



# The Green-Eyed Monster

## Jealousy: Causes, Challenges and Solutions

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Jealousy is the green-eyed monster that can suddenly rear its head when you want to be like someone else or you feel that something's been taken from you or you are afraid of being left behind. You believe you're as talented as they are, so why did *they* make it to the Olympic Games? Why do *they* have a generous sponsor and you don't? Why do *they* have a barn full of international team-caliber horses?

Theodore Roosevelt said "comparison is the thief of joy;" it robs us of satisfaction with our own lives. The need to be judgmental and jealous is a result of the ego trying to protect itself from the pain of feeling inferior.

Equine competition is tough because you are judged on your and your horses' ability and, as a professional, the stakes are even

higher for you to perform. It's not easy to quash those feelings of inferiority when you or your students end up at the bottom of the competition scoresheet.

Research shows that jealousy is a result of the primitive part of our brain called the amygdala going into high gear. It's responsible for making quick decisions about whether something is good or bad in order

to keep us safe from danger, and feelings of jealousy trigger a response.

Feelings that typically accompany jealousy include resentment, anger, hostility and bitterness. Everyone experiences jealousy at some point in their lives, but the emotion can become unhealthy and negatively impact your life. When it's severe, irrational jealousy can lead to distrust, paranoia, abuse or even physical violence.

Jealousy can also cause physical symptoms including:

- Stomach ache
- Headache
- Chest pain
- High blood pressure
- Heart palpitations
- Weight gain or loss
- Insomnia or disturbances in sleep
- Poor appetite
- Weakened immunity

On top of that, our modern lives include a jealousy trigger our ancestors didn't have to deal with: social media. Carefully curated content and creative filters can make it appear that everyone is skinnier, smarter, taller, shorter, more attractive, more talented or luckier than you and that can lead you to be envious of the lives of others or depressed about the state of your own less-than-perfect life.

Jealousy can be difficult to understand and process. Depending on the situation, you may feel embarrassed, threatened, insecure or abandoned. Most of all, it harms the one who feels it. When you or your students are obsessed with someone else's success, self-respect suffers and you may neglect or even sabotage your own performance and possibly your career. Envy is difficult to manage, in part because it's hard to admit that we harbor such a socially unacceptable emotion. Our discomfort causes us to conceal and deny our feelings, and that makes things worse. Repressed envy inevitably resurfaces, stronger than ever.

As riding instructors, it's important that we don't fuel the flames of jealousy among people in our barns or make negative claims about other riders. Knocking a rider's generous score given by the judge or commenting that another trainer *buys* her horses rather than training them up just creates more suspicion and bad feelings.

Learning to identify jealousy is a skill. When you do experience it, try using one of the many coping mechanisms available to you to alleviate the emotion. Understand, though, that jealousy does not excuse manipulation or abuse.

The term *mudita* (from Pali, an ancient language of India) is used by Buddhists to mean "rejoicing in the good fortune of others." It is the rare person whose automatic impulse is to feel glad when meeting someone smarter, prettier or more talented. It's hard not to be jealous of a barn mate's blue ribbon or talented horse. Nevertheless, it is possible to cultivate more generosity of spirit.

For your own mental health, you'll want to find healthy ways to handle your own jealousy and to help your students waylay their bad feelings. Consider these recommended coping mechanisms:

- Recognize when you are most susceptible to comparison. You will most likely see that the pattern of comparison is most distressing when it reflects something you value, or something you *think* others value. Pinpoint what makes you envious. Is it blue ribbons and great placings or is it the fact that another trainer seems to get all the breaks? Your own envy reflex can be a useful source of information. Think of it as data on what you value most.
- Confront your fears: Jealousy can stem from insecurity or poor self-image, which is why it's so important to confront your fears. Once you recognize these fears, you can acknowledge and address them, as they are often the underlying cause of

the jealousy. As a riding instructor, help boost your clients up rather than tearing them down to help quash their feelings of inferiority.

- Consider other perspectives. Remember, you are seeing only one perspective. Social media is particularly egregious in showcasing an altered reality. Everyone has bad days and not-so-good rides, although they might not post it on social media.
- In order to deal with social media jealousy, manage the way you use social media, create healthy relationships online, and unfollow or delete anyone or any brand or company that causes you anxiety or makes you feel inadequate. Distance yourself from social media for a while if necessary.
- Some people are limited by their own beliefs, which is a major obstacle in their career. They think they are not good enough and that they can never achieve what they want. They may be too judgmental of themselves or others and they might be jealous of other people's success. Consider if you or your students are getting in your own way. Be the kind of trainer who builds up your students instead of breaking them down.
- The first step to getting ahead in your own career is to identify the limiting beliefs you have, such as fear of failure or fear of success. You should also evaluate your judgments about yourself and others. When you stop judging yourself and others, you will start to feel less negative emotions like jealousy or anger that will limit your opportunities for success in the future.
- Take action. Experience life fully.
- Practice gratitude. Remind yourself about all the beautiful things that life has given you. Be thankful for the people and horses in your life.

- Avoid making comparisons. By constantly comparing your life to your friends, colleagues or peers, you may lose sight of the amazing things about your own life. Focus on what you have, not what others have.

- Remember your own value. When jealousy prompts you to compare yourself to others, your self-worth can end up taking a hit. Your life might be pretty enviable to someone else, but jealousy can make you feel like nothing you have is good enough.

- Practice mindfulness: Negative emotions can affect your physical and mental health. When you're feeling jealousy or another negative emotion, such as anger or resentment, try meditation or self-hypnosis.

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It's time to tune out the comparison game! It's totally natural to fall into this trap, and we all do it from time to time. Believe it or not, jealousy can trigger growth and increased self-awareness. Comparison isn't just the thief of joy. Comparison is the thief of progress, peace and creativity.

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