

Confidence issues when riding



Many riders have confidence issues, especially when they return to riding after a break. For many people these issues can result from a bad experience in the past, also some people are naturally more cautious than others and tend to lose confidence more easily. Whatever the reason your confidence can usually be restored with the right horse and good help and support. Even if you do not regain the level of confidence that you may have had when younger you should be able to enjoy riding again. For many horse people - no matter how scary riding becomes - giving up is not an option. Many people have what I call 'the horse gene'. If you have the horse gene you will not give up as riding as it is a very important (sometimes *the most* important) aspect of your life. Therefore addressing these confidence issues as soon as possible is very important. Below are some things that you can do to help you on your way and get you back in the saddle:

Find yourself a good instructor who understands your concerns. Generally speaking this will be an older instructor who has a lot of experience and can empathise with your situation. Ask around and find out who in your area has a good reputation for dealing with confidence issues.



Stick to riding well educated, quiet horses (at least until your confidence returns). If your current horse frightens you consider either re-homing or selling him or her. Do the right thing and be honest when you are looking for a new home for the horse. It is in no ones interests (yours, the horse's or the potential new owner) to not be truthful about why you are looking for a new home for the horse.

You could consider loaning the horse out to a more experienced rider for a while until later when your confidence has increased. Another alternative - if you have the space - is to not ride the horse while you ride another horse to gain back your confidence. You could still be working with the first horse on the ground which will pay off later when you begin riding the horse again.

Aim to acquire (buy or loan) an educated sensible mount either on a temporary or permanent basis to build up your confidence. These horses are hard to find but should be cherished once you have them. They are the key to regaining your confidence and are worth their weight in gold.

Make sure that your horse is not being over fed (given too much high energy feed) for his or her current workload. A horse with too much energy can be dangerous. Remember that horses should be fed a low energy/high fibre diet and only supplemented with high energy supplements if their workload warrants it.

Attend (either mounted or unmounted) as many horsemanship/riding clinics as you can, there are numerous good clinicians around. In particular clinics by Steve Brady (all of Australia and NZ), Andrew

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McLean (all of Australia, NZ and overseas), John Chatterton (Australia) are well worth attending. Go and fence-sit (watch) before committing yourself if you are not ready to take your horse. These guys (and many others like them) have a client base that is made up of mainly amateur riders. They also of course teach more professional riders but it is amateurs that make the horse world go round so don't think that they will not be interested in teaching you.

Take small achievable steps, if you do too much too soon it will result in a reduction in confidence. Confidence is easy to lose and much harder to gain so make sure that you keep control of the situation and do not allow yourself to be pushed too far too fast by well meaning family or friends. Always progress at your speed, don't be rushed, but do respond positively to encouragement from experienced knowledgeable people. Spend more time with positive helpful friends and less time with negative critical friends. Keeping the right company goes a long way to helping with your confidence.

Accept that you may never again be as brave as you were when you were a teenager. When you are young much of this bravery comes from a lack of experience 'ignorance is bliss'. However with age comes experience, use this experience wisely.

Once you have your confidence back - ride as regularly as possible as long gaps tend to diminish your confidence again. Even two times a week on a regular basis is good enough if that is all that you have time for. The more you ride, the better your riding ability becomes and the better you feel - leading to better riding and so on.



Work on improving your seat! This is one of the fastest ways to restore your confidence. Find an instructor who specialises in balance and seat so that you will feel safer and more secure ASAP. There are instructors who specialise in seat training although they are far rarer than instructors that don't. There are many good books on the subject which can help enormously as long as you have a good horse to practice on. See the riding section of the website www.equiculture.com.au for a list of recommended books.

Team up with a like minded friend and you can help each other, especially if you are working from a book. Just having someone on the ground when riding can help your confidence a lot.

Join a club of like-minded people and get out and about with your horse as soon as you feel capable. This could be a trail riding club, a general riding club/pony club or a dressage club for example. There are lots of clubs out there.

Make sure your gear fits your horse properly (a comfortable horse is a safer horse). Horses that have badly fitting gear will resist sooner or later (understandably) which will erode your confidence. Use gear such as safety stirrups (caged stirrups such as those that endurance riders often use) so that you do not have to worry about getting hung up in the stirrups if you fall off.

Make sure that your own riding gear is comfortable and allows you to ride properly, you cannot concentrate on your riding if you are uncomfortable (or even sore). **Never ride without a helmet** and consider wearing a protective vest.

Above all remember you are not alone, this issue is far more prevalent than you think.



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