

LORRAINE MITCHELL

Reclaiming Your Power on the Yard

For Horse Owners Ready to Ride Their Own Way



Dolly Communication

First published by Dolly Communication 2025

Copyright © 2025 by Lorraine Mitchell

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| 1 Personal Story: “A Lesson in Cruelty” | 4 |
| 2 The Legacy of Control in the Horse World | 7 |
| 3 When “Helpful” Becomes Harmful | 11 |
| 4 Handling Stress and Anger | 15 |
| 5 Feeling the Fear of Being Bullied | 19 |
| 6 Reclaiming Space Without Justifying Yourself | 23 |
| 7 Navigating Yard Politics Without Losing Yourself | 26 |
| 8 Staying Connected to Your Horse When You Feel Under Pressure | 30 |
| 9 Setting Boundaries with Yard Bullies Without Burning Bridges | 33 |
| 10 Building a Positive Support Network on the Yard | 36 |
| 11 Staying True to Your Values Amid Pressure | 39 |
| 12 The Power of Persistence — Why Giving Up Isn’t an Option | 44 |
| 13 Tools for the Journey Ahead | 47 |
| <i>About the Author</i> | 52 |

Introduction

Why This Book Exists — No More Myths and Lies

When you question what you are told about how to treat your horse because it feels wrong:

- You are not wrong.
- You are not weak.
- You are waking up.

And that's why this book exists.

I'm here to help you navigate a world full of closed minds and people so convinced they're right, they refuse to see another way.

Although this book speaks directly to the bullying and pressure so many of us face around our horses, I know that bullying shows up in many forms—targeting who you are, not just how you ride. If you've been pushed aside, shamed, or punished for being different in *any* way, I hope you find strength, clarity, and validation here too.

Because you're not just right in what you're feeling—

Following those feelings makes you part of the movement the horses desperately need.

The wider world sees the cruelty the horse world stubbornly

ignores—and they are watching.

If we don't clean up our act, legislation will come in to placate those watching. I'm not against laws, but before we add more, we should enforce the ones we already have.

Cruelty is illegal. Yet the horse world protects cruelty by writing its own rules.

Overtight crossed nosebands have been the norm for years without resistance, without question and without real understanding of the damage they do to the horse. We are taught they solve a problem, but no-one cares about what causes the problem because we are taught it is the horse's way to evade what we are teaching them to do. They are being resistant, naughty, idle.

It is not the norm to question why the horse is being resistant.

Riding "behind the vertical" was once rewarded at the highest levels and sometimes still is.

Double bridles aren't optional—they're requirements. It is necessary to shove two bits in a horse's mouth to compete.

This internal legislation has lost its way.

Force is faster than patience and understanding. Force breaks bodies and souls, but it delivers quicker results, more medals, and a disposable horse ready for the next one.

These accepted cruelties remove any legal accountability. Nobody is reported when horses suffer this way. The horse world closes ranks, protecting itself by refusing to see the pain.

When you listen to your horse, you threaten those walls. You open the doors to light, to truth, and to real change.

When you're bullied to "control your horse," that bullying is shielding these dark truths. It's protecting what no one should see.

This book is your guide to standing strong in the face of that

INTRODUCTION

bullying—and to being the change our horses need.

1

Personal Story: “A Lesson in Cruelty”

When I came back to horses at 46, I already knew things had changed. But I wasn't prepared for how much I'd have to unlearn.

It was a lovely day when I turned up for my riding lesson. I hoped to ride Dolly. I was drawn to her. She wasn't flashy, maybe even a little gawky to look at, but she had presence. Something about her felt familiar. Safe.

She was also easy to ride—responsive without fuss—so as someone returning to the saddle with an uncooperative back and more weight than I liked to admit, she made me feel capable again.

As a child, riding had been strict and stiff-backed: heels down, knees clamped, hands still, eyes up. Now, in my mid-forties and a long way from those childhood weekends, the world of riding had changed—or at least the words had. Relaxed seat. Soft contact. No gripping with the knees.

I wanted to do things right, for Dolly's sake more than mine. So when I noticed that my rein contact seemed inconsistent—as her head moved, I could feel my hands bouncing—I asked about it.

"Shorten your reins," my instructor said. "You need to feel the weight of her mouth in your hands. Keep it like that."

So I did.

But shortening my reins meant Dolly had to lift her head. My balance wasn't up to it. My body struggled to match her rhythm, and instead of flowing with her, I jiggled and bounced, accidentally jabbing the bit in her mouth.

Dolly responded gently—she leaned on the reins, trying to create some slack, some relief. I didn't realise it at the time. All I heard was:

"She's pulling them through your hands again. Shorten your reins."

I did. Dolly shook her head.

"She's trying to take the reins—don't let her. Smack her shoulder and tighten them up."

I hesitated. But I did it. A light tap at first. Then harder, because I was told I must. Smack her. Smack her harder. Don't let her win.

By the end of that lesson, Dolly was still trying to stretch her neck out and loosen the reins. She was shaking her head, frustrated, and I was smacking her rump—weakly, but obediently—and feeling utterly broken inside. I didn't want to hit her. I didn't believe it was right. But I didn't know how to stop without being made to feel like the failure.

When we rode back into the yard, I felt nothing but sadness and regret. My instructor was furious. Dolly was still shaking her head at me. And I, I apologised to her while I untacked her.

She was right to complain. I knew that deep down, even if I didn't yet understand why. It couldn't be normal to force a horse to endure discomfort for an hour without letting her communicate it. That ride taught me something my instructor

never meant to: that a horse's resistance can be their only voice—and that maybe, just maybe, they are not the ones in the wrong

2

The Legacy of Control in the Horse World

That ride changed me. It showed me something I hadn't seen so clearly before: everyone has a different measure of cruelty. I suppose the instructor felt I had asked to learn contact and so she was teaching me. I didn't ask her to make Dolly so uncomfortable and make me hit her to stop objecting. As an adult and paying client I would have had more respect for her if she had said "you're not physically strong enough to hold a steady contact. This is too uncomfortable for Dolly. You do not need that level of control to have a relaxed hack. It should be fun for both of you. Enjoy the ride and work on your upper arm strength off the horse until you can hold your arms steady." That would have taught me a lot more than spending a miserable hour beating a horse into submission that was just trying to stop me jiggling her mouth around.

Maybe people don't expect to be told the truth. "The customer's always right" is an old adage that keeps the money coming in. Horses are expensive and so instructors bow to the

paying public, but surely, they are compromising their own values to make this happen. This can't be a good place for them to live in either.

The horse world has a control problem. Not just the kind that keeps horses in tight halters or forces them through mechanical devices, but the kind that has infiltrated nearly every layer of how we're taught to interact with horses—and, by extension, with each other.

If you're reading this, you've probably started questioning what you were taught. You've probably felt that jolt in your gut when someone hits a horse in front of you and says, "It's for their own good." You've maybe even done it yourself in the past, because you didn't know another way. Most of us didn't.

For generations, control has been sold as safety.

The idea that the only way to handle a horse is to dominate it—get ahead of its reactions, shut them down, force respect—has become so ingrained that it's often not even questioned. It's considered common sense. But that "common sense" is built on fear. Not just the horse's fear, but also that of the humans. Fear of being hurt. Fear of getting it wrong. Fear of looking weak.

So, we control. And then we're taught to control others, too.

The problem is that this way of being doesn't stay neatly between a human and a horse. It seeps. It spreads. People who have learned to dominate their horses often feel it's their job to dominate other horse owners too—especially those who do things differently. It's no longer just about their horse's behaviour. It becomes about your horse. Your choices. Your voice.

On a livery yard, this shows up fast. People offer unsolicited advice with an edge of authority. They suggest you're too soft, too inexperienced, too naïve. They insist your horse will hurt

you if you “let it get away with that.” They claim they’re just trying to help—but what they’re really doing is policing.

And it’s not their fault, entirely. They were taught this too. Many of them truly believe that domination equals safety. They’re not being malicious. They’re being faithful to what they’ve been told is the “right” way. But when someone is faithful to control, it often comes at the cost of compassion.

Here’s the truth they don’t want to hear:

Control does not equal safety.

Force does not equal respect.

Fear does not equal partnership.

A horse trained through fear may “behave” on the surface, but underneath, it’s a coiled spring. You’ll hear people say things like, “He just exploded out of nowhere,” or “She was fine until she wasn’t.” But when you train a horse to shut up instead of speak up, you’re not removing the problem—you’re hiding it. And when pain or stress resurfaces, as it always does, that horse has no language left except reaction.

In contrast, a horse raised through trust and mutual understanding learns something very different. It learns that its feelings are allowed. That its fear doesn’t get punished. That its human listens. And in times of stress or pain, instead of exploding, it looks for guidance. That’s not fantasy—it’s neurobiology and relational safety at work.

These terms might sound clinical, but they describe something deeply natural: the way living beings—humans and horses included—co-regulate and connect when they feel safe. This understanding is the driving force behind Equine-Assisted Learning and Therapy, where horses are used to help humans heal from trauma, develop emotional intelligence, and build trust.

Ironically, the horse's sensitivity and willingness to connect has become something humans now *use* for human benefit. While the horse world in general still refuse to recognise or honour what that connection could mean for the horse. My whole drive is to flip this script. This isn't about how horses can help humans feel better. It's about how this human can use that same connection to make their horse feel safe, seen, and understood.

(If you're curious about the science behind this, you can read one of the key research articles here: [Physiological Synchrony in Horse-Human Interactions](#))

But here's the sticking point: when you start to walk this path—when you choose trust over obedience—you become a threat to the system.

You'll be told you're unrealistic. That you're dangerous. That you're spoiling your horse. Not because it's true, but because your way of being exposes the cracks in theirs. Your presence alone becomes a quiet challenge to everything they've built their identity on. And that's when the bullying starts—not just of your horse, but of you.

So, if you've ever wondered why people are so invested in convincing you to “be in control”...

If you've ever felt the weight of being “the odd one out” for choosing kindness...

If you've ever been afraid that maybe they're right and you're wrong...

Let me say this clearly:

You are not wrong. You are not weak. You are waking up.

And that's why this book exists.

3

When “Helpful” Becomes Harmful

If you’ve spent time on a livery yard, you’ve likely met them—the “helpful” ones. The ones who always have advice. Who watch closely. Who offer a running commentary on your every move. Who claim they just want to keep you safe. And maybe, once upon a time, they genuinely did.

But intention and impact are not the same thing.

It’s natural for people to discuss different ideas, especially in a community with a shared passion like horses. But there’s a difference between sharing perspectives and forcing them. What often starts as advice can quickly become correction, then control—and that’s when it crosses the line into bullying.

The hard part is: **they don’t think they’re bullying.** They think they’re helping you. Educating you. Rescuing you from your own ignorance. They may even believe they’re protecting your horse. But underneath that concern is something darker: a need for control, rooted in fear and tradition.

“That horse is going to walk all over you if you don’t show it who’s boss.”

“You need to be firm. Horses respect strength.”

“You’re going to get hurt doing it that way. Trust me, I’ve seen it a thousand times.”

Sound familiar?

You’re not alone. This is how control-based conditioning gets policed: not just by professionals or trainers, but by peers—by other horse owners who have internalised the same rules and now feel it’s their job to pass them on.

Let’s call this what it is: **generational control trauma**.

It’s no different from the generational shifts we’ve seen in how we treat children, partners, or pets. It wasn’t that long ago that smacking a child was considered good parenting. That controlling your wife was seen as normal. That dominance-based dog training was the only option.

And yet, in many livery yards, the horse world hasn’t moved on. In some circles, it’s proudly stuck.

The horse is still seen by many as a dangerous animal that must be dominated. That fear—fed by tradition—leads to methods built on pressure, punishment, and forced obedience. It’s rarely acknowledged, but often justified: “for your safety.”

Let’s look at that for a moment.

Dogs—natural hunters with sharp teeth—are welcomed into homes and co-sleep with children.

Cats—independent, territorial predators—are doted on as cuddly lap companions.

But **horses**, flight animals whose first instinct is to *avoid* conflict, are routinely treated like loaded weapons.

It doesn’t add up. Horses don’t want to fight us. They want to feel safe.

The danger isn’t the horse—it’s the human who doesn’t understand the horse.

And so, when you start doing things differently—when you

listen instead of dominate, when you slow down instead of push through, when you honour the horse’s “no”—you disrupt the story. You make others uncomfortable, because your choices highlight what they’ve chosen not to see.

That’s when the “helpful” comments start to sting.

That’s when the advice stops being kind and starts becoming constant.

That’s when your presence alone is enough to draw criticism.

You are not imagining it. And no, you’re not being too sensitive.

You’re standing at the fault line between two worlds: **the old world of control, and the new world of connection.**

It takes strength to stand your ground when others act like they’re trying to “save” you from yourself. But you’re not here to be saved. You’re here to wake up.

And the truth is, you don’t owe anyone an explanation for the way you choose to relate to your horse—especially not people who mistake dominance for safety, and pressure for love.

In the next chapter, we’ll start building your toolbox: how to stay grounded and respond with strength when you’re under pressure to conform.

RECLAIMING YOUR POWER ON THE YARD

4

Handling Stress and Anger

There's a particular kind of pressure that comes with doing things differently. When you're surrounded by people who constantly question or challenge your approach to your horse, it can stir up all sorts of emotions: frustration, self-doubt, defensiveness, shame—and yes, sometimes, full-blown rage.

It's not just about the comments themselves.

It's the relentlessness.

The way it chips away at your nervous system.

The way you lie in bed at night replaying the same interaction and wishing you'd said something different.

Anger is a natural response to being judged or controlled.

But here's the trap: if you let that anger speak for you, you feed the bully's narrative.

"See? Told you she was over-sensitive."

"Look how emotional she is—how can she be trusted around a horse?"

"She doesn't even know what she's doing—she's dangerous."

That's how they win. Not by being right—but by getting you to abandon yourself.

So the goal here isn't to silence your anger. It's to *understand* it—and to choose how to act, not react.

* * *

🔑 **6 Ways to Stay Grounded (When You Want to Scream)**

1. Pause and Breathe

This sounds simple because it is. But don't underestimate it. A deep, conscious breath interrupts the fight-or-flight spiral and gives your thinking brain a chance to step in. Even one slow exhale can keep a confrontation from escalating.

2. Don't Take It Personally

Most bullying has nothing to do with you. It's about the other person's fear, ego, or need to feel in control. What they're really saying is, "*Your way makes me uncomfortable.*" That's not your problem to solve.

3. Stay Calm = Stay Powerful

Bullies feed on reaction. They want you rattled, flustered, off-centre. If you stay composed—shoulders soft, eyes steady, voice low—you signal that you're not easy prey. Calmness isn't weakness; it's strategy.

4. Use Assertive Boundaries

You don't have to justify or explain yourself. A quiet, firm "Thanks, but I've got this," or "I do things differently," followed by walking away, is often more powerful than any lecture. You're not here to convince them. You're here to protect your peace.

5. Get Support, Not Permission

Find someone who *gets it*—a friend, coach, or group that understands the road you're walking. Not to validate your every move, but to remind you that you're not alone, and that you're not losing your mind. (You're not.)

6. Reclaim Your Power Through Self-Care

Every time you choose empathy, patience, and clarity—especially under pressure—you’re showing your horse (and your nervous system) that it’s safe to be different. That matters more than being “right.” That builds resilience in both of you.

* * *

You don’t need to be perfect. You don’t need to have all the answers.

But you *do* need to protect your energy, because that energy is what your horse reads. That’s where your relationship lives.

You will be tested. Again and again.

But each time you meet conflict with steadiness, you’re rewiring the story—for yourself, your horse, and maybe even the person who tried to shake you.

Next, we’ll explore what happens when fear starts to creep in—when the anticipation of being judged changes how you act around your horse, and how to stop that fear from poisoning your connection.

RECLAIMING YOUR POWER ON THE YARD

Feeling the Fear of Being Bullied

You don't have to be shouted at to feel bullied.

Sometimes it's the look, the sigh, the unsolicited advice every time you halter your horse. Sometimes it's the walk-by commentary:

"Still not using a bit?"

"You really should get on with it, or he'll start taking the mick."

"You're going to get hurt being so soft."

Other times, it's just the tension in the air—the knowledge that someone is watching, waiting for you to mess up.

This fear can be subtle at first. You might brush it off, make excuses. But over time, it creeps in and starts to change you.

You start adjusting your routine—avoiding certain times of day, skipping groundwork altogether, rushing through your visit just to keep your head down. You find yourself doubting what you know, second-guessing what your horse needs. And all the while, something sacred is slipping away.

Your connection.

* * *

The Nervous System Doesn't Lie

Your horse feels everything.

They don't need to understand the words or the situation—they read your nervous system like a book. If you're bracing for conflict or trying to make yourself small, your horse senses it through the tension in your shoulders, the shallowness of your breath, the quickness in your step.

They feel it through your **vagus nerve**, the part of your nervous system responsible for calmness, connection, and co-regulation.

When your body is in a state of fear, it's not just your mind that's affected.

Your horse gets the message: "Something's not safe here."

And they start reacting.

Not because they're misbehaving. But because you're no longer fully *with them*. You're distracted, disconnected, half-listening while trying to manage invisible social landmines.

It's not your fault. It's trauma logic. And it's real.

* * *

How This Fear Shows Up in Your Life

Let's name it:

- **Hypervigilance:** You scan the yard constantly—who's there, who's watching, who might say something. Your body stays tense, even if you tell yourself everything's fine.
- **Erosion of Self-Trust:** You start believing you're the one who's wrong. You adjust your handling style, not for your

horse's benefit, but to avoid judgment.

- **Emotional Exhaustion:** You leave the yard drained instead of uplifted. The joy is gone, replaced with dread or a sense of “just get through it.”
- **Avoidance and Isolation:** You stop going as often. You make excuses. You spend less time doing what used to bring you peace.
- **Breakdown in Horse Communication:** Your horse starts pulling away—confused by your inner conflict, less responsive, more anxious, harder to reach.

And worst of all:

You begin to believe that the connection you once felt was naïve, or not real.

But it *was* real. It *is* real.

It's just being clouded by fear that doesn't belong to you.

* * *

You're Not Weak. You're Waking Up.

If any of this sounds familiar, you're not broken—you're awake.

You're tuned into your environment because you've had to be. You're emotionally responsive because you care. The fear is not weakness. It's a response to real pressure, real emotional harm. But the good news is, it can be unlearned.

In the next chapter, we'll walk through how to protect your energy, hold your line, and start reclaiming your space—so you and your horse can get back to building what matters: trust, togetherness, and the quiet strength of doing things your way.

6

Reclaiming Space Without Justifying Yourself

There comes a point in every journey where you have to make a choice:

Do I keep shrinking to fit the space I've been given?

Or do I take up space—quietly, confidently—on my own terms?

If you're reading this, you're probably reaching that point.

You've seen how bullying, even in its mildest forms, chips away at your peace. You've felt the effects in your body, in your horse, in your joy. And now, it's time to reclaim your space—not by fighting back harder, but by withdrawing your need to explain, convince, or gain approval from people who don't *want* to understand.

Because here's the truth: **you do not need their permission.**

* * *

Why Justifying Doesn't Work

Let's get this out of the way—justifying yourself is emotion-

ally draining, and it rarely changes anything.

“I’m doing it this way because I read...”

“Well, actually this trainer says...”

“It works better for my horse because...”

You’re not educating. You’re trying to earn your right to be different.

But people who bully or criticise don’t want a conversation—they want control. They’re not asking because they’re curious. They’re asking to challenge, correct, or put you back in your place.

So don’t play the game.

You don’t need to explain why you do things differently any more than someone needs to explain why they don’t hit their child, or shout at their dog, or tolerate abusive relationships.

Your values speak for themselves. Your horse speaks for you.

* * *

What Reclaiming Space Looks Like

Reclaiming your space isn’t always loud. It’s often subtle, firm, and rooted. It’s how you move, how you stand, what you choose *not* to say.

- **It’s walking into the yard with soft shoulders and a clear plan.**
- **It’s haltering your horse with connection instead of command, even when others roll their eyes.**
- **It’s doing what your horse needs, even if it doesn’t look “productive.”**
- **It’s holding the line with a short “I do things differently” and then turning your focus back to your horse.**

No eye contact, no justification, no energy drain. Just quiet resolve.

You don't need to win the room. You need to stay with your horse.

And the more often you do this, the more your nervous system starts to believe it's safe to be different. That's the real win—not the debate you didn't have, but the peace you didn't surrender.

* * *

Boundaries Are a Form of Love

Not just for you—but for your horse.

When you stop letting other people influence your energy, your horse feels it. Your cues get clearer. Your energy steadies. Your bond deepens.

Every time you stand in quiet alignment with your values, your horse learns something too:

“My human is calm.”

“My human means what they say.”

“My human won't let noise get in the way of us.”

That's leadership. Not the loud kind. The kind that builds trust.

In the next chapter, we'll look at the social dynamics on yards—the gossip, the subtle shunning, the fake friendliness—and how to protect yourself without losing your kindness or your clarity.

Navigating Yard Politics Without Losing Yourself

Livery yards can be wonderful. Community, shared resources, backup when things go wrong.

They can also be emotional warzones.

Not always overtly—but in the sideways glances, the passive comments, the cliques. You feel it in the conversations that stop when you arrive. The advice wrapped in sugar. The cold shoulders. The subtle questioning of everything you do.

And because most of us are kind-hearted and conflict-avoidant, we tend to internalise the problem.

“Maybe I’m overreacting.”

“Maybe they’re just trying to help.”

“Maybe I’m being too sensitive.”

But let’s be honest: these social dynamics are not accidental. They are a form of control. And they thrive in silence.

* * *

The Currency of Yard Culture: Conformity

At the heart of it, yard politics are about maintaining norms. Those norms often favour the status quo—control, dominance-based handling, and the belief that you must be in charge of your horse at all times, or else be at risk.

So when someone walks in doing it differently—slower, quieter, with more listening and less force—they become a disruption.

Not because they're wrong, but because their presence challenges what others have built their confidence and identity on.

And if those others are insecure or threatened, they don't respond with curiosity.

They respond with gossip, distancing, or performative concern.

"I just worry she's going to get hurt."

"It's not safe to do groundwork when the horse's clearly just being stubborn."

"She means well, but she doesn't really know what she's doing."

These are not neutral comments. They're warnings to the group: *Don't be like her.*

* * *

Don't Let Their Noise Become Your Inner Voice

The hardest part isn't hearing what they say—it's starting to believe it.

Yard politics worm their way into your self-perception. One day you're holding space for your horse's anxiety. A few weeks later, you're questioning everything—wondering if you're too soft, too emotional, too unqualified.

That's how social conditioning works. It doesn't break you all

at once. It wears you down.

The antidote isn't to isolate entirely. It's to hold onto your truth more tightly than their approval.

Practical Ways to Stay Sovereign in Yard Culture

1. Stay polite—but not porous.

You don't have to be rude. You don't have to be best friends either. Keep conversations light and surface-level with people you don't trust. Let them feel friendly without giving them access to your inner world.

2. Know your people.

Even one safe person can anchor you. Find another listener. Even if you rarely talk horses, having someone who sees you can be enough to stay steady in a sea of subtle hostility.

3. Create energetic boundaries.

Before you get out of the car, take a breath and set your intention. *"I am here for my horse. This is our time. Other people's opinions are not my responsibility."*

4. Don't explain your choices unless someone genuinely wants to learn.

Let your results speak for themselves. Horses don't lie. As your bond deepens and your horse becomes calmer and more responsive, the ones who *are* open will start to notice.

5. Keep a reflective practice.

Whether it's a journal, voice notes, or just a quiet moment after each visit—anchor yourself in what's working. Process the emotional toll, remind yourself why you're doing this, and name the wins—no matter how small.

* * *

Protect Your Kindness Without Making Yourself Small

There's a real risk in environments like this: you stop being you. You go quiet. You smile when you don't mean it. You dim your light to avoid the fallout.

But here's the truth:

You don't need to be colder. You need to be *clearer*.

You don't need to be harder. You need to be *stronger in your centre*.

You don't need to push back. You just need to *stand still when others try to move you*.

In the next chapter, we'll look at how to maintain a strong connection with your horse—even when everything around you is trying to pull you out of alignment.

8

Staying Connected to Your Horse When You Feel Under Pressure

The yard politics, the subtle bullying, the constant second-guessing—they all chip away at your calm and confidence. When you're under pressure, your horse feels it immediately. Their connection with you can falter just when you need it most.

This chapter is about how to hold steady in that pressure cooker so you don't lose your bond, your trust, or your own sense of self.

* * *

Why Connection Is Your Anchor

Your horse is a living, breathing mirror of your nervous system. They don't just hear your words—they *feel* your emotions through your body language, your breathing, and the tiny shifts in your energy.

When you're anxious, frustrated, or distracted by the pressure around you, your horse picks up on that. They might become guarded, reactive, or distant—not because they want to be

difficult, but because they're responding to your state.

* * *

Tools to Stay Connected Amid Stress

1. Regulate Your Nervous System First

Before approaching your horse, take a moment to calm your own body. Slow, deep breaths. Grounding exercises like feeling your feet on the floor. Even a simple hand-on-heart pause can bring you back to your centre.

2. Use Your Body Language Consciously

Your horse watches your posture, your gaze, and your micro-movements. Open, relaxed shoulders, steady soft eyes, and a gentle tone communicate safety better than words ever could.

3. Create Small Wins

Under pressure, don't try to tackle big training goals. Instead, focus on small, clear, and achievable interactions—like a soft neck scratch, a quiet “hello,” or a shared moment of stillness. These wins rebuild trust and reduce tension.

4. Lean into Listening

Even if your horse isn't acting as you want, listen for their subtle cues. They might shift weight, flick an ear, or change breathing. These signals are their way of saying, “I'm here, I'm trying, but I need space or time.”

5. Plan for Buffer Zones

If the yard environment is triggering, consider moving your horse to a quieter area for moments of connection. This could be a paddock corner, a less-trafficked aisle, or a spot they find calming. Giving both of you some space from the pressure resets the dynamic.

* * *

The Power of Self-Compassion

Under stress, it's easy to slip into self-criticism: "*I'm not good enough,*" "*I should handle this better.*" That just feeds the cycle of anxiety and disconnection.

Instead, treat yourself with the same kindness you give your horse. Acknowledge that feeling overwhelmed doesn't mean failure. It means you're human, and this is hard.

* * *

What Happens When You Reconnect

When you manage to stay calm and present—even briefly—your horse's body language will shift. Their head will lower, their breathing will slow, their ears will relax.

Those are the moments that remind you: connection is possible, even in the chaos. They're proof that your empathic approach isn't just theory—it works.

* * *

Next, we'll talk about **setting boundaries with bullies**—how to protect your space without burning bridges or losing your temper.

Setting Boundaries with Yard Bullies Without Burning Bridges

You're not just fighting for your horse's well-being—you're fighting for your own peace of mind. Bullies thrive when you don't push back. But pushing back doesn't mean you have to fight fire with fire.

This chapter is about drawing clear, calm, and firm boundaries that protect you and your horse without escalating tension or isolating yourself.

* * *

Why Boundaries Matter

Boundaries aren't walls to shut people out. They're a way of saying, "This is what I will and won't accept."

When you set boundaries, you reclaim your power. You reduce anxiety, and you create a space where your horse and you can thrive.

* * *

How to Set Boundaries That Work

1. Be Clear and Direct

Say what you mean without beating around the bush. For example: “I appreciate your concern, but this is how I handle my horse, and I’d like you to respect that.”

2. Use ‘I’ Statements

Frame your boundaries from your perspective. “I feel overwhelmed when I get advice I didn’t ask for.”

3. Stay Calm, Even If You Feel Fired Up

Bullies want a reaction. When you respond calmly and confidently, you remove their fuel.

4. Repeat if Needed

If someone crosses your boundary, calmly repeat your statement. “As I said, I’m confident in my way of doing this. I’m asking you to respect it.”

5. Walk Away When Necessary

If the person keeps pushing, it’s okay to physically remove yourself. You don’t owe anyone a showdown.

* * *

Handling Common Pushbacks

Bullies might say:

- **“I’m just trying to help.”** Response: “I know your intentions are good, but this is what works for me and my horse.”
- **“You’re putting your horse at risk.”** Response: “I’m committed to my horse’s safety and well-being, and this approach supports that.”
- **“You don’t know what you’re doing.”** Response: “I’m learning and adapting as I go, just like anyone else.”

* * *

Protecting Your Mental Space

Setting boundaries isn't just about words. It's about protecting your energy:

- Limit time with known bullies.
- Avoid gossip and negative talk.
- Find allies—other empathic horse parents who get it.
- Practice self-care rituals after tough yard encounters.

* * *

When Boundaries Lead to Isolation

Sometimes, standing firm means losing some people. That's okay.

You want a community that supports growth, not one that drags you back to fear and control.

Remember, your peace and your horse's well-being come first.

* * *

Next up, we'll look at **building a positive support network on the yard**—because nobody should have to face bullies alone.

Building a Positive Support Network on the Yard

You can't control every person on the yard, but you can control who you spend your time with—and who you lean on.

A strong support network isn't just about friendship; it's about survival and sanity in an environment that can feel hostile.

* * *

Why You Need Allies

- **Validation:** It feels good to have someone acknowledge your struggles and choices without judgment.
- **Shared Wisdom:** Others on the same path can offer insights and tips you might not have considered.
- **Safety:** Bullies lose power when you're not isolated. A group can stand up together.
- **Encouragement:** When your confidence dips, a support network boosts you back up.

* * *

How to Find Your Tribe

1. Identify Like-Minded Horse Parents

Look for people whose approach aligns with your empathy and trust-based philosophy, even if they're quiet about it.

2. Start Small Conversations

A casual "How do you handle X?" or "I'm trying something new with my horse" can open doors.

3. Be Open About Your Values

You don't need to preach, but gently sharing your philosophy helps attract those on a similar wavelength.

4. Attend Yard Events or Group Activities

If your yard hosts lessons, talks, or casual get-togethers, use these to connect.

* * *

How to Nurture Supportive Relationships

- **Listen Actively:** Show genuine interest in others' experiences.
- **Share Your Story:** Vulnerability builds trust.
- **Offer Help:** Even small gestures create bonds.
- **Celebrate Wins:** Acknowledge progress in yourself and others.
- **Keep Boundaries:** Avoid gossip or negativity that drags you down.

* * *

When Support Is Not Available Locally

If your yard feels isolating, don't despair:

- Join online communities dedicated to empathic horse parenting and trust-based training.
- Find mentors or coaches who share your values.
- Create your own small group or meet-up if possible.

* * *

The Ripple Effect

Your positive support network doesn't just help you survive the yard bullies—it models a better way to be with horses and each other.

When you show empathy, respect, and kindness, others start to notice—and some might even follow your lead.

Staying True to Your Values Amid Pressure

The pressure to conform on the yard is real. Bullies lean hard on fear and control as “the only safe way.” But you know better. You’ve seen what empathy and trust can do for your horse—and yourself.

This chapter is your blueprint for holding your ground and staying authentic, even when it feels like you’re swimming upstream.

* * *

Why Staying True Matters

- Your horse relies on your consistency and calm leadership.
- Changing your approach under pressure undermines your bond and progress.
- Your confidence grows when you stand firm—others pick up on that, too.
- Staying authentic protects your mental health.

* * *

Common Pressures You'll Face

- **"You're too soft; your horse needs control."**
- **"You don't know what you're doing."**
- **"If you don't do this, your horse will get hurt or hurt someone else."**
- **"Everyone here does it this way; you're the odd one out."**

* * *

Bullied into Betrayal: A Lesson I'll Never Forget

When Dolly put on weight and her saddle no longer fit, I should have addressed it properly—padded it out, got her moving—but truthfully, I was nervous. Instead, I found comfort in walking her in hand. No bridle, no fuss. Just the two of us, side by side like old friends. She'd walk beside me better than any dog at heel, trotting through village roads and slowing when I did. We passed gardens, watched our reflections in dark windows. I spoke to her like she understood every word, and maybe she did.

Eventually, I saved up to have the saddle professionally fitted, thinking we could start gentle rides again. But the moment people on the yard found out, the pressure began.

"Are you going to ride now?"

I said yes—just a quiet hack round the village. But they insisted I prove she was "listening" first. They wouldn't open the gate for me. Instead, they pushed me to ride in the arena, under their watch. I didn't have the strength to ride "properly," and Dolly didn't understand why her soft, responsive rider was

suddenly pulling and pushing with unsteady hands. We both struggled. I felt ashamed. They said it was unsafe, foolhardy, to want to take her round the village without being in proper control. They told me I was too soft, that Dolly was getting away with too much.

The next day was worse. The bullying grew. They mocked me for wanting to give her a day off. I knew she'd already done more work in two days than she had in months, but I caved. Again. More arena circles. More pressure. Not just on her—but on me.

By Thursday, after they'd taken turns riding her themselves, they still pushed me to get on. I wanted to say no. But I didn't. That evening, I promised Dolly that Friday we'd go round the village, just us, quietly, before they arrived.

But even then, alone in the yard, I froze at the mounting block. My old fear kicked in. Dolly wouldn't stand still and the yard was solid concrete. The shame bubbled up. I got down, untacked her, and told her I was sorry. Again.

Saturday was the worst. They "helped" me for over an hour. It turned into a show of force—not theirs, but mine. Because they bullied me into bullying her. Dolly refused to be mounted, bless her heart, in the gentlest, most persistent way. She wouldn't fight. She wouldn't lash out. She just stood her ground, dodged, shifted, made it clear: this wasn't right.

Eventually, they told me to lunge her hard "make her respect you." I pretended. I shouted commands while Dolly quietly stood by my side, out of their sight. When they were gone, I untacked her and apologised yet again.

That evening, I visited a workmate—someone with decades of horse experience. I told her what had happened. She said what no one else did: "You should have told them to back off. She'd done more work than most fit horses do in a week. You

were right to want to just have a 10 minute steady walk round the village. You know her better than they do.”

She also told me something I’ve never forgotten: that hunters, after a summer off, are brought back into work with just 10 minutes a day—slow, steady, respectful of what the body can handle. Dolly hadn’t been idle—she’d been unfit. She wasn’t being “naughty.” She was tired, confused, overworked, and voiceless in a system that demanded obedience above sense.

Back then, I didn’t trust myself. I thought people who had “always had horses” knew more than I did. But I’ve learned this since: having horses all your life doesn’t mean you know better. It doesn’t mean you have the right to dictate what’s best for someone else’s horse.

Never go against your gut. Never ignore what your horse is trying to tell you. They’re never lazy. They always have a reason, and they are worth fighting for.

That wisdom came too late for me and Dolly that week. But maybe, if you’re reading this, it’s not too late for you.

Strategies to Stay True

1. Remind Yourself Why You Chose This Path

Write down your core reasons—your horse’s well-being, your shared trust, your values. Read them when doubt creeps in.

2. Practice Self-Compassion

It’s okay to feel scared or uncertain. Being kind to yourself fuels resilience.

3. Focus on Small Wins

Celebrate moments when your horse responds with trust, calm, or joy.

4. Keep Learning and Growing

Building your knowledge deepens confidence and shields against criticism.

5. Lean on Your Support Network

When pressure mounts, reach out to your tribe.

6. Practice Grounding Techniques

Breathwork, mindfulness, or simple rituals help you stay centred in tough moments.

* * *

When Pressure Feels Overwhelming

It's okay to take breaks from the yard, to protect your peace.

Remember, your journey with your horse is lifelong. Sometimes stepping back is the strongest move you can make.

* * *

Your Authentic Path Is Your Power

You don't owe anyone compliance with outdated, fear-based methods.

By staying true to your empathic values, you're not only shaping a better life for your horse but helping shift the culture on your yard—one calm, consistent step at a time.

The Power of Persistence — Why Giving Up Isn't an Option

Change is hard. It's uncomfortable, slow, and often lonely. Especially when you're standing firm against a culture that's deeply rooted in control and fear.

But giving up isn't just quitting on yourself — it's quitting on your horse and the future you want to build together.

* * *

Why Persistence Matters

- **Trust Takes Time:** Your horse didn't lose trust overnight. It won't rebuild overnight either.
- **Cultural Change is Slow:** You're challenging old beliefs held by the whole yard—and beyond. That kind of shift takes patience.
- **You're a Role Model:** Every time you stand your ground, you show others that there's a different way.
- **Progress Builds Momentum:** Small wins stack up into real

change. Don't discount the power of daily commitment.

* * *

What Persistence Looks Like Day-to-Day

- Showing up even when the bullies are loudest.
- Choosing empathy over fear—even when it feels risky.
- Learning something new regularly to strengthen your approach.
- Journaling your progress and challenges to keep perspective.
- Celebrating every moment of connection with your horse.

* * *

When You Feel Like Quitting

- Take a break—this isn't about burnout.
- Reach out to your support network—don't isolate.
- Remind yourself of the big picture and why you started.
- Know that every empathic horse parent faces tough moments—you're not alone.

* * *

The yard bullies want you to quit because it keeps their outdated ways safe. Your persistence breaks that cycle.

Keep going. Your horse, your values, and the future of

empathic horsemanship depend on it.

Tools for the Journey Ahead

You don't have to face the yard bullies—or the emotional toll of standing your ground—alone. The path of empathic horsemanship can feel isolating, but it's *not* empty. There's support out here for you. Real, practical, non-judgmental help.

And I'm walking it too.

Wrap-Up: Stand Your Ground, Be the Change

You've read the truth. You know the myths and lies that have been shoved down your throat for too long. The outdated ideas. The control-obsessed "experts." The closed minds clinging to a system built on fear and cruelty.

But you're different.

You feel your horse. You *listen*. And that makes you a threat to the old way—a threat to the cruelty hidden behind tradition and silence.

Yes, you'll face pushback. You'll meet resistance. You'll deal with bullies who think they know better just because they've been told so for decades.

Here's the truth:

That bullying is **not about safety**.

It's about **control**.

It's about protecting the status quo.

But you? You have every right to stand tall, to walk your own path with empathy and courage.

This isn't just about your horse. It's about changing the horse world—starting with your own corner of it. It's about lighting a fire under those dark, dusty old ideas and refusing to go back to silence.

Don't back down. Don't get discouraged.

You are not alone. And every small step you take chips away at the walls of cruelty.

Keep listening.

Keep learning.

Keep fighting—for your horse, for yourself, for the future of horsemanship.

The horses are counting on you.

Real-World Help That Works

Free Tools to Empower You

Build inner strength with my free resource pages.

These help you develop emotional skills that many of us were never taught—but that your horse desperately needs from you as a grounded, calm leader.

Use my private, mobile-friendly journal.

Sign in to create your own secure profile and write your thoughts right there on the yard, while everything is fresh. Track your growth. Spot patterns. Add photos if you want to create a visual record of progress.

Download my free ebook, *The Myths of the Horse World*.

Bust open the unspoken rules and expectations that quietly shape your experience in the yard—and reclaim your clarity.

You'll find all these on the **Free Resources** section of my website. No login needed to explore.

1:1 Coaching for Empathic Horse Owners

If you're ready to go deeper—or if you're struggling with the emotional strain of standing alone—I offer **private empowerment coaching** designed specifically for people like you.

This is for you if you want to:

Make sense of the emotional pressure around you and how it impacts your horse.

Rebuild your trust in your own instincts.

Learn to spot when your brain is working against you—and shift it.

Get grounded strategies that reconnect you to your values and your horse.

My coaching doesn't give you rules—it helps you **reclaim your own authority**. It's about growing strength from the inside out, so your horse sees you as a safe place to land—no matter what's going on around you.

Tools I Use and Trust

During my coaching, I also recommend **free external tools**—YouTube practices that support:

Nervous system regulation

Grounding after conflict

Strength and resilience during hard transitions

These aren't fluffy add-ons. They're the quiet workhorses of my own healing. And they're there for you, too.

A Final Word

If this book spoke to you, it's because the part of you that

knows better has never really gone away.

Keep trusting it.

Keep fighting for it.

And when the noise gets loud, come back here. To the words.

To the truth.

To the horse.

You've got this.

And I've got your back.

You knew something wasn't right.

The way they told you to handle your horse—the force, the fear, the dominance—it didn't sit well. And when you listened to your gut and chose empathy instead, they turned on you. The yard got colder. The comments sharper. The pressure unbearable.

But you didn't give up.

And you're not alone.

This book is your guide through the emotional landmines of traditional yards, where control masquerades as care and kindness is branded as weakness. It shines a light on the myths still dominating the horse world—and shows you how to hold your ground without losing yourself.

You'll find stories that echo your own, straight-talking insight that cuts through the noise, and gentle tools to rebuild your confidence, calm, and clarity.

Whether you've been belittled for being 'too soft,' or quietly breaking from the herd to listen to your horse—this is for you.

Written by an empowerment coach and empathic horse-woman who's lived it, this book gives voice to the silent strength of riders like you.

You don't need to fight fire with fire.

You just need to stop doubting your own flame.



About the Author

Lorraine didn't set out to write a book. She set out to survive.

As an empathic horse owner surrounded by a system built on dominance, force, and silence, she found herself questioning the practices everyone else called “normal.” What she discovered—through deep listening, emotional honesty, and trial-by-fire experience—changed everything.

Lorraine now helps kind-hearted horse people who've been told they're “too soft” reclaim their instincts, rebuild trust with their horses, and rediscover their own voice. Her approach is shaped not by traditional qualifications, but by lived experience, hard-won insight, and an unshakeable commitment to doing better—by the horses and by ourselves.

Through her coaching, writing, and online resources, she offers sanctuary and support for those walking the lonely road of doing things differently.

This book is part witness, part guide, and part quiet rebellion.

She's not here to impress the horse world. She's here to help change it.