

Therapeutic Riding & Equine Assisted Activities

HETI -Federation of Horses in Education and Therapy International

It is widely recognized that the interaction between people and horses has a powerful and varied benefit. The benefits are physical, mental, emotional and intellectual. Horses complement the work of many practitioners, Physiotherapists, OT's, Speech Therapist's, Educationalists and Psychotherapists among others, use equine facilitated activity to enhance their work. The movement of the horse's walk closely mimics the human walk. The horse's walk stimulates and synthesizes human walk making it a transformational treatment base. The scope for transferring learning from the horse's environment to life skills acquisition is significant.

Interaction with a horse can include riding, carriage driving, vaulting and horsemastership.

The benefits of riding for people with challenges have been recognized for over three thousand years.

Physical challenges ranging from cerebral palsy to accidental injury, cognitive difficulties, mental illness, autism, developmental delay and emotional challenges have all responded positively to equine facilitated activity. Individuals who are unable to bear weight are often limited to swimming. Riding offers an effective alternative to develop muscle tone and improve posture, with the added advantage of the dynamics of the horse's movement. The bond that develops between human and horse also opens up many new opportunities, such as independence and responsibility.

Benefits Include

- Improvement in joint mobility, balance and coordination
- Changes in muscle tone
- Increased self-confidence through improved self-image
- Improved learning, concentration, spatial awareness
- An incentive and opportunity to take responsibility and control
- The transfer of learning outcomes in an equine environment to daily living skills
- Motivation to set and achieve goals

CanTRA – Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association

... Some centres may offer physical therapy with the therapist using the horse's movements to influence the body of the rider (Hippotherapy). Other centres focus on the mental health benefits of riding (Equine Facilitated Mental Health). The majority of centres focus on therapeutic riding to provide socialization, recreation, interaction of clients and horses, and the care and training of the horse. In addition, many of the centres provide life skills training, rehabilitation and employment

opportunities for these individuals. At the riding centres, individuals of all ages are exposed to a sense of freedom and achievement. For many students with physical challenges, riding may be their only experience of this kind of mobility.

Benefits of Therapeutic Riding

Therapeutic riding can help to improve the physical, mental, emotional and/or social well-being of most people with these challenges. An invigorating form of exercise and recreation, riding is challenging, giving the rider a sense of accomplishment and increased self-esteem. For individuals who have challenges that affect mobility, the horse provides freedom of movement and independence of assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, walkers and canes. Riding is also a positive sensory experience for the rider. Perhaps most important, riding is enjoyable, worthwhile for its recreational value alone.

- Development of mobility, balance and co-ordination
- Improvement of muscle tone and strength
- Increased concentration and improved learning skills
- A challenging recreational activity
- Independence, integration and a sense of achievement
- Development of self confidence and motivation
- Opportunity to become an elite athlete.

Definition of hippotherapy

The word 'hippotherapy' comes from the greek 'hippos' meaning horse and 'therapy' meaning care. Thus, hippotherapy is the utilization of the horse for therapeutic purposes rather than equestrian goals. This new field targets acquisition of motor pre-requisites rather than equestrian abilities. Hippotherapy is a *rehabilitation strategy* using a mobile and live instrument called 'horse.' The horse possesses motor and emotional, neuro-sensitive stimulation qualities never equalled by a machine. The horse offers 110 multidimensional movements by impulsion every minute. No therapist, no matter how motivated or talented, can compete with this quality stimulation. Hippotherapy is a specialization reserved to rehabilitation specialists: physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech language specialists trained in this field. In hippotherapy, the rider does not influence the horse but rather the movement of the horse stimulates postural and muscular reactions on the rider. The rider will take different positions on the horse to stimulate affected group muscles. Objectives are not essentially motor; they can be of all types (cognitive, behavioural, etc...) depending on the initial evaluation prepared by the therapist (OT, PT, Speech-Language Pathologist) with the help of the rider's medical team.

BCTRA -BC Therapeutic Riding Association

How Therapeutic Riding Helps

Therapeutic riding has been recognized for decades as physically, psychologically, socially and educationally beneficial. Horseback riding can improve balance and co-ordination, strengthen muscles, increase circulation and decrease spasticity. Motor functions are improved by this unique and enjoyable therapy.

Horseback riding increases concentration and improves learning skills. Riders are challenged and are rewarded with a sense of achievement. They experience a general feeling of well-being, self-esteem and self-confidence.

The person may also develop a strong bond of respect, trust and kinship with the horse, volunteers and fellow riders.

Riding has a place in overcoming perceptual or developmental problems. Horseback riding helps children and adults who have conditions such as:

EAGALA –Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association -Equine Assisted Mental Health

This is the use of horses in the mental health field; it is facilitated by mental health professionals working with credited equine professionals.

Horses are large and powerful, which creates a natural opportunity for some to overcome fear and develop confidence. The size and power of the horse are naturally intimidating to many people. Accomplishing a task involving the horse, in spite of those fears, creates confidence and provides for wonderful metaphors when dealing with other intimidating and challenging situations in life.

Horses are very much like humans in that they are social animals. They have defined roles within their herds. They would rather be with their peers. They have distinct personalities, attitudes, and moods. An approach that seems to work with one horse, does not necessarily work with another. At times, they seem stubborn and defiant. They like to have fun. In other words, horses provide vast opportunities for metaphorical learning. Using metaphors, in discussion or activity, is an effective technique when working with even the most challenging individuals or groups.

Horses require work, whether in caring for them or working with them. In an era when immediate gratification and the "easy way" are the norm, horses require people to be engaged in physical and mental work to be successful, a valuable characteristic in all aspects of life.

Most importantly, horses have the ability to mirror exactly what human body language is telling them. Many people will complain, "The horse is stubborn. The horse doesn't like me," etc. But the

lesson to be learned is that if they change themselves, the horses respond differently. Horses are honest, which makes them especially powerful messengers.

Cartier Equine Learning Center –Equine Assisted Learning

What is Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)?

Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) is an effective approach to human development through horsemanship. Participants engage in team emphasized exercises and find themselves learning valuable skills in a fun and exciting atmosphere while working through the dynamics of horses.

EAL has proven to be effective, powerful, interesting, exciting, therapeutic, positive, educational, and creative. Equine-Assisted Learning can be a very powerful journey of facilitating participants learning alternative skills to draw from when faced with difficult challenges in an effort to overcome negative influences.

This particular building block style of learning helps individuals better understand themselves as they participate in exercises designed around understanding the nature of "the horse". We call it, "Using Horse Sense".

When one has learned the fundamental principals of EAL, it is easy to understand why individuals with compromised moral values or ethical standards find it difficult, if not impossible, to keep their secrets hidden when they start to work through exercises with horses.

By recognizing a horse's ability to read and understand human body language, it is equally understandable how one can use EAL to provide leadership development opportunities, as well.

Why horses?

Equine-Assisted Learning programs are a powerful journey of learning and understanding for those who participate. Horses in this program are effective teaching tools; immediately responding to what participants do, trained facilitators look for "teachable moments" that horses identify. Quite simply, the horse does the teaching; facilitators are there to offer explanation and provide guidance as they work through the solution.

The single most asked question is, why are horses uses? To understand how this process works we must first realize how horses learn and understand the laws of survival. In a horse's world, the rules are clear, easy to understand and dealt with swiftly when challenged.

Nature provides them with instincts and senses that are very astute. For their mere survival, a wild horse, must be aware of their surroundings and quick to react. They watch for the slightest movement, especially threatening body posture. Horses know how to

discern the difference between a calm non-threatening approach and anxious, nervous energy; immediately identifying individuals struggling internally. By understanding the true nature of the horse, we can alter our techniques to become efficient facilitators.

Horses look for strong leadership and willing to follow, but only after they find respect and trust. If we provide contradictory behavior, they will question and challenge our authority to lead. Horses respect the stringent outline of the hierarchy. In a horse's world, team work is respected and expected. Horses respond favorably to positive stimulus and respect consequences inasmuch as it is fair. Horses are tough and steadfast dance partners; they don't judge, but they don't forget. They don't let you cheat and their feed back is honest. Dr. Phil may have paraphrased "how's that working for you" but horses have been asking since the beginning of time.

If we, as facilitators, are willing to listen, they can assist us with guiding groups to becoming better individuals. By including horses in specially designed educational experiences, equine-assisted specialists have greatly multiplied the participant's rate of success to self-discovery. Horses can't over think a participant's motive and horses can't manipulate behavior. But by their intuitive nature and innate sensitivity, horses can provide facilitators with a window into the participant's personality. As facilitators listen to a horse's non-verbal communication, together, they have the ability to walk participants through to finding life-altering change.

By understanding why and how horses are aware of our every movement – you will come to understand how effective equine-assisted learning programs are to finding individual.

Quite simply, equine-assisted learning, works.