



LOPOLO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Regain Your Confidence

Train your mind away from fear.

BY NATALIE DEFEE MENDIK

Let's face it: we've all experienced something in our equestrian lives that has made us nervous, whether it's entering the show ring or approaching a creek crossing on the trail. A key strategy to overcoming these feelings: rewrite the script. Laura King, author of *The Power to Win*, tells us how.

First, don't feel you're alone. King's clients include high-profile equestrians such as United States Equestrian Team members Robert Dover (dressage), Mary Phelps (combined driving), and Margie Goldstein-Engle (show jumping). From coaching Olympians and CEOs to appearing on the Rachael Ray show, King brings 25 years of experience to developing techniques to retrain and reprogram your subconscious mind.

You are what you think, says King, who explains that with some simple mental exercises, you can achieve peak performance—whatever that may mean to you.

THREE EXERCISES

LET YOUR FEARS GO by sitting in a quiet place, breathing slowly and deeply. Think about what you are afraid of.

For example, if you worry your horse will spook when out on the trail, feel that fear. Then imagine the fear in your hand. Make it tangible: give it a shape and color. Then shrink it down to about an inch. Finally, blow it away with a puff of breath.

Manipulate your fear with visualization, and then send it off into space. For me, I imagine holding a butterfly in the palm of my hand. I give it all my worries and watch it flutter up and away.

CREATE THE SCRIPT you would like to follow by anchoring, a technique that conditions your mind to respond in a positive way when certain stimuli are present.

Create a mental script and repeat it to yourself. I like to **smell the leather, feel the horse's muscles move under me, and let the air touch my face** as I envision myself having a magnificent day in the saddle.

Start by lying someplace peaceful and breathing deeply. Tell yourself that when you put your foot in the stirrup or pick up the reins, you are instantly relaxed and in control. Imagine these feelings.

Create a mental script of this and repeat it to yourself. I like to smell the leather, feel the horse's muscles move under me, and let the air touch my face as I envision myself having a magnificent day in the saddle.

USE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL. You can achieve your desired goals by allowing yourself to mentally copy someone who performs the way you would like.



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Sit in a quiet place and breathe deeply while you visualize your fears and let them go.



A positive mental outlook will improve all facets of your life, particularly riding confidence.

LIGHTPOET/SHUTTERSTOCK

Close your eyes and memorize the rider's body and demeanor. Allow yourself to feel how it is to ride this way: **confident, with perfect position and harmonious with the horse.** The brain will mimic what we see and think.

different perspective and different outcome by reprogramming the subconscious mind."

Ready to take it a step farther? King also performs hypnosis with many of her clients to release fear. If that sounds too out there for you, consider that hypnosis is simply relaxation that helps you access the subconscious.

"You go in and out of hypnosis all the time," says King. "Have you ever driven somewhere and forgotten the whole journey? That is a state of hypnosis. It's like daydreaming. All visualization is a form of self-hypnosis. Even worry is a form of self-hypnosis, because you go into an altered state of mindset."

The best part: you can implement self-hypnosis techniques at home. King outlines the steps.

1. Start with a written script or plan you have created. These words will re-anchor your subconscious mind to the new response you would like, such as telling yourself that every time you sit in the saddle, you breathe and ride with confidence. This will become your body's auto-response every time you get on the horse.

2. In a quiet place, breathe deeply and count backward until you are relaxed.

3. From that relaxed state, visualize your desired scenario. This replaces old habits with good habits at the subconscious level.

Mental techniques help you frame your perspective in a rosy light.

"Keeping a positive mental outlook helps with everything in life," says King. "You are what you think. Thought creates a physical reaction. Remember, if you think about fear, you're going to create more of it. Take that feeling of fear and replace it with a good feeling."

Want to try more? Check out King's courses designed specifically for equestrians, available on CD or as MP3 download at laurakinghypnosis.com. ■

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ROLF DANNENBERG/SHUTTERSTOCK

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I watch clips of dressage rider Charlotte Dujardin performing the test I'll be showing, paying attention to how she holds herself, how she flows with the horse, and how she gracefully maneuvers the arena.

MENTAL TRAINING

Train your brain to respond positively with muscle memory.

"While you may logically realize you can trust your horse, your trainer, and your riding abilities, the subconscious mind, which is stronger than the conscious mind, may still hold on to fear," says King. "The job of the subconscious mind is to protect you from danger, whether real or imagined. Positive thoughts create a

Picture yourself riding like your equestrian idol, with their confidence, form and harmony.