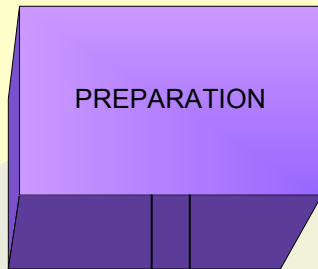


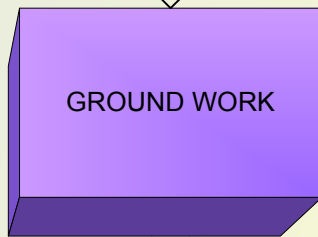
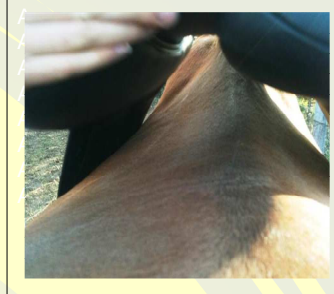
Problem Resolution

...at Lucan Lodge

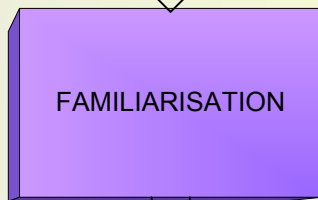
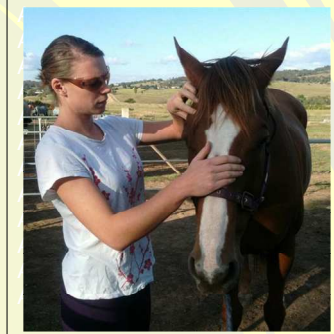
Most problem behaviors are caused by anxiety. There are many causes for anxiety, and we need to resolve the root cause in addition to retraining the learned stress responses.



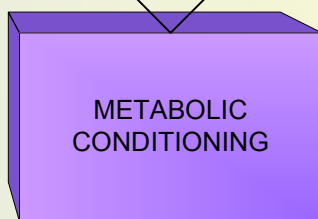
Before commencing work, we undertake a full pain assessment, conformation and gait analysis, dental check, saddle fit and bridle fit. We allow the horse 24 hours to become comfortable in the new environment. We eliminate starch and excess energy and protein from the diet, and may feed a supplement to resolve any sub clinical hindgut acidosis before we begin training. We prefer to take a history of the horse from the owner on or before this date, and draft an overall training plan together.



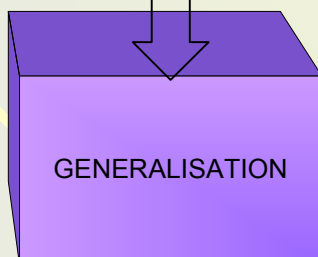
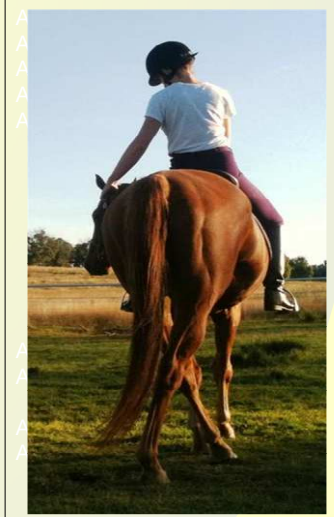
To re-establish confidence, we introduce the ground tie, and systematically desensitize the horse to being handled. We ensure the horse is comfortable accepting contact and pressure on all parts of his body, as well as being approached, circled and walked away from, without moving his feet or showing any signs of anxiety. We then do at least one session working the horse in hand. We make sure the horse understands and accepts cues to yield, go, stop and back up at walk, trot and canter. Any physical issues not apparent in the preparation stage can be identified here.



The initial ridden sessions are focused on ensuring the horse is comfortable and calm in the training environment. These sessions are usually limited to walk and trot, with most work on a longer rein. We introduce head-lowering cues in the initial rides to help combat anxiety as it presents during the riding in process. This involves using a direct (opening) inside rein to encourage the horse to reach down and forwards with his head on a circle whenever he becomes tense, choppy or resistant.



Using the direct rein, we begin to work the horse. Every time a problem behavior presents, or even if the horse just becomes tense or anxious for a moment, we step in with the direct rein, asking the horse to lower his head and bend. This helps diffuse his flight response, or *HPA axis*, which is a metabolic process involving stress hormones. As soon as the horse lowers his head and relaxes his back, we reward him with a pat and let him rest until his heart rate returns to normal, then begin again. With repetition, we can retrain the stress response to trigger less often, peak less drastically, and resolve faster. This is effectively an *interval training* process. As the horse gets better at coping with stress triggers, we apply more and more stress in the form of more complex movements and more intensive exercise. Eventually the horse learns to manage all kinds of physical, mental and social stress without resorting to flight mode.



Once the flight response is reconditioned, and the horse is working consistently in a controlled environment without becoming anxious, we can start to extend his comfort zone. We ride out on trails and roads, gradually desensitizing the horse to more and more new things. If possible we travel out and attend events, and work offsite. We expose the horse to traffic, stock, vehicles, dogs, bicycles and other novel stimuli to help consolidate and generalize the foundation of calmness and confidence.

