

Moods and Non-Typical Behaviors in the Horse

By Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland

“Non-typical” behaviors in animals - I have seen a lot of these behaviors in the past 11 years through my aromatherapy work with horses, dogs, cats and exotic animals. The one thing I have learned in these situations is that through the use of essential oils, patience, understanding and kindness, a change will occur for these animals. Many times it is human error that has created these behaviors and I feel it is our responsibility to help these animals re-adjust.

What are “non-typical behaviors” in the horse community? The types I have seen are: aggression, mistrust, dislike of humans, stubborn behavior, unhappiness, sour attitude and isolation from the herd. Horses may have one of these conditions or a combination. I feel they can be dealt with through natural horsemanship, kind and patient human interaction, and essential oils.

One of the first case studies to come my way when I first started my training with essential oils was a strikingly handsome Belgian, named Sunny. Sunny had the kindest eyes. He was the type of horse you looked at in awe and wanted to just go up and stroke his stout body.

That is what our reaction was when John, my husband, and I first saw Sunny. We walked up to his paddock area and John gently reached out his hand to pet Sunny and he just bolted away in fear. John and I just looked at one another in amazement; this was not the typical behavior we were expecting from such a kind looking horse. But that was Sunny; you could not go near him and he was definitely not coming near you.

After that incident I thought Sunny would be an interesting case study. I prepared the following oils in preparation for our next visit: Rose to help him deal with past issues and anger, Neroli for any abandonment issues or loss of a loving companion, Violet Leaf to strengthen and comfort his heart, learn to trust and to find inner strength, and Frankincense to deal with his fear, slow down his breathing in order to produce a feeling of calm, and to help him with anxious and obsessive feelings linked to the past.

The next visit we arrived with the oils and our desire to help. John and I went up to his paddock and I held the oils out to Sunny one by one over the fence and he sniffed them from a distance, but he was not coming over. John went into the paddock area and just stood by the gate and Sunny stood at the other end of the paddock as far away as he could. I left them there and if I remember correctly John stood there for 20 minutes or longer.

We did this every weekend for about three weeks and on the fourth weekend, Sunny came up to John. Maybe for the apples he offered, but maybe for friendship - whatever it was, we were delighted. It was fantastic to see the trust building between the two of them.

John just stood there with his hand out and Sunny cautiously sniffed it. I decided that John was the person to work with Sunny so I instructed him on how to work with the oils. For the next few weekends John showed Sunny the oils and eventually he was able to touch Sunny. Eventually we both were showing him the oils and John was able to pet him, touch him and even give him a little hug. I also know the owners of the stables were working with him in a similar fashion. We made a lot of progress with Sunny with patience and the oils.

What struck me about this “non-typical behavior” was that we were able to make a change with him through John’s slow and trusting approach and with the essential oils. Sunny eventually grew to love all four of the oils we offered him.

We all know how kindness, patience and understanding work and the benefits of natural horsemanship. Yet, how do the essential oils work? An essential oil is a volatile oil extracted from plants through steam distillation or expression. I have heard essential oils referred to as the life force, the soul and immune system of the plant. Essential oils are a natural substance that are 75 to 100 times more concentrated than herbs and are very therapeutic on a physical and emotional level.

One of my favorite quotes regarding essential oils is by Dr. René-Maurice Gattefossé, the famous French doctor who coined the term aromatherapy. He states; “Beside their antiseptic and bactericidal properties widely used today, essential oils possess anti-toxic and antiviral properties, a powerful vitalizing action, and an undeniable healing power...” This is how I feel about essential oils and why I enjoy working with them.

When an essential oil is inhaled it goes on an amazing journey through our olfactory system. Once the fragrance travels through our nose it reaches our *Limbic System* where the *amygdala hippocampus* resides, which affects our emotional activity. The fragrance then reaches the *hypothalamus* and *cerebral cortex* associated with our intellectual activity, and finally goes on to the *pituitary gland*, *sex glands* and *adrenal glands* affecting aggressive responses and sexual responses. This is a very simplified explanation of what is occurring upon smelling an essential oil.

The essential oils I suggest to have in an aromatherapy kit for moods and non-typical behaviors are: Basil, Frankincense, Jasmine, Neroli, Rose, Sweet Marjoram, Thyme, Violet Leaf and Yarrow.

Brief essential oil descriptions pertaining to moods and non-typical behaviors:

Basil: One of the most useful oils for stimulating and clearing the mind. When inhaled it clears the head, relieves intellectual fatigue, and gives the mind strength and clarity. Also useful for nervous disorders, especially those associated with weakness, indecision or hysteria.

Frankincense: Helps one to deal with their fear, slow down their breathing in order to produce a feeling of calm and to help them with anxious and obsessive feeling linked to the past.

Jasmine: Deeply relaxing oil. This oil helps to calm the body mind and spirit. And, it helps to diminish fear and enhance self-confidence.

Neroli: Helps with abandonment issues or loss of a loving companion. This oil has a very powerful psychological effect offering a feeling of emotional harmony.

Rose Otto: Helps with nervous tension helps with trauma, anger, resentment, fear and anxiety.

Sweet Marjoram: This oil has an ability to both strengthen and relax. In terms of oriental medicine, marjoram tones and circulates energy, clears phlegm and calms the mind.

Thyme: Strengthens the nerves and activates the brain cells thereby aiding memory and concentration. Lifts the spirits, relieves feelings of exhaustion and combats depression. Also, said to help release mental blockages and trauma.

Violet Leaf: Helps to strengthen and comfort your heart and learn to trust and to find inner strength. This oil will not dull the senses; rather it will help keep the animal in control, maintaining inner strength that would otherwise be depleted.

Yarrow: Is a form of rescue remedy. It helps to release past issues. It can help to release deeply repressed emotions such as anger and embitterment.

So, yes, essential oils can help with “moods and non-typical behaviors”. It is our job to be patient and kind during the entire process. In the herbal community they say that for every year a person has had a chronic condition, it will take that many months to get better, and for every month they have had it, it will take that many or up to twice that many days to get better. You can apply this same type of thinking to moods and non-typical behaviors. From my experience and determining the extent of the situation, I always add an extra two months for every year and two to three days for every month a horse has had the condition.

Please note when working with essential oils they should always be diluted. An essential oil should never be forced on an animal and know your animal’s constitution before working with essential oils. If you have questions regarding essential oils contact a certified aromatherapist.