



CASE STUDY

SID

A Sensitive Horse's Treatment Journey

"Trust cannot be forced. It has to be earned."

Sensitive Horse Package

KNEAD SUPPLE MUSCLES

Gentle Care for Sensitive Horses

Gemma Migdal - Cert ESMT, IAAT

Equine Sports and Rehabilitation Massage Therapist

Starting Point

Sid is a highly sensitive horse with a difficult past. Although he is now in a caring home, he remained wary of people, touch and unfamiliar experiences. His owner described him before the programme as very anxious and reactive.

"I'd like Sid to be able to relax and breathe."

Owner's goal before the programme

1/5	1/5	3/5
Sensitive-area touch	Neck & poll handling	Standing / relaxing during treatment



Sid during a calm session. Treatment was adapted to what he was comfortable allowing.

The Treatment Philosophy

Success was never going to be measured by how much treatment could be completed in one appointment. If Sid showed that something was too much, I slowed down, changed approach or stopped.

"Offer. Observe. Listen. Never force."

Four Sessions, One Progressive Journey

SESSION 1 • ESTABLISHING TRUST

Sid accepted gentle hand contact but was unsure of the PhysioKey. I allowed him to investigate the device and worked only where he was comfortable. No manual massage was attempted because he was still guarded. The first session was about showing Sid that his signals would be heard and that treatment would not be forced.

SESSION 2 • INTRODUCING CHOICE

I again used the PhysioKey gradually and at Sid's pace. I also offered oils from both my Trauma Kit and Relaxation Kit. Sid chose Yarrow from the Trauma Kit. I recorded this as his preference rather than using the choice as a diagnosis. His willingness to remain engaged with the treatment process was beginning to increase.

SESSION 3 • BEGINNING TO LET GO

I used the PhysioKey first, with the aim of supporting a calmer nervous-system response before progressing to more direct hands-on work. Sid showed a softer expression, licking, lip movement and yawning. As he became less guarded, I was able to introduce manual massage around the neck, jaw and poll without the same level of bracing. His owner also reported being able to touch around his gelding scar without his previous leg-raising response.

SESSION 4 • UNDERSTANDING SID

By the final session I understood how subtle Sid's relaxation signals could be. Compared with our first appointment, he accepted considerably more interaction and hands-on work. The important progression was not simply that I could do more, but that Sid could remain more settled while I did it.



PhysioKey treatment was introduced gradually and progressed at Sid's pace.

Why PhysioKey Mattered in Sid's Treatment

With a sensitive horse like Sid, muscular tension cannot always be approached effectively with massage alone. When a horse is anxious or anticipating discomfort, the body may remain guarded and the muscles can brace against touch. Trying to massage through that tension would not have fitted the horse-led approach I wanted for Sid.

PhysioKey uses bioadaptive neurostimulation, delivering electrical impulses through the skin that interact with the nervous system. With Sid, I used it with the aim of supporting relaxation and reducing guarding before asking him to accept more direct manual work.

TRUST → ACCEPTANCE → RELAXATION → REDUCED GUARDING → MANUAL TREATMENT

This became the key treatment sequence for Sid. I did not use the PhysioKey simply as an additional modality. It became a bridge between nervous-system focused treatment and manual massage. I watched for changes such as softening of the eye, lowering of the head and neck, licking, yawning, muzzle softening and changes in breathing. When Sid appeared calmer and less guarded, I could then introduce hands-on massage more effectively.

"The aim was not to massage a horse who was bracing against me. It was to help Sid reach a point where he could accept touch without immediately preparing to resist it."

Practitioner reflection

This case does not prove that one modality caused a particular behavioural change. Sid's progress occurred alongside patient handling, repeated positive experiences, owner support and manual therapy. However, clinically, the PhysioKey was an important part of how I prepared Sid for more effective hands-on treatment.

Physical Findings & Home Support

As Sid became more comfortable and less guarded, I was able to assess his body more thoroughly. He continued to hold tension around the base of his neck and tended to work on the forehand rather than effectively engaging his hindquarters.

- Carrot stretches
- Forelimb and hindlimb stretches
- Belly lifts and wither rocking
- Sternum weight shifts
- Progressive pole work within Sid's confidence and comfort

Sid appeared to tolerate **firmer, purposeful touch** better than very light or tickly touch. His owner was encouraged to try slightly firmer grooming pressure and observe his response.

Owner-Observed Changes

Progress was not seen only during treatment. Sid's owner noticed changes during everyday handling too.

"Tolerating his ears being touched, allowing me to touch inside of his back legs."

Owner feedback

She also reported that although Sid still does not really like being groomed, particularly towards his head, he had become better about being groomed over his body. She felt he had definitely become more trusting and comfortable with me.



What Sid's Owner Said

General behaviour / ability to relax	Some improvement
More trusting / comfortable with therapist	Definitely
Several close treatments more beneficial	Definitely
Enough time and choice	Yes, completely
Helped owner notice subtle signs	Yes
Would recommend the package	Definitely

"Gentle, kind, sensitive. Listened to him all the time."

What worked particularly well for Sid

"You are a lovely, kind and sensitive person who gives the horse as much time as necessary. Never rushed, always at the horse's pace."

What Sid's owner would tell another horse owner

Context: Sid's owner also noted that he was becoming more dominant in the field and felt this meant he was feeling good. Herd behaviour can change for many reasons, so this observation is recorded without attributing it directly to treatment.

Practitioner Assessment

FINAL SESSION - 15 AUGUST 2026

My final assessment showed **noticeable improvement** across Sid's four-session package. The clearest change was not simply that he tolerated more treatment, but that his relationship with touch had begun to change.

"In the beginning he would allow touch, then walk away. By the end he was actively seeking touch where he wanted it."

Final practitioner observation

Area assessed	First	Final
Comfort with my approach / presence	3/5	5/5
Acceptance of hand touch	3/5	5/5
Acceptance of PhysioKey	3/5	5/5
Comfort around sensitive areas	1/5	4/5
Neck and poll handling	1/5	4/5
Leg handling	2/5	4/5
Ability to stand and relax	1/5	5/5
Recovery after becoming worried	3/5	5/5

Relaxation responses observed

Across the package I observed **softening of the eye, lowering of the head and neck, licking/chewing, yawning, lip and muzzle softening, and changes in breathing**. With Sid, these responses could be subtle and needed careful observation.

MOST MEANINGFUL CHANGE	Trust and seeking touch rather than avoiding.
OVERALL OUTCOME	Noticeable improvement.
STILL REQUIRING SUPPORT	Hamstrings, neck and poll using Touch and Release System.

Recommendations and next steps

Sid's owner was given a home programme including stretches, walking and hill work, together with gradual pole introduction using the same calm, confidence-building approach. Ongoing maintenance treatment and continued positive handling experiences were recommended.

Where Sid Started - Where Sid Is Now

AT THE BEGINNING	BY THE END
• Highly cautious about unfamiliar treatment. • Sensitive-area touch rated 1/5. • Neck and poll handling rated 1/5. • PhysioKey initially worried him. • Relaxation signals were easy to miss. • Manual massage was limited by guarding.	• Allowed considerably more interaction and treatment. • Improved tolerance of ear touch. • Owner could touch inside his back legs. • Gelding-scar area touched without previous leg-raising response. • More accepting of grooming over his body. • Greater acceptance around neck, jaw and poll. • Manual work could be introduced with less bracing. • Owner felt he had definitely become more trusting and comfortable with me.

Progress, Not a Finish Line

"I would like Sid to trust, feel he actually enjoys being touched."

Sid's owner - looking forward

Tolerating touch is not the same as enjoying touch. Four sessions have not 'fixed' Sid. The programme has instead provided repeated positive experiences in which his communication was noticed and respected.

I recommended maintenance treatment approximately every **6-8 weeks**, alongside appropriate stretching, confidence-building pole work and continued attention to the type of touch Sid finds easiest to accept.

"Sometimes the biggest changes are found in the smallest responses."

Gemma Migdal

Knead Supple Muscles

Gemma Migdal - Cert ESMT, IAAT

07958 725 477 • ksmequinemassage@gmail.com

www.kneadsupplemuscles.com

Case study based on practitioner observations and owner feedback. Observed changes are not presented as proof that any single treatment modality caused a specific behavioural outcome.