



## Using the Fear Scale

### Module Five, Session Three

In this session, I'm going to share an exercise that you can use to move past mild show nerves, the occasional bout of anxiety or more acute fear that seems to take you by the throat at times. You can also use it to move past other emotions that tend to get in the way of your riding your best.

You can use it on your own or during lessons. This is an exercise that will help you process fear or nerves so you can get on with learning and building your confidence in your riding. The goal here is not that you become fearless. It's that you experience fear in little waves instead of as a big wall.

This exercise may seem to be a bit of a departure from a traditional therapeutic model. It also may seem counter culture in a "get back on the horse and tough it out" industry. I request that you keep an open mind. I'm blown away again and again by the progress that is made by riders when they begin to understand what I'm going to teach you here.

I have to preface this with the fact that I am a very pragmatic person. The first time I was exposed to this exercise, I was skeptical. But now, having modified it for riders and done it with hundreds, if not thousands of people, I believe whole-heartedly in the veracity of it. So please bear with me. If you're uncomfortable, you're growing!

The intention of The Fear Scale Exercise is to shift you from judging to observing your emotions. The Fear Scale itself provides a way for you to quantify what you're feeling.

Here is the scale:

When you're at a zero, you do not feel any fear or anxiety.

When you are at a one, you have some butterflies.

When you're at a two, you feel a slight increase in your heart rate and your breath may become shallow. Some of the muscles in your arms and legs might tighten.

When you're at a three, your heart rate goes up more. You're thinking all the "what ifs". You may automatically tighten on the reins and grip with your legs.

When you're at a four, you're aware of your heart pounding in your chest, you might start to sweat, pitch forward or adopt a fetal position in the saddle, you might start pulling back on the reins, get impatient and become quite narrow in your focus. You have to try hard to stay aware of what is going on around you because the emotion is pretty powerful. You hold your breath.

At a five, you want to get the hell out of Dodge. You try to think of ways to get out of the situation you're in. Your whole body is tense. You find it hard to breathe and want nothing more than to be done and get off. You may not be able to follow directions or get your body to do what you want it to do. You may feel paralyzed or even a little dizzy. Some riders experience tingling or numbness in their legs or hands at this point.

So here is how you can use the fear scale to get past fear in the saddle. First, when you feel the fear cycle kick in, pause. That might mean you halt; Or come to a walk; Or maintain the status quo and keep doing what you're doing. Or even dismount. Don't add in something harder, force yourself to keep going or "keep the horse busy" by doing more things. Please suspend your horse training instincts briefly and give yourself the gift of focusing on observing your emotion rather than focusing on a task. Horses are generous and resilient. A pause with purpose like this will allow them to process any tension and get to a more rideable place if they are in the fear cycle as well.

Go calmly through these five steps:

1. **Name the emotion you're feeling.** Is it fear? Nerves? Anxiety? Tension? Whatever word you use to describe it is fine.
2. **Ask yourself where you are on the fear scale 0-5.**

3. **Locate the emotion in your body.** Where in your body are you feeling it? (It might be in your chest or stomach or head or right ankle. Doesn't matter!)
4. **BREATHE. Take deep breaths and long exhales.** Get curious. Allow. Observe. Breathe through the emotion wherever it is in your body.
5. **Ask yourself the silly questions.** "How much does it weigh?" "What color is it?" "What temperature is it?" "Is it getting bigger or smaller?" "Where on the fear scale are you now?" "Where is the emotion now?" Use actual numbers as measures where you can. There are no right answers. Take more deep breaths. Notice the changes that begin to occur. Keep asking yourself these questions until you're back down to a 0-1.

You'll be surprised when your emotion starts to change. It will start to move and shift as you become the observer instead of the "judger" of it. Once you've done this a few times, you'll find that you only need to identify the number on the fear scale. As soon as you identify it, the fear will start to dissipate. In this way, you're training your body to process emotion efficiently.

Depending on your horse and the degree of fear you have, you might want to have a helper there to lead or stand with your horse. It's important that you learn to observe your own emotions rather than get super busy trying to micromanage your horse.

Make no mistake. This is not easy. One of the reasons this exercise can seem difficult, is that we are conditioned to believe that if we "go there" when it comes to certain emotions, we may never be able to get out of them. We're afraid that that the fear will be too uncomfortable.

If you share this scale with your instructor you will have a common language. At any moment, your instructor can say, "Where are you on the fear scale?" You'll stop judging and worrying, and start observing your emotion so you can answer. This is the point!

The objective of this exercise is to develop the ability to go low on the energy chart and then be able to go right back up. When you're emotionally supple you're able to handle disappointment, bad luck, and tragedy with much more strength and grace. You're able to get a case of the nerves and have them pass in a wave rather than stay with you throughout your ride. You're able to be more present with others who are feeling fear or pain. You can be a better friend, a better rider, a better teacher and a better parent. You can get to the other side of fear over and over again.

When you develop emotional suppleness along with mindset mastery, you'll feel empowered around your fear.

I went back and forth about whether to include this in the course. It's quite challenging to present in this format. I decided I needed to have the guts to discuss it here because I know this is pivotal to so much of what we struggle with as riders. It's a perspective shift that can change the way you ride. It has been such a game changer for my clients that I knew I needed to be able to share it with you.

By teaching this exercise, I've learned to trust people. To trust myself. I've learned that riders can go there. That they have the strength and the resilience to feel what they need to feel and be set free from whatever it is that has had them stuck. So go forth with this. Try it. Trust yourself. And if you need help, ask for it!