

19 ways to overcome anxiety and 'what ifs' when riding your horse





- ❓ Do you ever struggle with nerves and anxiety when riding?
- ❓ Or maybe you're stuck in a negative thinking pattern which stops you from enjoying your horse?
- ❓ It could be that you need help with those pesky 'what if' thoughts that play on a loop in your mind?


My name is Alison Buttery and I'm *obsessed* with helping riders to overcome their nerves, anxiety and fear, so that they can fall back in love with riding their horse again. Whether you're a rider who is struggling with nerves when riding in front of other people, or maybe you'd love to be able to hack out confidently, or to come back stronger after an accident, I know that you can learn how to build a confident, positive mindset around your riding.


As a certified mindset and confidence coach, a BHS APC Senior Coach and experienced rider, I know all too well how a lack of confidence can hold riders back. I also know how limiting beliefs, unhelpful emotions and negative thoughts keep riders stuck in a cycle of anxiety and worry.


This guide is packed with my go-to tips and strategies to manage and get rid of those mindset gremlins that stop you from becoming a confident rider, will keep you going... even on the days when you're feeling at your worst!


-  Keep a diary/journal to help you explore your thoughts, emotions and actions. By physically writing down your thoughts and how you feel, without judgement or filtering, you'll really start to get to know the mindset patterns and loops that are holding you back.


-  Remember that your mind does not know the difference between real and perceived threats, it will respond quickly to keep you safe (also known as the flight or fight response). This can work in your favour! Once you start feeding your mind with what you want to happen, rather than what you don't want to happen, you'll find that you can create a much more positive reality.


-  Recognise that your ancient 'lizard brain' is simply trying to keep you safe, in response to perceived threat. It's on your side! Acknowledge that it is working exactly as it should, and work to reassure it that you are more than capable of managing this situation.


-  Notice the thoughts that are appearing in your mind, without judgement; what is your inner voice saying? Building self-awareness is absolutely key to making the transition from feeling anxiety to calm, confidence. Start noticing what you are thinking, without judgement, and you'll begin to recognise the thoughts and phrases that are making you feel anxious.


-  Acknowledge the emotions you are feeling, and know that they are a perfectly normal human response to a perceived threat. It is entirely normal and healthy to feel fear; it is what has kept the human race going through time! The challenge is when our mind overreacts to everyday scenarios as if they are life threatening. The good news is that with commitment and practice, we can train our minds to respond to challenges in a less dramatic way!


-  If your mind creates the worst case scenarios with 'what if' thinking, consider how you could swap to positive 'what if' thinking. The more you allow yourself to keep thinking of all the awful things that could happen, the more you are telling your mind to make those things happen! For example, "what if I fall off?" causes you to become tense and ride defensively, so you are way more likely to actually fall off! On the flip side, if you could ask "how can I ride this course to the best of my ability?", you'll be far more likely to sit up, look up and ride positively, so you and your horse have a fantastic experience.


-  Ask yourself, "how else could I look at this situation?". One of my favourite sayings is that your perception is your reality. Just because you habitually think a certain way, doesn't mean that everyone will think the same way as you. There are always different ways to look at a challenge or scenario; the skill is to find those alternative viewpoints and open yourself up to the possibility of different outcomes.


-  Find out the specific trigger that causes your anxiety and negative thoughts to appear; how could you change the identity of this trigger to a positive meaning? Perhaps your anxiety rises as you get changed to go and ride, or maybe it happens in the car on the way to the yard, or even as you go to put your foot in the stirrup. Find the trigger and change something to make it a more positive experience or distract your mind, for example, singing along to the radio, saying your 12 times table out loud or repeating positive affirmations.


-  Explore what specifically you are anxious/nervous about; are these things real or imagined? Use your diary or journal to delve into exactly what is the belief behind your anxiety. Ask yourself "why specifically do I think or feel this way?" until you get to the root cause.


-  What plans could you put in place to manage the scenarios you are worried about? Where do your ridden skills need to be improved? How could you train yourself and your horse to become confident in the scenario? What small steps could you take to gradually stretch your comfort zone? I see too many riders completely over-facing themselves and diving in at the deep end in the vague hope that it will all be fine. Sometimes it will be, and sometimes it won't be. How much more confident and positive will you feel when you know with 100% certainty that you have followed a training plan, worked on your riding skills, practiced the skills and mindset you need to do the 'thing'? Much better to get professional help from coaches and mentors, and take the time to work towards your goal, rather than 'winging it'!

-  Create a specific goal of what you want to achieve; what, when, where, how and why do you want to achieve your goal? Your mind is like a search engine; it will give you exactly what you ask it for!

-  Imagine and visualise what it will look, sound and feel like when you DO achieve your goal. Create a bright, colourful, detailed movie of how it will be when you are achieving your goal. Repeat this visualisation as many times each day as you can.

-  Be mindful of the language you use. Try swapping 'I should' for 'I could', 'I have to' for 'I get to', and 'I can't' for 'I'm learning'.

-  Remember how far you have come already! Keep a record of all of your achievements, big and small, a strengths diary to boost you when you're having a confidence wobble.

-  Celebrate each and every success on your journey towards your goal. Reward yourself as much as you reward your horse!

- ➡ Be kind to yourself! If you are your own worst enemy, and you constantly beat yourself up about your riding, your thoughts and emotions, then you need to start showing compassion to yourself. I'm sure that you would never speak to or treat anyone else as badly as you speak to or treat yourself.

- ➡ You always have a choice in what you think, how you feel and how you act. It's simple but not always easy, but you are in control of your mind, not the other way round!

- ➡ You are not your problems. You are not a bad person because you didn't ride well today. You are not useless because you forgot the course. We all have challenges and things that we find difficult, but those things? They do not define who we are.

- ➡ Remember, you are good enough, you are worthy and you can do anything you put your mind to!



If you've found this useful, then do please get in touch and let me know what has resonated for you. Contact me at **info@theeverydayequestrian.co.uk**

I also know that you will absolutely love my rider confidence membership programme - **Crack the Confidence Code** - where you can join the BEST community of riders, just like you, who are learning how to overcome their mindset blocks and build the confidence to *finally* enjoy riding their horse again.

Click the link below for all the details:

www.theeverydayequestrian.co.uk/cccmembership