

Pony Club, Parents & Pressure

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Schemes

Aims:

- Light-hearted look at parents & pressure
- How pressure can affect competition performance
- Developing the coping rider

Jobs of the Pony Club Parent:

- Taxi Service/Lorry Driver
- Money Lender/Personal Bank
- Groom/Mucker-Outer/Instructor.....
- Development of Child
- Laundry Service (Clean numnah, itchy undies!)

The Most Important Job of All....the Development of the Child

- Significant others help to shape a child's general development
- Significant others are parents, siblings, trainers, D.C.'speople whose opinions impact upon the child
- Their presence, behaviours & words have the potential to enhance or destroy a competition performance

Sporting competitions have the potential to develop the child's

- Positive self-perceptions (how they feel about themselves)
- Intrinsic motivation (doing for the sake of doing)
- Positive affect (e.g. enjoyment, vigour)
- Coping skills (e.g. dealing with things as they arise)
- Moral development (e.g. sporting behaviour)
- Empathy with others
- Lifetime friendships

What benefits do
you want your child
to gain from Pony
Club?

(They're probably similar to the
ones on the previous slide...)

What does your child want to get out of Pony Club?

A child's perspective on sports
can be very different to an adults:

Ask them!

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Is your behaviour &
what you say on
competition days
congruent to these
benefits?

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Are you *aware* if you...

Help or *Hinder*

Pressure or *Support*

your child on
competition days?

Saying & Doing

- By displaying certain behaviours & saying certain things you potentially can add or reduce the amount of pressure a child feels
- Your reactions before, during & after competitions send clear messages to the child as to what motivates you as a person/parent/D.C.

The 'ideal parent' – what the kids say.... (taken from netball)

- Has a positive, supportive attitude
- Does not nag
- Lets me come to them for support rather than offering unsolicited advice
- Does not 'live' for netball – I'm the player!

Taken from work done by
Richard Perry & Phil Moore

Before the match:

- Gives me ‘personal space’ for the couple of hours before a match
- Makes sure that I have everything I need (drink, food kit etc)
- Gives positive (non-technical / tactical) messages – ‘*good luck, play well*’
- Is calm
- Not too inquisitive

Taken from work done by
Richard Perry & Phil Moore

During the match:

- Supports the team whether winning or losing
- Sits with the other parents
- Stays calm
- Encourages me no matter what the score

Taken from work done by
Richard Perry & Phil Moore

After the match:

- Smiles!
- **Listens** and waits to be asked for feedback
- Is honest when asked for feedback but picks out positives as well as negatives
- Does not criticise other players, selection, coaches, umpires, etc

Taken from work done by
Richard Perry & Phil Moore

The 'Unhelpful Parent' – what the kids say....

- Tries to do the coach's job
- Lives their life through me
- Creeps - coach
- Give me advice on how I should play/what to do
- Wants me to do things for them before the game (i.e. taking photos)
- Tells me that I don't look well when I feel fine, and then I get paranoid and start to think I might be!
- If I've had a bad game **I know**, she/he doesn't need to tell me!

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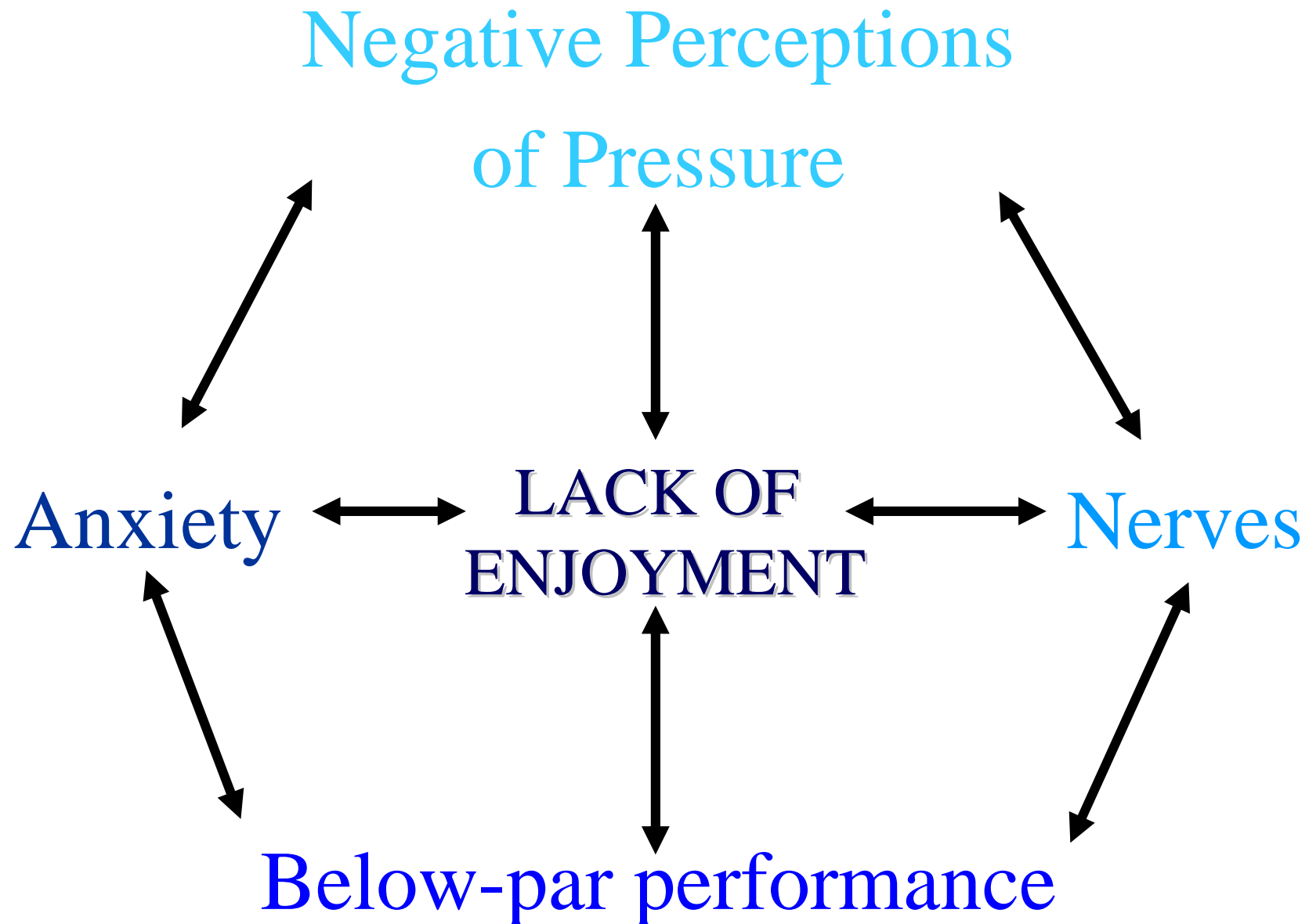
The 'Nightmare Parent:'
Homer Simpson

The Simpsons:
*'Dead Putting
Society'*

How might pressure
(from any source)
affect competition
performances?

The Negative Cycle:

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Does my child suffer
from the **NEGATIVE**
affects of competition
nerves or anxiety?

i.e. Are they ‘Bad
Nerves?’

‘Physical’ Nerves

- Dry mouth
- “Weak” muscles
- Feeling sick
- Shallow breathing
- Pale complexion
- Sweating
- Feeling shaky
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Fumbling/clumsiness
- Disturbed sleep

‘Mental’ Nerves (anxiety)

- Poor concentration (e.g. going wrong in the dressage)
- Inability to focus (goes off on a ‘tangent)
- Inability to get timing right (e.g. missing strides in the show-jumping warm-up)
- Negative self-talk (e.g. saying to themselves ‘I can’t do this’)
- Poor time management (e.g. having lots of time to rushing to get ready)

'Emotional' Nerves

- Irritability
- Lethargy
- Lack of humour
- Rudeness
- Forgetfulness
- Impatience
- Anger
- Nervous laugh

Don't mistake these with
teenagitis!

Ask Yourself....

Do I *inadvertently* add
to competition nerves
by putting pressure on
my child?

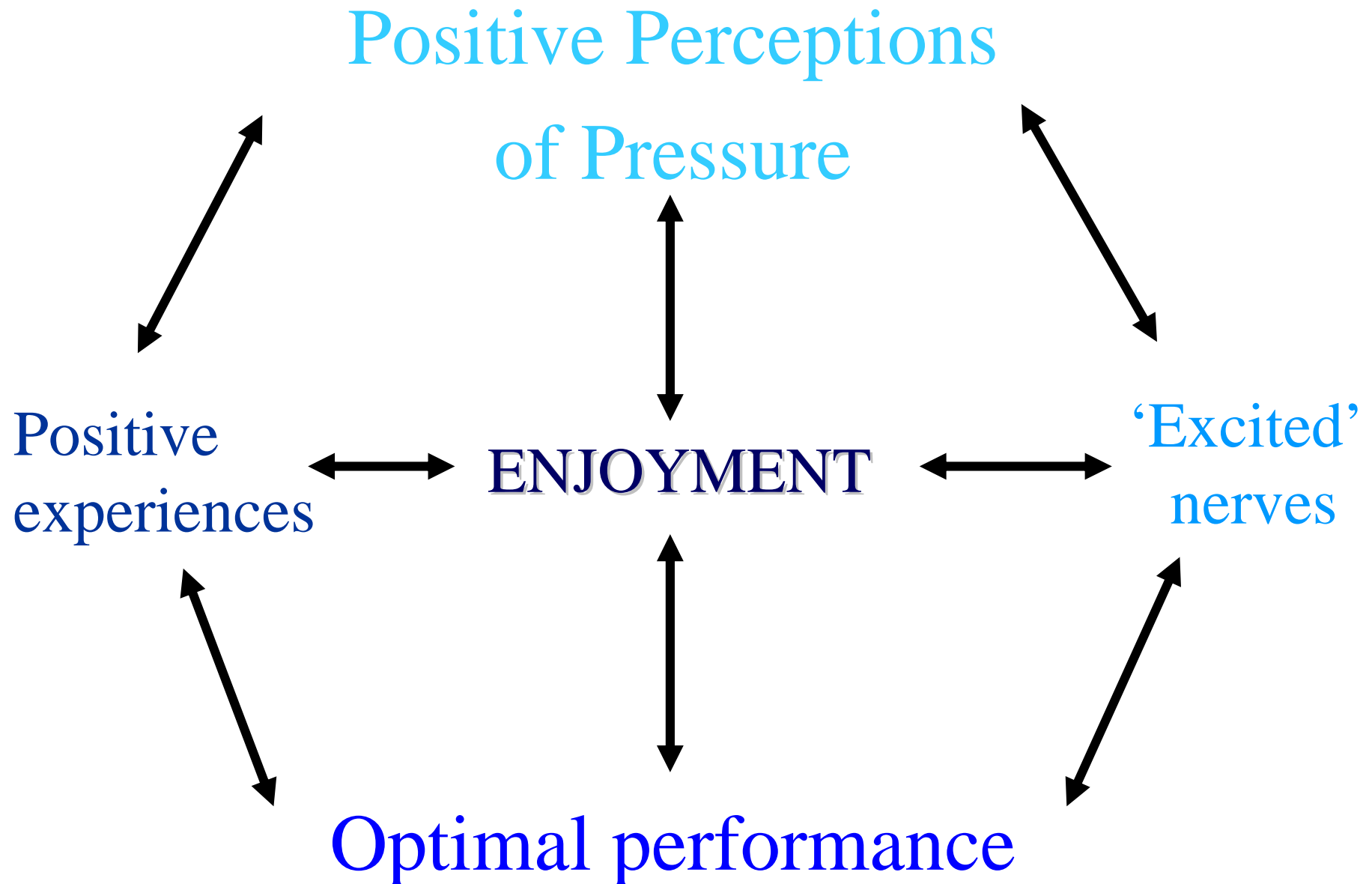
Do I act the same
whether she/he
wins or loses?

Do I *really* understand
and appreciate that
riding ponies throws
up a range of
uncontrollable
elements?

So, how can I
SUPPORT my child
at competitions?

The Positive Cycle:

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Encourage them to embrace 'nerves' as helpful to performance

- Expect them
- Have strategies for dealing with them
- Encourage them to think of 'excited butterflies' rather than 'scared butterflies!'

Expect them: Pippa Funnell gets them too!

- “I don’t say I don’t get nervous because I get very, very nervous, but I’m actually more confident now that the nerves are a good thing, because I know how to deal with them rather than thinking, *‘help, I feel nervous and they’re going to work against me.’*”
- “Nerves actually help my performance because I know how to handle them. I won’t say I like the feeling because I hate the feeling.”

Strategies for dealing with nerves & anxiety:

- Planning, preparation & time keeping
- ‘Belly’ breathing (in through nose - belly rises; out through mouth. Smooth & relaxed)
- ‘*Ditch the devil*’ & ‘*listen to the angel*’ (pretend there’s an angel sitting on your shoulder saying good, positive things into your ear. Don’t listen to the little devil on the other shoulder!)
- ‘Approach’ coping strategies (e.g. ‘bogey fence planner’ – worried about a certain fence? Plan what you will do, e.g. ½ halt at tree, ride forwards, sit up & squeeze....)
- ‘What Ifs?’ (Worried about something happening? Decide on a ‘Plan B’)
- Constructive evaluation (e.g. write about competitions in a diary – encourage them to describe *how* they felt)

“Have you had a ‘Grey Day’ or a ‘Sparkly Day?’”

Help riders to talk & understand
the range of feelings &
emotions they experience
before, during & after
competitions

Rehearse your
reactions to
disappointment &
poor performances

Remember....

De-briefing not *De-griefing*

Dealing with Disappointment:

- Give them some time (the 'long ride home')
- Get rider's opinion first
- Pick out positive side
- Give reassurance
- Tell them that there will be other times
- Be positive about what they have learnt
- Smile

Focus on:

- Factors that are under the control of the rider
- Process goals (e.g. accuracy in dressage test rather than a top 3 finish)
- Behaviour not personality

And.....

...don't
mention the
money!

Try to act the same at
the ‘more important’
competitions

Plan ‘parent coping
strategies!’

Parent Coping Strategies:

- Be **aware** of your own reactions to competitions & your child
- Anticipate ‘**hot spots**’ & avoid them
- **Distancing** – let someone else work them in/put fences up
- **Delegate** – multi-tasking is tough in the competition environment
- Find a **job** (chief photographer)
- Belly **breathing**

..if all else fails have
a G&T!

D.C.'s & parents – Supporting the rider's development:

- Enter rider at the right level of competition for their *personal* development (& pony's)
- Remember that the child may be technically advanced/talented, yet behaviourally & emotionally average
- Ask questions such as '*how did you perform?*' rather than '*did you win?*'
- Be creative with training & competitions

DC's & parents – Look to ‘bridge the gap’ between training & competitions:

- Set up ‘semi-competitions’ (e.g. style prizes, coaching rounds)
- Practice reacting to pressure situations in training:
 - e.g. XC combination fence – ‘quick switch’ to long route
 - e.g. Practice the dressage warm-up, with a set ‘test time’ in rallies – you might even tell them to do their test early to see how they cope, discuss reactions afterwards)

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About.....**

- A landmark psychology study asked children engaged in sporting activities the question;
‘Would you rather play simply for fun, or would you prefer to win?’
- **95%** said **FUN.....**