



WHAT IS

Equine Therapy?

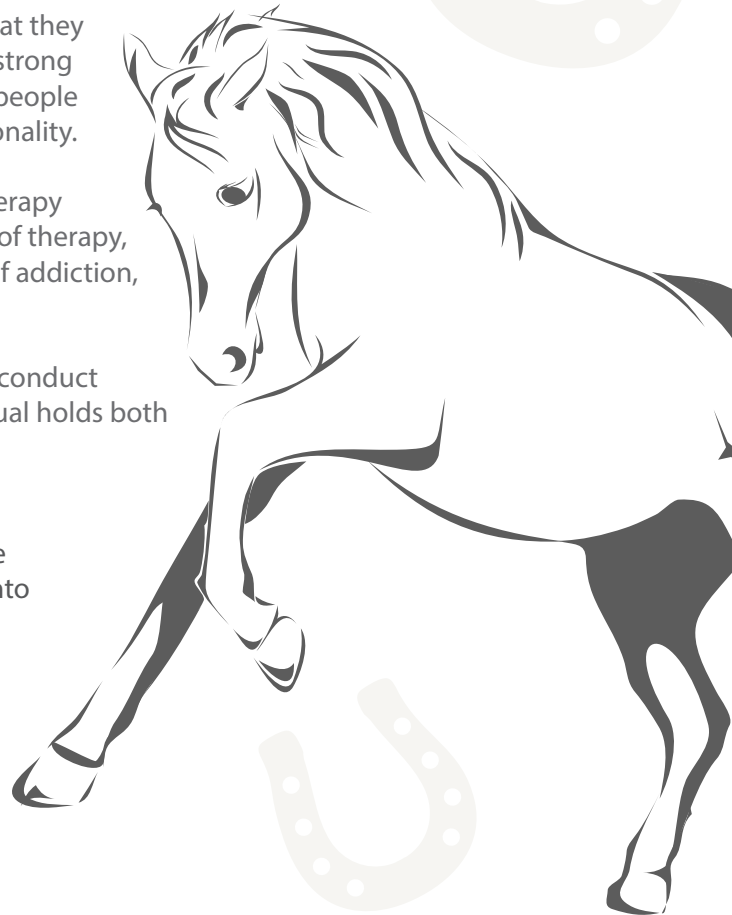
What is Equine Therapy?

Equine therapy is a form of therapy that uses horses to help people resolve deep emotional issues. Many people find that they have a nearly primal connection with horses, so creating a strong and nurturing relationship with a particular horse enables people to rebuild damaged or underdeveloped parts of their personality.

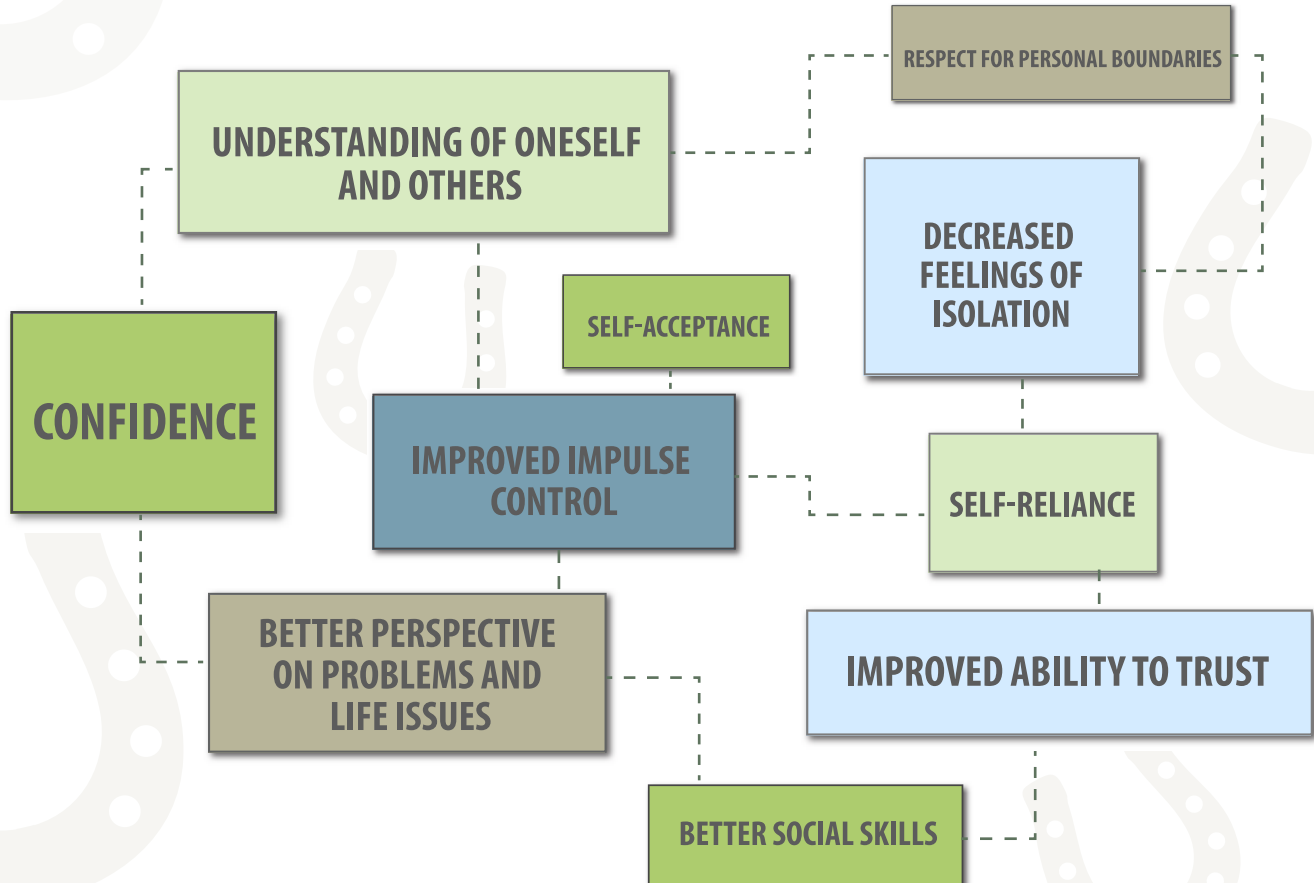
The emotional growth that people experience with equine therapy occurs much more rapidly than it does with most other types of therapy, so this makes equine therapy especially useful for treatment of addiction, learning problems, behavioral problems or autism.

A mental health professional and a certified Equine Specialist conduct equine therapy together, although frequently a single individual holds both credentials.

The therapist introduces the patient and the horse, and the patient conducts a series of activities designed to build a close nurturing relationship with the horse and to provide insight into the patient's relationships and behavior with people.



Practitioners credit equine therapy with creating the following positive outcomes in many patients:



Horses have an innate sensitivity and responsiveness to the moods of the people caring for them. Aggressive behavior around horses results in nervousness and fearfulness in the horse, so people soon learn to use a more reasoned approach to build rapport and achieve better results.

Equine therapy is especially beneficial for people who have trouble expressing their emotions or being in touch with their feelings.

Working with the horses helps patients bring their negative emotions to the forefront, and to work them out in a positive way.

Equine therapy may be the therapy of choice in activities where the patient helps people to understand how their own behavior affects their relationships with others.

For example, in one common equine therapy exercise, the patient must get a horse to move in a certain direction without touching it.

They quickly learn that no amount of yelling or wild gesturing will cause the horse to move, and the patient comes to understand that yelling and aggressive behavior is not a good way to get anyone to perform a specific behavior.



Building self-respect, learning to care for a dependent animal, and forming relationships built on trust are positive outcomes of equine therapy.

The therapy may or may not include riding the horse, but it nearly always includes feeding, grooming and caring for the horse's needs. Some people scoff at equine therapy, saying it is simply recreation, but solid research supports equine therapy's positive outcomes.

A recent study from Washington University on the positive effects of equine therapy on children with cerebral palsy showed marked and sustainable improvement in stability and range of motion in the study participants.

Dr. Colleen Dell from the University of Saskatchewan showed positive anecdotal results in treating adolescent solvent abusers with equine therapy.

The patients exhibited positive personality traits including increased learning abilities.

Equine therapy requires a skilled therapist, and several organizations offer certification in the discipline.



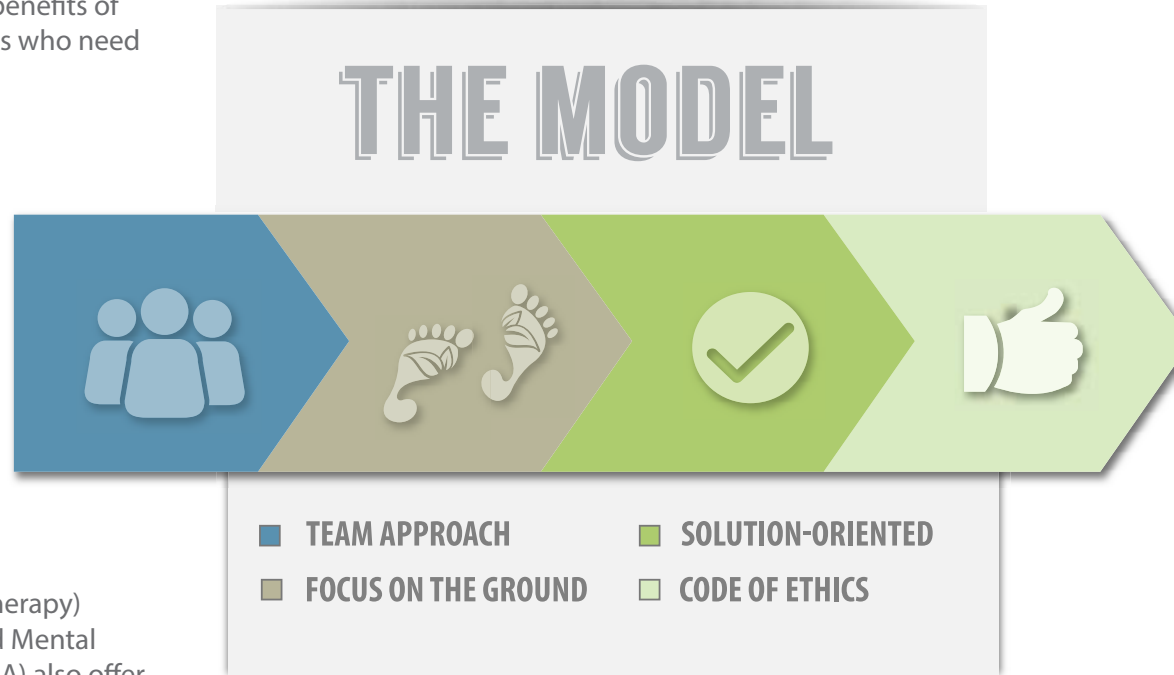
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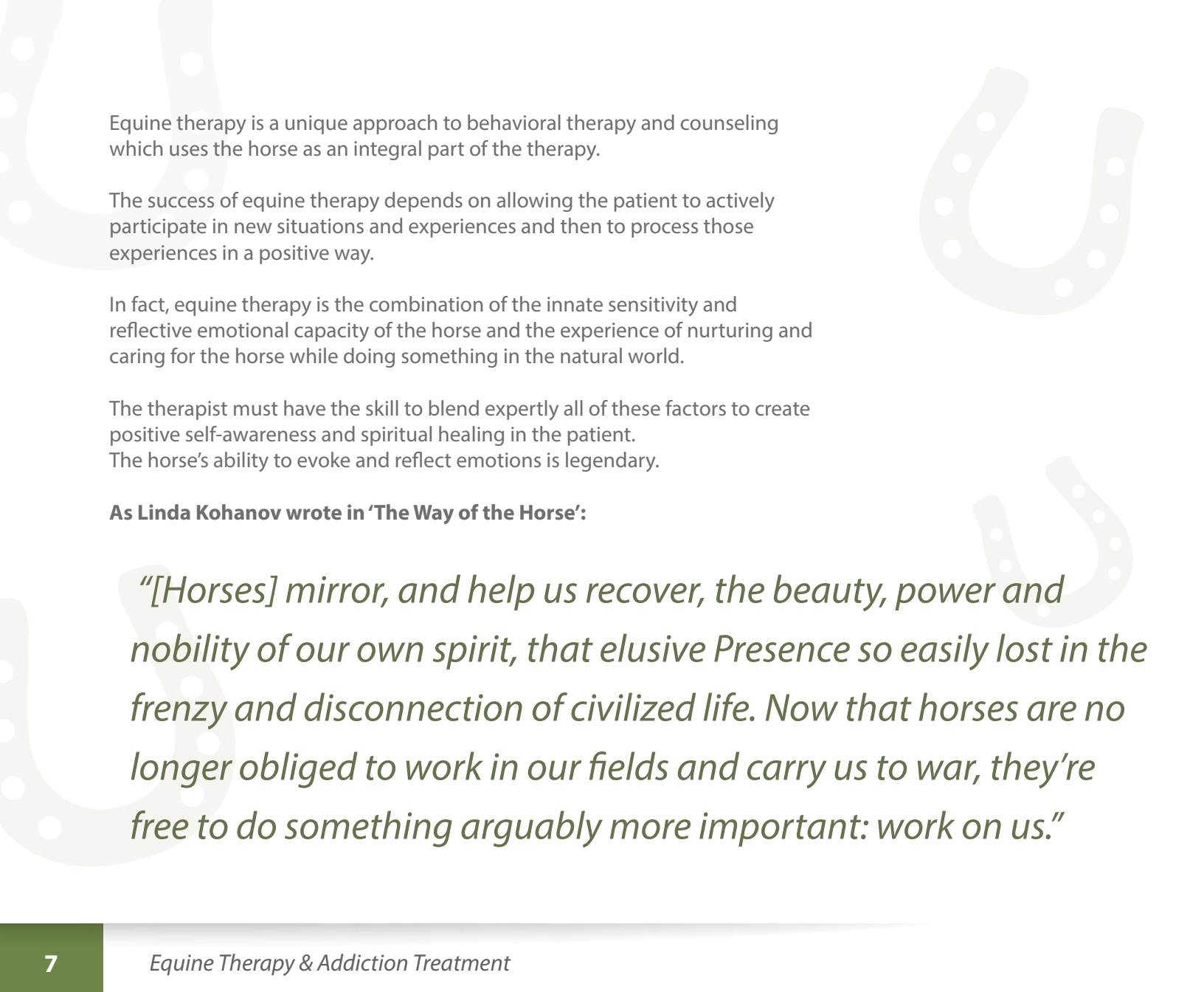
**DECREASE
in recidivism**

The most well-known organization for equine therapy certification is EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association), a non-profit devoted to ensuring that every individual has access to equine Assisted Therapy and equine Assisted Learning.

EAGALA members live and work worldwide, bringing the benefits of equine therapy to patients who need it.

EAGALA certification requires completion of two 3-day workshops and the submission of a professional development portfolio. Other organizations, including NACPET (National Association of Certified Professionals of Equine Therapy) and the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA) also offer respected certifications.





Equine therapy is a unique approach to behavioral therapy and counseling which uses the horse as an integral part of the therapy.

The success of equine therapy depends on allowing the patient to actively participate in new situations and experiences and then to process those experiences in a positive way.

In fact, equine therapy is the combination of the innate sensitivity and reflective emotional capacity of the horse and the experience of nurturing and caring for the horse while doing something in the natural world.

The therapist must have the skill to blend expertly all of these factors to create positive self-awareness and spiritual healing in the patient. The horse's ability to evoke and reflect emotions is legendary.

As Linda Kohanov wrote in 'The Way of the Horse':

"[Horses] mirror, and help us recover, the beauty, power and nobility of our own spirit, that elusive Presence so easily lost in the frenzy and disconnection of civilized life. Now that horses are no longer obliged to work in our fields and carry us to war, they're free to do something arguably more important: work on us."

Leif Hallberg, in her book 'Walking the Way of the Horse,' points out that equine therapy benefits both the horse and the patient in a win-win relationship that balances the needs and desires of both the horse and patient, and binds them together with mutual respect.

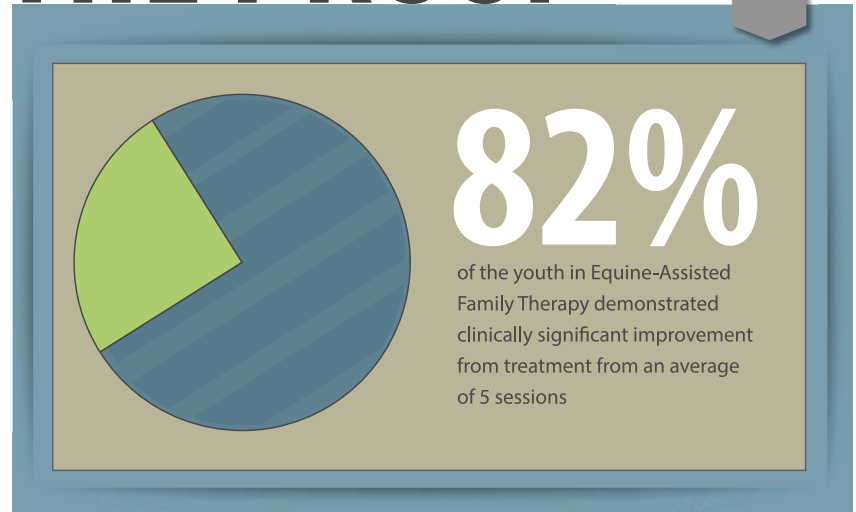
It is when the patient is able to take the gentle lessons learned in the relationship with the horse and apply them to relationships with other people that the true benefit of equine therapy becomes apparent.

Equine therapy teaches individuals to focus on the task before them and to hone the skills necessary to a relationship with a horse – the very same skills necessary to develop relationships with people. The required skills include listening, observing, respect, collaborating, partnering, connecting, leading and following.

As the patient learns the delicate dance of building a relationship with the horse, the patient learns to apply those same skills to relationships with people. Broken relationships begin to heal, and the patient becomes more comfortable forming new relationships.

The burgeoning self-confidence and respect that the patient experiences during equine therapy help them to face additional life challenges that might once have seemed overwhelming.

THE PROOF

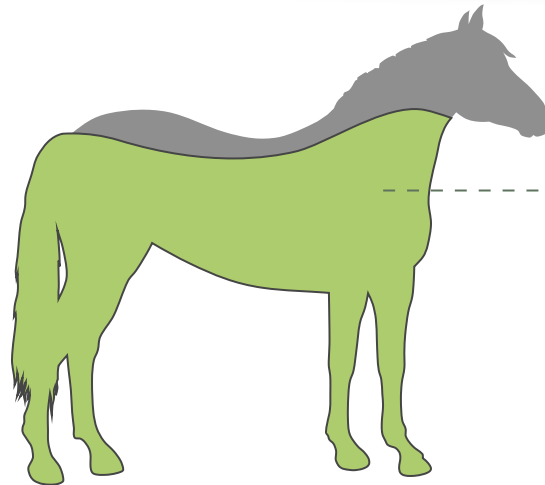


Not every horse can be a therapy horse, but this is primarily a safety issue and not a spiritual one.

Carefully guided equine therapy provides a caring and safe relationship that helps guide people suffering from depression, addiction, learning disabilities, abuse, low self-esteem and other mental health issues back to a healthy feeling of well-being.

Once the spirit of the horse has healed the individual, the person can go on to heal other aspects of their life.

**THE FOCUS IS NOT
RIDING OR HORSEMANSHIP...**



90%
takes place purely on
the ground

Equine Therapy Research and Education

Until recently, much of the research on equine therapy was anecdotal rather than experiential, but that has changed as this exciting branch of therapy has gained traction in the mental health community.

Colleen Dell, Addiction Research Chair at the University of Saskatchewan, has done groundbreaking research into using equine therapy to break the cycle of addiction for teenagers who abuse solvents.

The results of her research showed that the improved self-esteem the participants developed helped them to stop abusing the harmful solvents. In addition, she noted fewer incidences of depression, improved relationships with parents and authority figures and better performance in school for participants.

Wanda Whittlesey-Jerome, New Mexico State University assistant professor in the School of Social Work, learned early in life that her relationship with her own horse helped her to improve relationships with her peers.

As an adult professional, she has conducted research on at-risk teenagers to see if equine therapy could help improve their lives. The people in her program have demonstrated stronger positive resiliency scores on tests and they had improved physical and emotional well-being that translated into better academic performance. Her next research project is to study the effects of equine therapy on adult female victims of violence.



Another equine therapy study, conducted by Leigh Shambo, MSW, LMHC, focused on adult women with post-traumatic stress disorder complex, and found significant improvements in depression, anxiety, dissociative scores and in responses to outcome questionnaires. At the start of this research all the participants met the criteria for PTSD and were symptomatic despite undergoing counseling or taking medication.

Equine therapy research is ongoing, and the results of the research continue to be overwhelmingly positive, whether the research topic is addiction, behavioral problems, learning disabilities, autism or physical issues and disabilities.

As the exciting breakthrough research pours in, more and more licensed therapists are interested in adding equine therapy credentials to their other degrees and licenses.

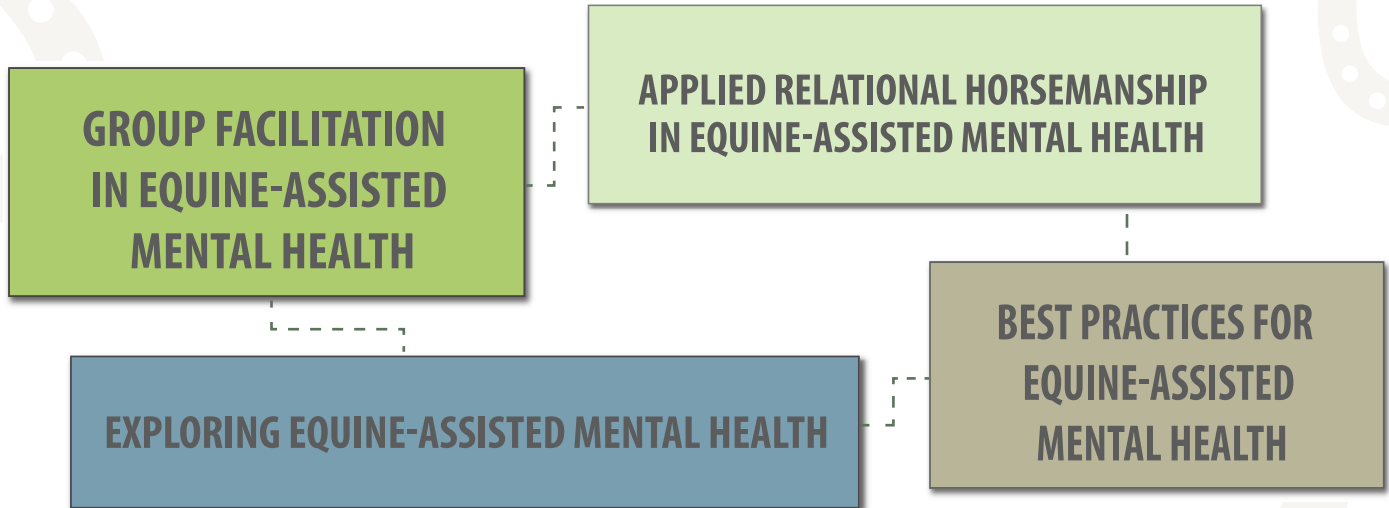
In fact, several colleges and universities, including Washington University, New Mexico State University and Prescott College, among many others, have added Equine Therapy specializations to their therapist curricula.



THE FOCUS

involves setting up activities involving the horses which will require the client or group to apply certain skills

To receive a certification in equine therapy as an additional credential to a mental health degree, students are usually required to take courses such as:



In addition, most college and university based equine therapy programs require an internship or a semester of field work before awarding the credential.

Certifications offered by equine therapy professional organizations require submission of a portfolio of fieldwork as well as completion of the required coursework.

Nearly every equine therapy certification program requires continuing education and recertification at regular intervals.

Equine Therapy and Addiction

Many individuals find that using equine therapy as part of the addiction recovery process is highly beneficial. Equine therapy provides a safe, enjoyable activity that takes their mind off the stress of recovery while helping to build self-reliance and self-esteem.

Along with regular sessions with drug counselors and therapists, individuals battling addiction spent time each day with the horse as part of their therapy. The person in recovery tends to the horse's needs, exercising, feeding and grooming the horse each day. The program may include learning to ride the horse or saddle the horse as well as tending to its care. Many equine therapy programs do not include riding due to the age of the horses involved, many of whom may have been selected for a placid temperament rather than a sound gait.

Interacting with almost any animal is soothing and relaxing for most people, but this effect is much more pronounced with horses. Caring for the horse gives the person recovering from addiction a new focus that helps to control their thoughts and gives purpose and meaning to their lives.

The regularity of tending to the horse on a daily basis helps to form a new, healthy habit that replaces the former unhealthy behaviors that led to addiction. The recovering person learns to take on responsibility and to maintain a schedule. Forming these sorts of positive habits and behaviors is a key part of re-entry into normal life.

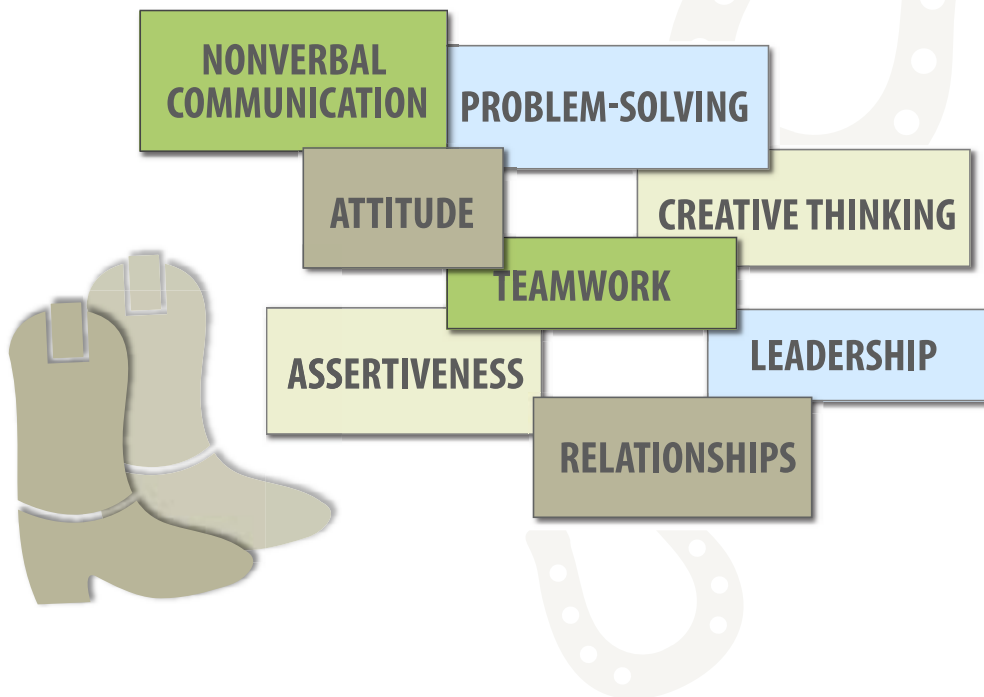
In addition, quietly performing these tasks gives the person time to reflect on life and their personal problems and demons. This quiet contemplation helps them to come to grips and resolve the issues that may have led them to engage in unsafe or addictive behaviors. As the individual makes peace with themselves, their past behaviors and their relationships, they can start to plan and look forward to a healthier future.

Equine therapy helps people struggling with addiction to develop positive feelings of self-worth. As they learn and master new tasks and perform them responsibly and reliably, they come to realize that they can use these same skills in their day-to-day life after recovery.

Furthermore, equine therapy helps people to realize the negative consequences of their erratic, violent or aggressive behaviors. .

The horse intuitively senses the person's mood and reflects it back to them in nervousness, fear or recalcitrance. Acting in ways that help the horse to remain calm helps the person to learn to control their behavior better and to find ways to make their needs known without yelling or threatening.

This new understanding helps them to be more successful in all areas of their life, including improved relationships with friends and family and a better performance at work or in school.



Another significant positive emotion that equine therapy fosters in patients is the ability to trust. Patients learn to trust in their horse to respond calmly and reliably to their actions, but more importantly, they learn to trust in themselves. They grow to understand that they can cope with responsibility and that they can be trusted with the care of another living being.

Caring for a horse helps the patient with learning to trust in a higher power and to ask for help when necessary.

This symbiotic relationship between person and horse lowers the patient's stress level, soothes the spirit and helps to lessen the severity of any lingering withdrawal symptoms.

In addition to these proven physical benefits, equine therapy helps build many positive character traits such as self-confidence, self-reliance, patience, responsibility and trust. These positive characteristics help the patient recover more easily from addiction and to lead a productive and fulfilling life after recovery.

