

## Chapter 16. The ESCT Therapy Session

*Presenting and removing the first stressor*

### The essential choreography in detail

ESCT is a choreographed dance of tension and release. We introduce the stressor, notice the horse's reaction, remove the stressor, and then give ESCT. A little further into the session, the stressor is often left in the horse's visual field of close to him while ESCT is being given, but in the beginning, until the good body chemistry saturates the horse's body tissues, we remove the stressor from sight after each presentation. (As you gain proficiency in ESCT, you will be able to judge when to leave and when to remove the stressor. Some horses CAN have the stressor constantly in their visual field). The dance allows the horse to experience his stress, have it lessened by ESCT, experience this lessening bodily, and then re-experience the stress in his new and improved body state. Watching the stress come and go also gives him understanding that it is not continually a part of his life and that he can survive it. This is the essential choreography of ESCT, and it is through tension and release that he will, later on in the session, begin making choices of his own. The secret of ESCT is that we give the horse a CHOICE: A choice to "stay and play" or "run away." By engaging the volitional brain, we gently neurally reprogram his brain's memory pattern to include ONLY his healed reaction to his stressor. The old negative reaction fades away, is literally erased, and it does so quickly just as in humans.

### Approach and retreat, presenting and removing



LEFT: Presenting a stressor up high is counterproductive. The horse's head goes up and the eyes become big. We want a soft neck if possible with soft eyes.

While your handler holds the horse, present the stressor. The stressor can be an object ("thing") or a situation involving natural stressors such as wind, thunder, lightning or other objects. Do this in an even-handed and calm manner. Bring it to him from a distance so that he can see it approaching. If it is an object, you bring it to

him. If it is a situation, you put him into it. Let the horse take it in and react to the presentation.

Reactions to stress and signals for removing the stressor can be:

1. Prancing in place
2. Pulling on the lead rope
3. Raising the head and widening the eyes
4. Moving back a few steps
5. Averting his head
6. Bolting and whirling

When he shows any of these reactions, quietly remove him from the stressor or situation until he settles down. You can walk him out of the stressful situation and away or simply remove the stressor. The horse may avert his head at this point, focus back on you for reassurance, or he may keep his eyes on the stressor, but he should stop moving. His four feet should

**RIGHT:** Presenting the stressor low keeps the horse's head on the horizontal or below. Here Vic eyes the flag carefully.



be planted on the ground. He may be in a flight readiness position, leaning back on his hind end a little, but he should not be moving. He may also be flight ready, but his head may be down and ready to sniff the stressor. Verbally assure him and reward him by gently stroking him.



## Respecting the horse's fear

**LEFT:** Once Vic is habituated to the flag, touching him at the shoulder is easier with a soft neck. Notice the float in the rope. He can move off anytime. Notice, too, how Justin stands with soft shoulders and relaxed wrists.

This approach and retreat process is different from training. Most trainers will want you to “push your horse through” a situation. In therapy, we respect the horse's fear when it

surfaces. We do not want to engage him in fear. We up the ante bit by bit. This means he will most likely go through the experience at various levels of discomfort without actually experiencing real fear, if we do our job right. Pushing him over the edge and flat out making him balk, bolt or spin is not our goal. We can make him uncomfortable to a degree so that we can bring him back down with ESCT. This difference is important to keep in mind as you work with your horse. If he does “freak out” somewhat, just give him a set or two of ESCT and walk him a bit.

**RIGHT:** Here Vic makes contact with the flag, sniffing it with curiosity and following it as Justin moves it away, always low.

Try to imagine this scene with you and your handler working in slow motion, and with your horse reacting at normal spooky speed. Your rhythms will NOT be in sync at this point. You and the handler will remain calm, moving as if in slow motion, and



allow the horse room to move on the lead in real time but not bolt. Reassuring words to the horse at this point in a quiet and calm tone do help. When the horse is stilled, situate yourself so that his head faces you. His neck should be straight toward you and slightly lowered. Gently pull on his halter with the lead rope to get him to release, as practiced earlier in the groundwork section, if needed. ESCT is next.

### **POINTS TO REMEMBER:**

1. **Work with your horse in small steps.**
2. **Present and remove the stressor in a choreographed manner.**
3. **Up the ante slowly and don't drive him over the edge into fear.**
4. **ESCT differs from training in that one backs off when the horse does so and begins again with ESCT and presentation and removal of the stressor.**
5. **A horse can only make choices when his volitional brain is engaged.**

## Chapter 17. How Many ESCT Sets Work Best?

### *How to judge your horse's limits*

You may now be wondering if your horse is saturated or able to take more therapy. As long as your horse continues to show deeper relaxation and acceptance of treatment, you know ESCT is working. Signs it is working are:

1. A relaxed head and neck
2. Soft eyes with soft lids
3. A relaxed stance in the hind end
4. Licking and chewing
5. Sighing
6. Expelling air through the nose
7. Yawning
8. Nuzzling your chest or hand
9. Leaning into you for more therapy
10. A continued acceptance of the stressor
11. Accepting it at closer range

If he is saturated, he may:

1. Move away from you
2. Shake his head at the stressor
3. Avert his head
4. Show lack of focus by bobbing his head up and down
5. Show general frustrated disinterest in what is going on

The number of sets most often used appears to be 3 to 5 sets of left/right stimulation for each particular stressor. Each set consists of 20 to 25 left/right movements. Most horses choose to continue because they experience the relaxing pattern created by tension and release in the presence of ESCT and begin to feel good in themselves again.

Sessions should last no longer than 30 minutes, allowing for rest breaks between sets of ESCT. Once the horse's body is with good brain chemicals, usually about 10 minutes into the session, things progress rapidly. A sequencing might go like this if he is afraid of tarps, for instance:

1. Introduce the tarp, note the stress level
2. Remove the tarp from him and his field of vision
3. Apply ESCT and reassure him
4. Reintroduce the tarp, note the stress change
5. Remove the tarp or leave it near him if he can handle it
6. Apply ESCT and reassure him
7. Walk a bit

8. Touch him with the tarp, if possible
9. Remove tarp as needed
10. Apply ESCT, reassure him
11. Continue on in this manner until he is accepting

If not, you have two choices, stop the session now or continue. If he seems present, push a little harder - you can make him sniff the tarp, walk on the tarp, even wear it, stretching his measure of acceptance so that he masters his fear. If you choose to stop, begin the next session with the same introduction to retest his acceptance and then start by trying to touch him with it.

In between each accelerated learning step, apply ESCT as needed. He will signal you by either going along with the accelerated learning or backing off. If he backs off, then apply ESCT. He will be your guide as his body movements and interest level show you where he is headed emotionally. You never want him to lose it. Pushing a little harder is very different from striking terror in his heart. It is time to use your intuition here and let gentleness guide you.

Some horses can handle the introduction of additional stressor(s) in the same session. It was an amazing and wonderful experience to watch the horse blossom with courage. I have worked with a horse that went through six stressors in one hour and integrated the therapy very well over the next few weeks. His owners continue to use ESCT on an as needed basis and they have reported a transformed horse, one full of confidence and happiness. Yes, horses rediscover their happiness when fear leaves them. Most horses handle one to three stressors the first hour. Discuss your horse's reactions with your assistant at this point to determine if a second stressor is in order. If yes, use the same sequences as outlined before.

It is not unusual to encounter a horse that is SO relieved to give up his fear that he "turns to jelly." We haven't found a better psychological term than that! He will turn into a soft curve with relaxed hindquarters, show a soft neck, soft muzzle, and will sigh from time to time. His lids will be heavy and his eyes may close during tapping. He may even fall asleep. You will find yourself awed by the change in him. This happens quickly, usually in the first half hour of ESCT.

### **POINTS TO REMEMBER:**

1. Horses show specific signs of accepting ESCT
2. Horses also show specific signs of saturation
3. Stressors come and go as a process
4. Use your intuition to judge his saturation point