

AND RELAX

A stressed out couple find a way out of their troubles, guided by a horse

My partner, an army veteran, has PTSD, OCD and depression as a result of his service. In trying to support him through some incredibly difficult times and on a day to day basis, my own anxiety has heightened significantly. This isn't a great combination so I knew I needed to find interventions that would help bring down our stress levels.

We had previously experienced a taster day of Intelligent Horsemanship which we both found calming, and my partner especially found it to be a welcome respite from his tumultuous thoughts, unlike other more formal therapies he's tried. It was recommended we attend the two day Dare to Live course, which also involves horses, and is set in a beautiful tranquil setting of a farm in East Sussex. This in itself was an opportunity for us both to take a deep breath and relax. The team were incredibly warm and considerate of the various situations we found ourselves in. They presented us with a variety of tools to understand and subsequently manage our minds and bodies more effectively.

In my experience, the difficulty with poor mental health is that individuals find it difficult to communicate what they are feeling, either because they don't know how to describe it, or because they internalise thoughts for fear of worrying or bothering someone. Living with it in a partner can involve a lot of guess work of how the other person is feeling! Working with the horses and the techniques provided I was able to understand a great deal



more about non-verbal communication. Having had a couple of decades of horse (and human) experience already, I had some insight as to how to read and interpret body language, but hadn't really appreciated how effective it could be. An important part of evaluating the situation before me was by using the horse as a mirror for myself, and to hone my awareness of discrete body and eye movements. The team talked us through the ways we receive information through the body as well as visually and I was able to get a much deeper and more meaningful understanding. I can now apply this to ascertain my partner's state of mind without words, which is incredibly useful. I still need to improve getting the right action to go with what I perceive of him, but this will come with practice.

The other element that I found useful was understanding the fight and flight mechanism in greater detail. Through this I learned more about how my body

operates. How to listen to it and not only to my brain. We were taught how to take appropriate action by just letting the situation be and understanding how we feel about it. I also learned how to decrease the worry and heightened panic feelings wherever possible, and to rationalise them.

The Dare to Live course gave us really practical tools to use at home and a chance for me to understand myself and my partner more effectively, which will benefit us both and alleviate some unnecessary angst. I like the way I can now support him better by being more tuned in to him and myself and vice versa. There are some techniques we can do together which is also a nice way to connect when he's having a difficult time.

We really enjoyed it, and had a great team supporting us.



Date to Live
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