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Let your emotions work for you

Do you sometimes feel that your emotions get the better of you; that unpleasant emotions such as sadness, loneliness, fear or anger are running around in your heart like a bunch of wild horses, messing up your day? Do you fail in your attempt to shake these unpleasant feelings?

Maybe you can use the horsepower behind these emotions to your advantage by harnessing them to work for you, rather than against you.

THE PLAN:

Identify:

One cannot harness a herd of wild horses simultaneously for a cart. Choose one horse at a time to work with. Which unpleasant emotion would you like to tackle first?

Show appreciation:

Any horse expert will tell you that being tough and ruthless will get you nowhere when working with wild horses; it will rather cause them to run out of control. A horse would more likely respond to respect, confidence and support. Rather than fighting and criticizing your feelings, acknowledge the existence of these feelings. Maybe the wild horse of emotion is the bearer of a special message to you and by showing appreciation; the message might be delivered more easily.

What is the message?

Each feeling that we experience, bears a special message. These messages are the armour we use to harness the horses in an orderly fashion to the wagon so that they can pull the wagon in the direction of our goals.

The fear-horse's message:

The horse takes the shape of feelings like anxiety, worry, fear, panic or being afraid. The message he brings is one that reads: "Something is going to happen. You must start PREPARING and making practical plans."

Instead of trying to ignore the fear horse in your life, rather ask: "What practical plans can I make to help change the situation? What can I do more? What can I do less of? Who has the potential to help me with what I may need to prepare for the situation? What practical actions can I take to prepare for and handle the specific situation?"

The injured- horse's message:

Feelings of hurt are often related to a sense of loss that we experience. Have you maybe lost a business, job, friendship or even your health? The message that the injured-horse wants to convey is one of: "I am disappointed because my expectations were not met."

Treat the injured horse of disappointment by asking yourself whether you have really lost everything. What do you have left and what can you do with it?

I have lost my father to cancer. All that I have left is his perseverance and his desire to make a difference in the lives of other people. What I do with it now gives meaning to my everyday life and it makes the loss and hurt more bearable.

The anger-horse's message is:

"Either you or someone else has violated an important rule or principle or standard that you have set for yourself." Remember, it may be that the other person unknowingly violated your standards because he / she did not know how important you consider that rule in your life. How fair are the standards you set for yourself and others? What about other people's standards; do you take them into account? How can you communicate your own standards clearer and more directly to other people?

The feeling- incompetent-horse's message is:

"You do not currently have the right skills for the task you must perform." Remember, you are valuable and unique. Ask yourself what other knowledge, training, experience, strategies or even people do you need to be able to complete the task at hand and to do it well? How else can you perform the task with better results?

Don't be afraid of your emotions. Listen to the messages they convey and respond by taking practical action. I can think about a horse, but it is only when I take practical steps and get onto its back that I will be taken on wonderful journeys.

The feelings of toddlers and young children

Toddlers and young children do not always have the words to express their feelings effectively. Yet, they experience the same feelings and just as intense as we as adults do. Children may find it easier to express feelings through play rather than to talk about it. Play therapy does the same for children as counselling does for adults. Through play therapy young children get to know and acknowledge their feelings and they learn to deal with them in a more acceptable way. Through guidance parents can be helped to assist and support their infants and young children when unpleasant feelings threaten to make their children's lives uncomfortable.