

HOME OF THE STARS

Behind the Barn Door of Starlight Therapeutic Riding Center

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EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY

Is it healing or hype?

FROM GINA FRIEDMAN

Can time spent with an animal truly translate into a meaningful, healing experience? That's the question surrounding equine-assisted therapy (EAT), an increasingly popular experiential treatment where individuals interact with horses in various activities, including grooming, feeding, walking, and equine games, to improve their psychological health. Both a licensed therapist and horse professional conduct EAT.

EXISTING RESEARCH

To date, few scientifically substantiated studies have confirmed the benefits of EAT. However, anecdotal evidence is abundant. *So why is there a lack of published studies on EAT?* Experts agree it may be because experience-based therapy, such as equine therapy, is difficult to define. In other words, the questionnaires that psychologists typically use to measure a treatment's

effectiveness might not capture the changes or positive outcomes of EAT. It also is a relatively new form of therapy.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT?

Though empirical evidence is currently lacking, research and anecdotal testimony illustrate positive results. Therefore, if traditional talk therapy isn't appealing or isn't significantly improving an individual's mental health, EAT may be an option. When seeking a reputable program, consider the following:

- Does the program employ a well-qualified treatment team, including mental health and equine experts?
- Is the mental health provider licensed to practice in his or her state?
- What is the therapist's treatment approach? Each may have different ideas about the best way to proceed.

SAY HAY!

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HOW DO PROFESSIONALS DEFINE EQUINE-RELATED SERVICES?

Experts agree on new standardized terminology

FROM SHELLEY DUFFIN



In recent years, therapeutic services that include human and horse interaction have broadened and expanded, benefiting people of all ages and abilities. However, the immense growth also has led to a cornucopia of confusing and complex terminology used to identify and define these services. Ultimately, the absence of standardized terms has left equine service providers without precise verbiage to describe their programs and families and advocates without exact words to express their needs.

Most equine service professionals would acknowledge a definite need to create standardized or "optimal" terms if asked. Yet, others would object - having long-held beliefs of what to call particular services. But, both sides agree that the horse is the unifying factor in the equation.

Still, in 2018, a group funded by the Bob Woodruff Foundation, including representatives from The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.), combined forces to distinguish between the different services and publish a consensus report of optimal terminology.

The daunting, two-year process recently culminated in a newly published article in *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, "Optimal Terminology for Services in the United States That Incorporate Horses to Benefit People: A Consensus Document."

The journal article states that the group adopted the term Equine-Assisted Activities (EAS) to unify the diverse areas in which horses are incorporated into an activity to benefit humans. The report further explains the rationales and justifications the group applied to reach consent. Now, armed with definitive terminology, equine service professionals are optimistic that the standardized terms, once fully implemented, will clarify the types of services offered and give researchers consistent terminology to support their exploratory efforts.

THE THREE AREAS OF EAS

- **Equine-Assisted Therapy** - A general term referring to a licensed healthcare professional incorporating horses into the therapy process. Practitioners are often required to have a graduate degree and are regulated by a state board. Examples of EAT include equine-assisted psychotherapy/counseling and *hippotherapy.
- **Equine-Assisted Learning** - Certified equine instructors or equine specialists utilize experiential learning activities involving horses to benefit participants. Interactive activities may be mounted or unmounted. For example, schools may partner with an equine service center to integrate activities into the curricula to reach specific educational strategies and academic goals.
- **Horsemanship** - An area of non-therapy services focused on adapting various riding disciplines for individuals or groups with diverse needs. Qualified equine professionals with specialty training or certification develop lesson plans that may include mounted and unmounted activities to develop horsemanship skills and provide the therapeutic benefits of interacting with horses. Examples include therapeutic horseback riding, therapeutic vaulting, and therapeutic driving.

Note: *Hippotherapy is often incorrectly used to describe all forms of EAS, but actually refers only to the use of equine movement in physical, occupational, or speech therapy. It is provided by a licensed physical, occupational, or speech therapist.*

SPOTLIGHT:

AN INNOVATIVE ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL THERAPY

FROM GINGER CAGE

Starlight and Texas Tech Associate Professor of Psychology Stephanie Moses, Ph. D., recently facilitated a four-week focus group for youth who experience clinical anxiety. Findings from self-report questionnaires revealed reductions in fewer anxiety symptoms and improved emotional health. In addition, participants reported being calmer and better able to feel joy and happiness. Although the study had its limitations, the focus group formed a rich framework to examine alternatives to traditional treatment and to advocate for increased awareness about the benefits of equine-assisted services for mental health and wellness. Instructors and Dr. Moses will continue to offer to EAT in the fall. Creating awareness about the value of human and horse interaction for therapeutic outcomes may help validate the service to insurance providers and other professionals in the medical field.

“
*Horses calm me down
and clear my mind.*

Participant

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY



The focus group included ten participants ages 10-14 years of age.

FAVORITE ACTIVITY



Preferred grooming over herd observation and leading/haltering

NOTABLE OBSERVATION



Recognized patterns of horse behavior similar to human behavior

PARENT PERSPECTIVE



Indicated that interacting or observing the horses improved their child's anxiety symptoms



50%

of the teens experienced anxiety relief as a result of participating in the focus group.



100%

of parents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the program.



100%

of parents would like their child to continue in EAT.





DONOR DOLLARS AT WORK

FROM ELIZABETH MAYBIN

It's official! Construction and improvements are underway at Starlight. Instructors anticipate welcoming participants to the new indoor riding arena, sensory trail, and renovated Holt barn in the fall. Again, thank you to the foundations, businesses, and individuals who generously donated to our 2020 capital campaign. And, of course, thank you to our enthusiastic volunteers. We couldn't do it without you!

THANK YOU

- The FMH Foundation - \$150,000
- The Scharbauer Foundation - \$100,000
- The J.E. And L.E. Mabee Foundation - \$88,000
- Davis Partners Ltd - \$50,000
- The Henry Foundation - \$50,000
- The Holt Catania Foundation - \$10,000
- Concho Resources (Conoco Phillips) - \$10,000



Volunteers Gary Baily (top left) and Chris Johnson helping on demo day.



Prior to construction, Starlight's staff welcomed the FMH Foundation's board and leadership team for a site visit.

PERMIAN BASIN
GIVES

MAY 18, 2021
\$20,000
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