Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy & Learning: An Experiential Modality

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Objectives

1. Introduce Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)
   - What it is
   - How it works
   - Treatment applications

2. Illustrate with examples

3. Describe referral process.
What is EAP?

- Team Approach
  - Mental Health Professional
  - Horse Professional
  - At least 1 horse

- On the Ground

- Experiential

- Solution-Focused.
Team Approach
100% on the ground – no riding
Solution-Focused
Situation-specific, Tailored to client needs
EAP in Action

- EAGALA Video:
  http://www.eaglevistaranch.com/activities.html

Eagle Vista Ranch website:
www.eaglevistaranch.com
EAP is an Experiential Modality

• Trial and error; learning by doing
• Reflect on interaction between clients and horses
• Clients are active
  • Questioning
  • Investigating
  • Experimenting
  • Solving problems
  • Being creative
  • Constructing meaning
• Identify current beliefs and attitudes
• Practice new strategies to achieve goals.
Curiosity is key
The Horse’s Role

- Read and react to non-verbal communication
- Confront behavior and attitudes
- Act as a metaphor for relationships
Immediate, Unbiased Feedback
Mirroring
If we get distracted, they get distracted
Facilitator’s Role

Focus of treatment team is on:

- Creating a space for the clients and horses to interact
- Prompt insight and awareness
- Explore metaphor
- Reflect back – bring to conscious level and universal relevance.
Facilitator’s Role

- Focus on nonverbals
- Objective observations
- NOT subjective interpretations
- EAGALA framework to guide observations – **SPUD’S™**:  
  - S – Shifts  
  - P – Patterns  
  - U – Unique events  
  - D – Discrepancies – nonverbal vs verbal  
  - ’S – Our stuff - awareness of our counter-transference
Shifts, Patterns
UNIQUE!

- Horse lying down at end of session ("protector" role)
- Horse/s rolling in the dirt (humor)
- Client sitting down on the "bridge to the new life of Recovery" (ah-ha moment)
- Horse freezing at the "money barrel" (obstacle w/ client)
- Horse isolating himself (has many representations).
Discrepancies & Self-awareness
Why horses?
Why Horses?

- Social Hierarchy
- Predator-Prey Dynamic
  - Limbic vs. Cortex.
- Size & Strength
- Distinct Personalities, Attitudes & Moods.
Meet the Horses at EVR

Eagle Vista Ranch
Prince

- A thoroughbred, came to us from New Mexico. He is big and powerful, yet playful!
Superman

- Raced until he was 7 years old, when he was given to EVR. The track is a tough place to live but he has adapted well to “retirement.” He connects well with people, especially those with trauma history.
Superman

- Triggers from racetrack experience can still cause him anxiety.
Elvis

- His first day at EVR. He is mischievous & fun, but can be hyperactive and avoidant!
Pumpkin came back to Eagle Vista Ranch after living with another family for 5 years. Her mother is Peaches. Family reunification!
King

- King, with Prince and Elvis. King was adopted in 2006 along with a pony. He’s a survivor of cancer and has a few other health challenges.
CrackerJack

- He came to EVR in 2001. In July 2013 he nearly died from kidney failure. He’s everyone’s pal and is a survivor too!
Peaches

- Peaches is the alpha mare. As a leader she is confident, spirited and has good boundaries.
Therapeutic Benefits of Metaphor
Gibbs, et al., 1997; Glenberg, 1997; Zwaan, 1999; Jensen, 2006)

- Promotes increase in awareness and change
- Used as a learning tool in education & therapy
- Metaphors enable the connection of information about a familiar concept to another familiar concept, bringing a client to a new understanding or awareness
- Allows for creative problem-solving by opening up alternate responses which may be more appropriate and healthful (Battino, 2002)
- The indirectness of metaphor allows clients to “try out” a new perceptual frame without having to decide to accept or reject it
“Does this remind you of anyone or anything in your life?”
“What are the donkeys doing now?”
“Think outside the box”
EAP is being used to treat:

- Individuals, families or groups
- Grief and loss
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Attention Deficit
- Chemical Dependency
- Trauma
- Anger Management
- Relationship Issues
- Behavior Problems
- Abuse and Neglect
- Eating Disorders
- Parenting Issues

Center Stage - Constructivist Approach
Key issues that emerge in EAP

- Boundaries
- Control
- Roles
- Communication
- Teamwork.
Benefits of EAP

- Confidence
- Self efficacy
- Communication
- Trust
- Anxiety reduction
- Resilience
- Impulse modulation
- Social skills
- Assertiveness
- Boundaries
- Creative freedom
Theoretical approaches used with EAP

- Solution-Focused
- CBT
- DBT
- Reality Therapy
- Gestalt
- Psychodynamic
- Person-Centered
Horses/Family Structures

• Social Structure – “Herd” (family) groups, “bands” and individuals with the “herd”

• Structure and substructures are based on “rank” and require boundaries

• Understanding and enforcement of boundaries are key to emotional and physical safety

• Develop behaviors to deal with demands of living in the “system” structure

• Use keen observation skills

• Seek leadership
Family System ("Herd") Dynamics

- Work requires focusing on the “process”
- Changes in “system” can be planned or unplanned
- How does "herd" shift?
- Watch interaction or social exchanges between horses
The 5 R’s

- Rules, roles, relationships, responsibilities and “rituals”
- Who holds power?
- Who is in leadership position?
- What happens when there is a shift in the system and/or structure?
Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)

- Collaboration with mental health professional, horse professional, and other specialized professionals.

- Working with clients and horses to address learning goals.
  - Staff development
  - Skills groups
  - Specialized trainings
  - Professional development.
Evidence-based Research with AAT & Horses

• Therapeutic riding, a type of AAT, helps improve balance, posture, mobility, confidence, gross motor skills, while developing therapeutic bond between client and horse (Bachi, et al., 2011)

• All, et al, 1999 – Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder exhibited increased sensory seeking/sensitivity, social motivation; decreased distractability, inattention, sedentary behaviors

• Deaton, 2005 – New Mexico DOC paired wild mustangs and inmates in WPM, a collaborative rehab/training effort, demonstrating a lowered recidivism rate (25% compared to state average 38.12%) with inmates in the WPM
Populations, Disorders and EAP

- Chardonnes, 2009 - Children experienced an increase in self-esteem after EAP sessions

- Klontz, et al., 2007 – Depression in adults decreased after EAP, remaining stable at 6 month follow-up

- Bowers & MacDonald, 2001 – Individual, family, group therapy addressing a variety of MH disorders/issues – Grief, depression, anxiety, ADHD, CD, anger, abuse/neglect, relational & behavioral issues, eating disorders, etc.
Empirical Evidence

- EAGALA Model EAP is solidly grounded in well-established and researched theories of psychotherapy.

- EAGALA Model EAP is a clinical advance on these established practices where the incorporation of horses in psychotherapy in a deliberate, principled, thoughtful and professional manner catalyzes change.

- Clinical success preceded systematic study. EAGALA model EAP has been effectively employed in the treatment of numerous behavioral and emotional disorders.
Empirical Evidence

- Clinical successes led to academic interest where numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of EAP.
- Randomized Control Group Designs
EAGALA Research Initiatives

- Education of the Membership
- Identification and Development of Research Tools
- Research Advisory Group
- Institutional Review Board
  - Single Subject Research Protocol
Referral Process

- Referrals come from many sources: Individuals, previous clients, county, child protection services, other agencies, etc.
- Contact Liz Letson at Eagle Vista Ranch
- Cell phone: (218) 760-0656
- Email: eaglevistarancharch@gmail.com
- Website: www.eaglevistarancharch.com
- EVR referral form completed and submitted to Liz
Contact information

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What did you learn about yourself today?

- Leadership
  - I can be a leader
  - I can both follow and lead
- Recognizing and managing Fear
  - It's okay to be afraid
  - I can face my fears
  - Taking a leap of faith is scary but I'm not as scared of horses anymore.
What did you learn about yourself today?

- **Relationship Skills**
  - I can respect others’ boundaries
  - That the boundaries of the horses are the same as a human
  - To treat people the way you want to be treated
  - Body language is key

- **Self-awareness**
  - I let people do what they want
  - Sometimes I need to take a step back
  - I need to be calm around the horses; I think they picked up on my nervousness
  - I can be a great friend
  - I can be patient
  - I can have fun.
Thank you for attending!