

Meet the Herd - Experiential

Meet the horses in a different way – non-verbal, no touching and lots of time – so that we don't miss out on information that we would usually miss by 'rushing in'. Creates an opportunity for an initial assessment. Created initially by Barbara Rector.

Client

- General. We use this with almost all new clients as a first exercise. Adapt for group or individual.

Staff

- Requires one dually certified practitioner if working with an individual or small group. Depending on size of group, may need more staff to observe and watch for safety.

Requirements

- Horses nearby, across the fence, ideally in small individual paddocks so that clients can be fairly close but the horse can also choose to have some distance from the client. Can also be done watching one or more horses turned out together but experience may be less powerful. Works best if horses can be in an area without access to grass or hay.
- Paper or journals and pens. Exercise
- Start with sensing in exercise – notice smells, sounds, tactile while softening gaze or closing eyes
- Move to a new area. Body scan. Be aware of feelings/messages in body. Not changing anything, just noticing. – be aware how it changes during the exercise
- Meet all or just some of horses across the fence– notice who you are drawn to, notice what feelings you get from certain horses, notice what you observe in the horses
- What happens if you turn your back/ move further away/ move closer? Journal on what you have noticed – during or after

Debrief

- How does this differ to the way we would normally get to know new horses/people?
- What did you notice in your body?
- What did you observe in the horses?
- How did your experience differ with different horses?
- Was there a horse that you were drawn to or that felt like it was a teacher for you?
- What could you use from this experience in your life when you meet new people or are affected in social situations?

Tips for Body Scan and Meet the Herd with Individuals

- It is important for you as facilitator to be fully present and grounded
- It can be diagnostic to witness the reactions, opinions, behaviours and body state of your client while doing this exercise
- Adapt the body scan to suit the person. Start with an introductory body scan before you meet the herd, then use more brief scans between horses
- You can move with the client unless they are quite well regulated and independent. Give them varying space according to what is happening. You may be quite close and talking, or some distance away holding space and being available
- Have your pre-planning flexible so that the process remains more important than the plan
- After the body scan while meeting a horse you may tell the story of the horse if appropriate; either the client shows interest and wants more information about the horse, or you have a sense that the story may be helpful
- Generally, the client finds 1 or 2 horses they are most drawn to
- Take note of the horse they are most comfortable with and also the one they have the most 'charge' around
- This can determine the horse they may work with.
- It may be the story of the horse that is the most impactful
- It is helpful at the end of the exercise to ask which horse comes to them when they close their eyes. Often this is a horse that will be a powerful teacher
- It may be appropriate to shift the exercise into an experience with one horse rather than continuing to meet other horses
- You can also do this exercise in with a herd of safe horses
- For children book about one hour and you may not use it all
- For adults around 1 1/2 hours for a meet the herd/first session

Body Scan

The intention of a body scan is to bring a person's awareness to the sensations in their body. It is a core practice in all EFW experiences.

Becoming aware and being able to use the body as a guide is an important part of being fully in the world and making decisions about safety. Trauma disconnects people from their body. This process is a major tool in healing trauma states. Some people will be very able to notice and track body sensations. Others will have limited or no awareness. It can be uncomfortable to notice your body especially if it is associated with over-activation such as anxiety, or if feeling numb has been part of coping.

The process of a body scan can be very simple. A facilitator uses their voice to guide a person systematically and intentionally to become aware of the body sensations being experienced at that moment. The body scan teaches how to use body awareness as a scanning device for accessing helpful information. They can also be very in-depth bringing attention in a detailed way for those who are ready for that level of awareness.

Body scans are used extensively in meditation practice. The observational aspect of meditation is helpful to create familiarity with the awareness without judging it and without panicking about any discomfort. These body scans are generally done lying down. They are good for EFW practitioners to do themselves and then adapt for using in equine settings. A good resource to read further about how body scans are used in meditation is Jon Kabat- Zinn in his books such as *Full Catastrophe Living* and *Coming to Our Senses* (Hyperion 2005).

You can read about how Linda Kohanov started to use body scans in equine work in her book *Riding Between the Worlds* (New World Library 2003). This is a helpful model for EFW work.

A good resource to understand how to focus on the body with traumatized clients is *Healing Trauma* by Peter Levine (Sounds True, 2005) and for more depth In 'An Unspoken Voice' (North Atlantic Books 2010).

Generally, you would facilitate a body scan by directing attention to the feet on the ground as in: "Begin by noticing your feet in your shoes on the ground. Be aware of the weight coming through your legs into your feet. Notice if you are standing evenly on your feet, or if one foot, or a part of one foot is more solidly connected. You don't need to change anything. Just notice."

We begin with the feet to assist with grounding. Some people move attention in an upward direction from the feet; most will redirect to bringing attention to the head, face, neck and work downwards. This process is about where the attention is focused. Not about changing anything. Use phrases such as "Just notice. You don't need to change anything. It is information".

A body scan can be adjusted to meet the needs of the client or group. It is less activating to start with noting external awareness such attention to senses “feel the wind on your face” for example, than to focus on the body directly. If you are not sure how someone is doing, just check in gently asking something like “How are you doing?” Adjust as needed.

We begin every exercise with a body scan. It is important for the facilitator to do it as well and also to do their own body scan before doing any demos, work with horses, or beginning sessions. In time it can be a quick check of self which give the facilitator important information about their inner state and may also open their awareness about the horse or client. Most clients can quickly learn to do their own body scan as a self-awareness check. Practice frequently yourself and use with clients. It will become an important tool in your work. Horses are generally much more comfortable with people who have done a body scan as they become more congruent.