

10 Tips for Successful Showing



April Clay, Registered Psychologist



Riding out of Your Mind

Equestrian Sport
Psychology

*Train your mind, your
horse will thank you!*



April Clay, M.Ed.,
Registered Psychologist

Visit www.ridingoutofyourmind.com for more information and sign up for a **Free Newsletter** for monthly mental tips delivered right to your inbox!

No part of this publication may be reproduced, or transmitted in any electronic without prior permission of the author. Requests for permission should be directed to April Clay, 220, 1982 Kensington Road NW, Calgary, Alberta Canada T2N 3R5. Tel: 403.283.5525 or email april@bodymindmotion.com

Published by sportlife books



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

April Clay is a Registered Psychologist with an independent practice located in Calgary, Alberta.

She started out riding at age ten and was competing in the Open Jumper divisions by age sixteen. It was an early curiosity about the mental aspects of competition that enabled her to enjoy many successful years with her equestrian career. April eventually stopped competing in order to pursue a career in Sport Psychology. She now rides for fun and has been exploring her new sport, marathon running.



Although she works with all kinds of athletes in her practice, April especially enjoys assisting equestrian athletes with their mental goals. Her approach has proven popular with various kinds of riders, from hunter/jumper to barrel racers, bareback riders and dressage. She offers both individual consultation and group services, and has been a featured speaker at such events as Equine Affaire, EqWest, and the Alberta Horse Owners and Breeders Conference. She is a qualified member of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP). April also works as a service provider for the Canadian Sport Centre Calgary.

April is a regular contributor to numerous publications both locally and abroad. Her articles on sport psychology for riders have appeared in Horses All, The Corinthian Horse Sport, Your Horse, Equus, Dressage Today, Performance Horse, Flying Changes, Horse News, New York Horse, The Eastern Equerry, and the Canadian Horse Journal.

Dear riders and coaches:

I hope you enjoy the tips. If you have any questions you can contact me directly april@ridingoutofyourmind.com or connect via my [Facebook](#) page.

And please feel free to pass this along to others you think would benefit.

*Happy riding!
April*

PS: Don't let your mind ride unsupervised....

#1

Don't focus on "winning the class"

If you walk in thinking *I have to get a placing, I must win*; you will send your pressure gauge through the roof. While winning may be something you really want, using it as a goal is not going to be effective.

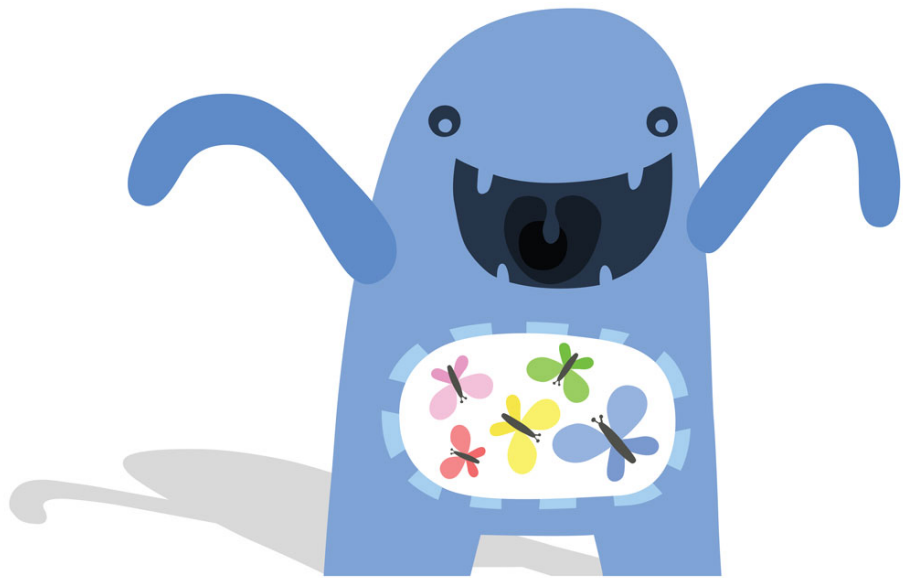
The truth is you are not 100% in control of any win. What you are in control of on that day is the way you ride, and your attitude so why not focus on these things? Choose a goal, and choose carefully. Goals can be extremely calming and focusing if you choose the right kind. Try goals like "no matter what happens I will stay positive today" or "today I will ride with rhythm". In short, make sure your goals are about the process of what you need to do out there, and are things you can control. This will help keep your mind where it is most effective- and yes, up your chances significantly of having a successful ride.



#2

Don't "battle" your nerves, embrace them...

Performance anxiety invokes the 'flight or fight' mechanism in your body. The blood begins pumping to all your major muscles to prepare you to face a dangerous situation. Your digestion system shuts down (butterflies), you urgently need to locate a bathroom (evacuation for faster flight) and your mind races ahead to try to assess the threat. The problem of course is that there is no real threat, your body just feels like it's under siege.



The good side of performance nerves is that they are telling you something very important. That you care about what you are doing and want to do it well. It can be a sharpener of your mind and focus if you know how. Butterflies don't have to be monsters holding your reins, they can be effective coaches if you work with them. When the physical sensations of anxiety start to manifest in your body, try responding to it differently. *Great! My body and mind are preparing for the challenge ahead I will direct this energy into a sharp focus.*

In other words, don't let that energy use you up, use it for good!

#3

Be prepared with a pre-ring routine

Do you know what your ideal performance state is? It is that sweet spot. That mental, physical and emotional place from which you ride your best. If you haven't competed a lot, go ahead and use exceptional training sessions.

You should also know what works best for your teammate. Is your horse better when relaxed and well worked or fresh and energized? Don't assume what will work for you will work for your mount.

This is the target state you will be aiming to create before entering the ring.

Routines are the tool you will use to help you get there.

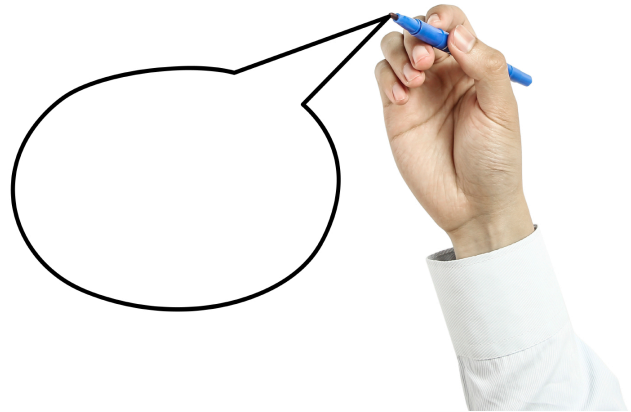
Don't get complicated when designing your pre-ring routine. Choose carefully, as each step should meet a need of you or your horse's. Some may do double duty, for example a process goal may calm both yourself and your horse during warm-up. Your self-talk can be designed to alleviate your show ring nerves and ultimately provide reassurance to your mount.



#4

Do communicate your needs and wants

Riders vary tremendously with how much contact they want with others before and after they compete. Some want to be left alone to focus, others want to chat to distract themselves from their nerves. Whatever your preference, make sure those around you know what you need and when. So tell your parents, trainer and fellow riders how they can help you. You might be surprised just how willing they are to help support you and reach your goals.



#5

Watch your language

Make sure you have some positive self-statements at the ready. Stress naturally causes us to focus on the negative. Choose a keyword to keep coming back to for the day. Something that reminds you where you want your focus to be: "rhythm", "commit" or a phrase "embrace the pace", "stay here and now". If you have your language ready, you are less likely to have headspace for that nasty gremlin of doubt.



#6

Focus on your own page

No doubt when you arrive you will want to check out your competition. *Do I know them? Have I ridden against them before? But this can quickly turn into are they better than me? What if they are better than me? I will never make medal finals. Ever.. I cannot blow this.* Yes, not exactly helpful thoughts when it comes to bringing out your best. So, remember how they taught you in school to focus on your own page? Do that. Focus on what you came there to do and do it well. Do not give your attention to the next guy/girl, you'll just be handing them an advantage. Instead, keep your energy and focus for yourself.

#7

Be prepared to accept mistakes

There is no way anyone gets through life, sport and certainly a tryout without making a mistake. It is not the end; it is only one moment in time. In fact, it could be that some mistakes are made because you are showing your ability to take risks. When you do make one, have a reboot strategy ready so you can get over and get on with it. Use a cue like "next" or "now" to shift your focus to the present, which is exactly where you need to be to ride effectively.



#8

Forget perfection

Perfection is not an ideal; it's not even possible. So what happens when you start to focus on the impossible? You become frustrated, impatient and angry with yourself. As you can guess, this means you will likely not perform to your potential. It also means you are more likely to become frustrated, impatient and angry with your horse. What you do impacts your team- every time. Think of a new ideal for yourself to go after- excellence, mastery of skills, continuous improvement. If your mindset is positive and possible- you will get the best from yourself.

Enjoy the ride.

#9

Everyone is human

Yes, don't forget that the guy or girl next to you is likely as nervous as you. Check it out. Take a look around when you arrive and have fun playing the "human test". I will bet you can come up with one thing per person (that guy has probably made mistakes before, she has likely been embarrassed, I'll bet he has had a bad haircut in his life) that makes them just as human as you. You are not surrounded by super stars, only others with strengths and weaknesses just like you. Whew!

#10

Start fresh every day

Horse shows are like little endurance events by the end. You hurry up, and wait. And wait and then you hurry off again, for days on end. That means you might just have a bad day and then have to go back out and try again. The last thing you want is to drag that bad day with you. This can leave you feeling mentally and physically tired, and focused on the negative.

So make a point of doing a quick review. I like to call this the 2/2 formula. Choose two things you were proud of, and two things that need "sharpening" for the next day. Then allow yourself to move along and relax with something non-sport related. Remember the motto "every day is fresh", meaning it is full of opportunity. Lucky you!



MORE RESOURCES:

Online Courses:

A cost efficient and convenient way to learn!

Are your expectations not meeting up with reality?

Maybe you need to learn the difference between expectations and goals. You'll feel and do better, trust me!

Try the:

Riding out of Your Mind Clinic

[More information and sign up](#)



Mistakes getting you down, not recovering so well?

Maybe you need a clear routine to help you move on and get back to your next ride. Try-

The Resilient Rider: Toughness Tools

[More information and sign up](#)



The Resilient Rider

Is your fear of falling off or getting hurt stopping you from performing?

Maybe you need some tools to help you get your ride back and leave fear back at the barn:

Riding Through Fear

[More information and sign up](#)



Riding Through Fear

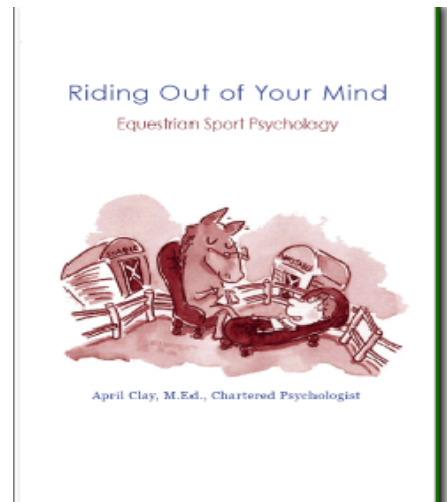
Like the articles? Get the eBook!

Riding Out of Your Mind is the essential book on Equestrian Sport Psychology for riders of all horse disciplines. Learn how to boost your riding pleasure and success by training your mind as well as your body.

Purchase online:

www.ridingoutofyourmind.com

\$17.50 CND



Looking for more specialized help?

Riders from all over the world benefit from personalized consultation with April. If you are looking for individual help to take your riding to the next level, consider an in-office or Skype Session. Insurance plans may cover some costs, [please inquire](#).

Live Clinics:

Are you interested in becoming a Riding Out of Your Mind Host Barn?

It's much easier than you think!

Get started by posting a flyer such as **this one** on your stable notice board. As we all know riders love to learn and enhance their performance, I think you'll find no trouble generating interest in a Riding Out of Your Mind Clinic.

These clinics are a fun, affordable way to get your mental training on the fast track.



FREE NEWSLETTER

Want to get all the latest updates, news and tips? Sign up for the FREE Riding out of Your Mind Newsletter

[SIGN UP](#)

Becoming a Winning Sport Parent:

Practical strategies to help you and your child get the most from their sport experience April Clay, M.Ed., Registered Psychologist

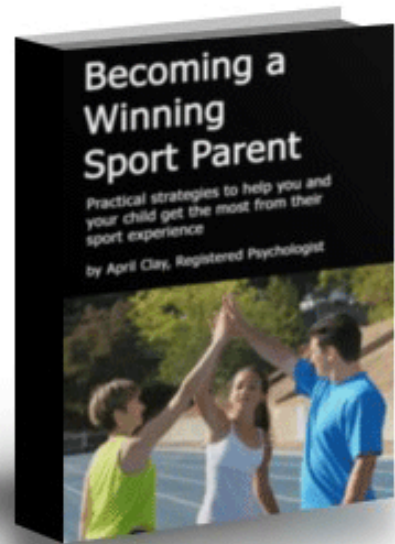
Sport Parents, sharpen your mental game!

Behind every successful young athlete are the parents that support them. Are you doing the best job possible to ensure your child enjoys their sport and reaches their potential?

Just a few of the topics covered:

- How to help your child deal with pre game jitters
 - Instilling a confident mindset in your child
 - How to talk to your child about a difficult performance
 - Dealing with negative coaches
 - Teach your athlete to set effective goals
- Featuring bonus interviews with: *Debbie Muir, Mark Tewksbury and Patti Sale!*

Only \$10.00 Download your copy now!



Services: FAQ

Why would I need a sport psychologist?

There are many reasons athletes come to see a sport psychologist. You do not need to have a “problem” with your performance. One of the most common reasons athletes seek out sport psychology is performance enhancement. Every athlete needs to learn key skills to meet the psychological demands of their sport. Other reasons for attendance include: competitive anxiety, confidence issues, injury, retirement, coach concerns and stress. Basically anything that impacts your sport can be the subject of a session.

Can my coach be involved?

It is up to you. For some, it is enough their coach is aware they are seeing a sport psychologist. Others want their coach present for a session. Some have circumstances where they wish to keep their attendance confidential.

Will my sessions be covered by health care?

No, Alberta Health Care does not cover the cost of a Registered Psychologist.

Can my sessions be covered by insurance?

Yes. Depending on your plan, Blue Cross does offer coverage for Registered Psychologists. Employee Assistance Programs also usually offer coverage; please contact your human resources representative. Sport Psychology services are a psychological service if offered by a licensed Psychologist. The mental skills you will learn will serve you in your sport- and life.

What if I need to discuss my sport and other issues going on in my life- can you help me with both?

Yes, we can discuss both. If for any reason I believe you need to see someone outside of my specialty area, I will make sure you have an appropriate referral.

How long will I need to come?

The number of sessions required will depend upon your goals and the presenting problem. At the end of the initial session, we will discuss your requirements.

Booking a Sport Psychology Session

What about confidentiality?

All information will be confidential with the following exceptions: 1. If a Release of Information has been signed to a specific person or persons with regard to specific information. (For example, your family physician) 2. If, in the professional opinion of the psychologist, there is a potential for harm to self or others. 3. If there is a legal or statutory obligation to report (as in cases of child abuse). 4. If the psychologist is legally required by a court of law to testify, submit a report or release records.

What happens in the first session?

The first session is an assessment of your situation. We will discuss your current concerns and collect the relevant information so I can inform you about how we might proceed. We will set a clear goal or focus for your counselling, and establish a time line for our work together.

At what age can my child benefit from sport psychology?

A minimum age of 10 is usually recommended, however please inquire about your specific situation. Sport psychology will be different depending on the developmental needs of the child.

Will I attend sessions with my child?

I usually prefer that a parent is present for part of the first session, so we can establish expectations. The younger the child, the more likely a parent is to be part of the consulting process. Depending upon the presenting concerns, a parent may also need to modify their role with their child athlete and therefore need a session of their own. We will discuss your situation at the first session, and make the appropriate decision.

If my child attends alone, do I have a right to information about their session?

The parent or guardian of anyone under 18 does have legal access to information about a child's psychological services. My preference is to discuss how we will handle this matter with the child and parent in the first session. There needs to be a balance between the child's privacy and parental involvement. This is usually easily negotiated, and gives the child a sense of empowerment in its own process.

If you have any other questions, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone 403.283.5525 or email april@ridingoutofyourmind.com