

CALMING & STRESS SIGNALS IN HORSES

Appeasement and/or displacement behaviours



lateral movement away from threat



seeking distractions (sniffing things, staring into the distance)



yawning



empty chewing



lateral ears



snapping or clapping (mostly youngsters to older horses)



sudden scratching, sniffing or grooming (themselves), or licking the handler



averting gaze and/or head



blinking



lowering head (slightly bent knees)



licking and chewing



eating to calm him/herself

These behaviours, popularly called 'calming signals', are often **indicators of stress and conflict**.

Appeasement is **directed at another** ("I'm not hurting you, so please don't hurt me.."), whilst displacement is **self directed or away from the other** ("This is very stressful, I am not feeling comfortable."). Sometimes they can be both.

If your horse is showing any of these signs **frequently** or with **greater intensity** during handling or training, or other situations where it normally wouldn't happen, it is important to **take notice**. Knowing or defining exactly what is going on (whether appeasement or displacement, or trying to guess what the horse is thinking) isn't essential as long as we are aware that calming signals can be an indicator of stress/conflict. By recognising calming signals in the context of our training, we can **adjust or change our approach** in response.