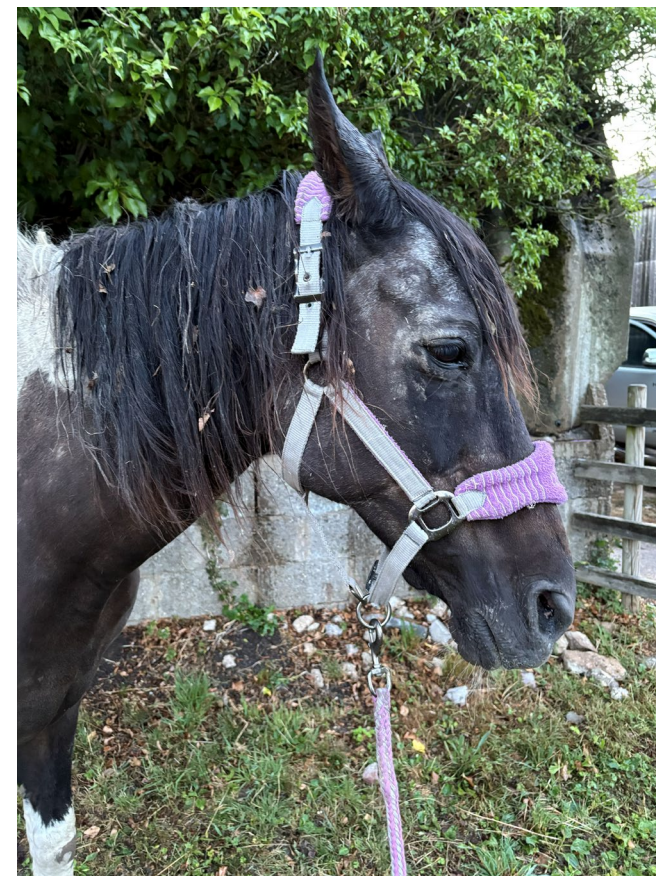


Pain



Table 8.1: Examples of Dynamic and/or Potentially General Reasons for Equine Pain
(Referenced in Chapter 8 of *Equine Behaviour in Mind*)

Example	Dynamic/Potential Reasons for Pain	Potential Presentation
Gut (visceral pain)	e.g. Gastric Ulcers (EGUS), impaction, torsion	Decreased appetite, crib biting, intermittent colic, irritability, 'girthiness'
Joints (articular pain)	e.g. DJD (osteoarthritis), OCD, sprains, subluxations	Lameness (may be subtle), resistance to certain movements, 'cold backed', bucking
Muscles (myalgia/muscle pain)	e.g. Strain, exertional rhabdomyolysis (tying up), 'atypical' conditions, trigger points	Stiffness, altered gait, sensitivity to grooming, decreased performance, unwillingness to work
Tendons & Ligaments	e.g. Tendinitis, desmitis (e.g., suspensory ligaments)	Swelling, heat, lameness (can be intermittent), dropping a limb when ridden
Feet (hoof pain)	e.g. Laminitis, abscesses, navicular disease, thrush	Shifting weight, 'pointer' stance, reluctance to move, increased digital pulses, sensitivity to certain ground
Teeth/Mouth (dental pain)	e.g. Sharp enamel points, wolf teeth issues, diastema, gum disease	Difficulty chewing, quidding, head tossing, resistance to the bit, pulling on reins
Tack/Equipment Fit	e.g. Poorly fitting saddle, tight girth, incorrect bit, restrictive browband	Resistance to saddling, bucking, rushing, tenseness, sores, uneven sweat marks
Neural (neuropathic pain)	e.g. Nerve impingement, compression, injury	Self-mutilation, hyperesthesia (over-sensitivity), sudden 'explosive' reactions, unusual lameness

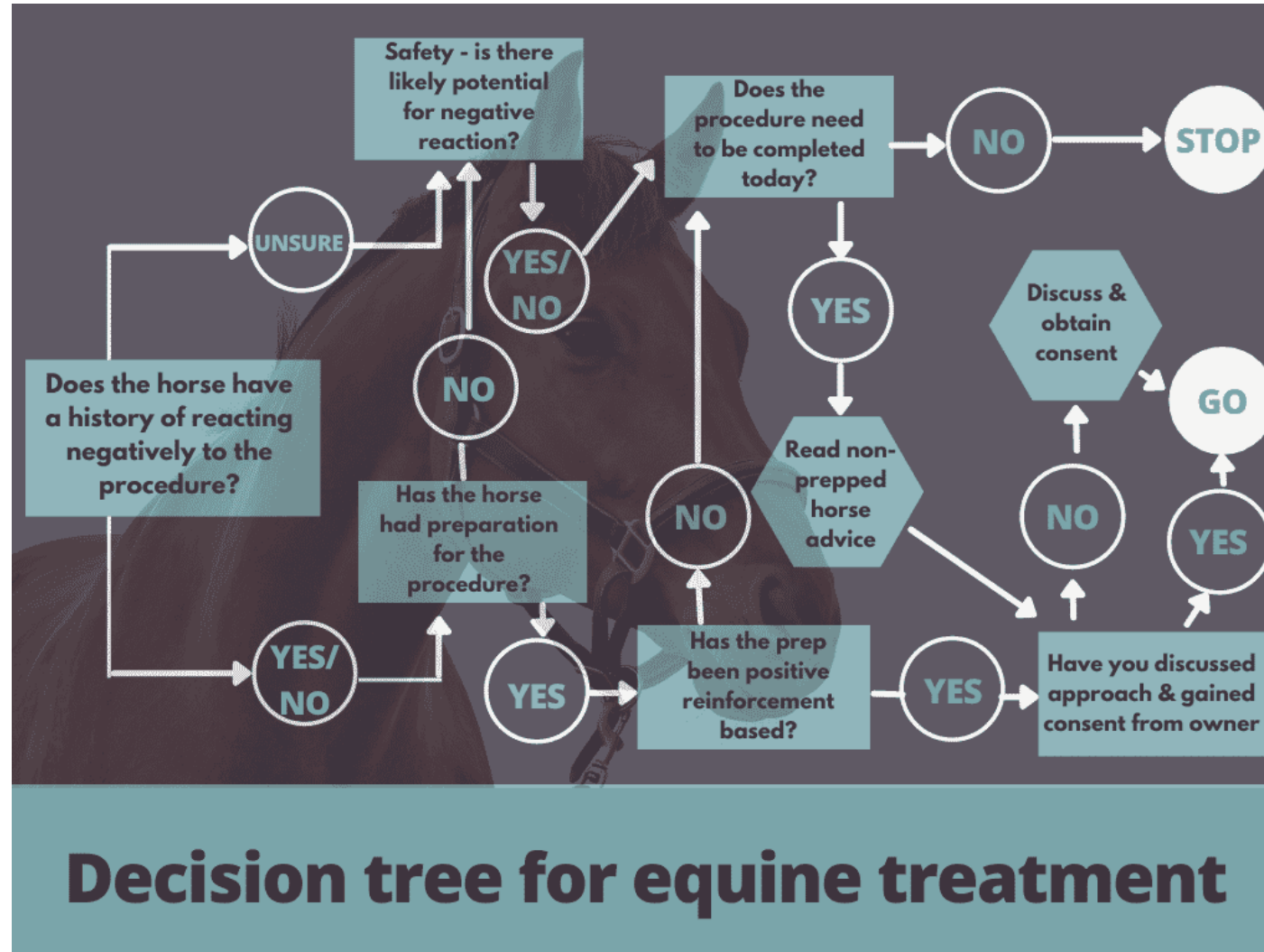


Treatment required?

See Loftus and Donovan (2021)
Providing evidence-based and behaviour-friendly equine visits

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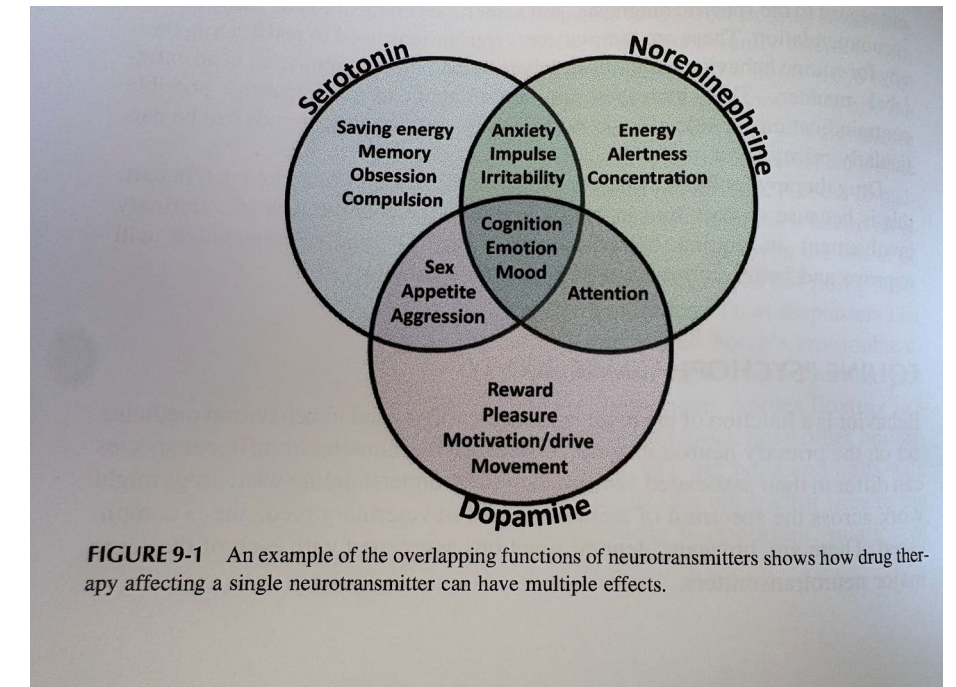
Psychopharmaceuticals

Event Medication

- Benzodiazepines
- Alpha 2 Agonists
- Trazodone (SNRI)
- ACP

Maintenance Medication

- SSRI
- TCA



Sedation is better than fighting with a scared and/or painful horse

Thank You – Questions?

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The article was created with vet visits in mind, but these tools can be used in relation to any procedure that the horse may find aversive.

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