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# EQUINE ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY

People can be more loving, trustworthy, communicative, strong, compassionate, honest, patient, and resilient with each other, work more effectively in a team and be creative... all with the help of horses.

Research has shown time and time again that Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) can help people develop and improve these traits and more...

What if a horse could motivate & empower a person to be their best and happiest?

They can!! And with EAP they do!!

**“There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of the man” - Sir Winston Churchill**

It doesn't matter if you have horse experience or not. The focus of EAP is not on riding or horsemanship. In fact, EAP takes place 100% on the ground. It is an interactive, experiential, hands-on approach and involves partaking in activities involving horses which

require the client to apply certain skills and decision making about how they approach the horses and the activities, as they navigate their way through trying to accomplish the task at hand. How these activities and horses are approached and managed, are representative of the direct impact the persons' behaviour has on others, within their daily lives and working contexts. The client's behavioural patterns as well as the impact of these patterns, become clearly visible to them, which is more often than not, easily and effectively translated back to their current life situations.

Regardless of these activities, horses each have their own distinct personality, and just like humans experience certain emotions or moods on certain days and during exposure to certain people or situations. This in turn impacts the manner in which they should be handled. Herein lies the power of the process...

The client needs to accurately observe the non-verbal body

language of the horse whilst at the same time being acutely aware of their own body language and the impact they're having on the horse. The client then needs to decide what is the most appropriate and effective action and communication in that moment and what will yield the best possible results for both horse and human. The objective of EAP is not about completing these tasks or activities, but rather allowing the client to reach their own solutions to the “problems” they're faced with, whilst being acutely aware of their behaviour and the impact of their behaviour on others.

Although frustrating at times for the client, it brings about awareness of current patterns of behaviour which motivates change. Simply put, the client learns that as they change their attitude, behaviour and actions, so too does the horse's reaction change.

The beauty of this approach is not only that it takes place outdoors but also it's often less intimidating than the traditional office setting. Clients

can immediately see the effects of their actions and explore what needs to change to become more effective. They also learn that interaction with others takes time, effort, respect, honesty and consistency.

While EAP is a practical means of assisting the client to learn how to function more effectively within their immediate environment and daily living, it should be remembered that it's an advanced form of psychotherapy. This means that EAP should only be facilitated by a two-man team, consisting of one of the following mental health professionals from the list below as well as a certified equine behavioural specialist:

- Clinical, Counselling or Educational Psychologist
- Registered Counsellor with a registered practice number
- Social worker or Clinical Social worker

It's essential to have a qualified team of professionals ensuring both the physical and emotional safety of the client and horses alike. EAPISA works on a strictly do no harm policy and therefore certification is of the utmost importance.

EAP is a powerful and effective therapeutic approach that has an incredible impact on individuals, youth, families and groups. It's all inclusive approach has been successfully used across all ages, genders, ethnic groups, abled and disabled people, small groups such as families as well as large corporate groups.

### People often ask why horses?

Horses are both intuitive and strong, they pick up on the emotional state of the client and respond immediately, where humans may hold back. This immediate response helps the client understand themselves better with greater clarity as they can't hide their feelings from the horses. **Unlike humans horses don't respond to negative reinforcement but challenge us to always seek a positive and empowered way of dealing with situations.**

The benefits of a good work ethic, responsibility, assertiveness, communication, and healthy relationships have long been

recognised. Horses naturally provide these benefits. The size and power of the horse are naturally intimidating to many people. Accomplishing a task involving a horse, in spite of those fears, creates confidence and provides for wonderful metaphors when dealing with other intimidating and challenging situations in life. There are infinite possibilities of including horses for emotional growth. The greatest benefit is that through learning with the horses, positive behaviours are not only taught, but experienced.

EAP addresses a wide variety of mental health and human development needs such as:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bipolar
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Eating disorders
- Adjustment due to divorce, death, medical conditions
- Relationship difficulties
- Communication needs

Please note that this is not an all-inclusive list, there is so much more that is covered.

It's an encounter of change and new growth. The immense value of EAP is that it promotes change through action - it's not just talk. Another great benefit of using horses is that it can be a lot of fun also!

### Case study

Many years ago a 35 year old male approached us for assistance. A brief condensed history and sequence of events follows below:

- Still living at home with his parents
- No promotion at work for many years
- Chronic pain due to a car accident
- No siblings
- No friends
- Poor and extremely ineffective communication skills
- Lonely and isolated
- Struggled to identify and express emotions
- Suicidal thoughts as a result

This client attended up to eight traditional therapy sessions with very little success due to his presenting style.

A decision was made to try EAP. Initially the client was very hesitant, but due to his desperation he agreed. Only 15 minutes into his very first session, he experienced a major breakthrough. He became aware that the horse was responding to his thoughts, behaviour and actions. Initially the horse completely ignored him, even facing in the opposite direction to the client and not acknowledging him at all. It's important to note that his was the complete opposite behaviour to this horse's personality and general daily observed behaviour.

Once the client understood the process and became aware of the impact he was having on the horse, even although he was extremely sceptical, he attempted to change his thoughts, behaviour and actions. The horse immediately responded, turned and walked across to the client and put his head on the clients shoulder and remained there for an extended period of time. Needless to say the impact on the client was immediately visible. He was shocked and overwhelmed by emotion. He cried and spoke about how he experienced the process for the rest of the session. This was a life changing moment for this client.

The client was able to identify how this related to his daily life. He booked a follow-up session and requested that all future sessions be EAP. The progress this client made over the next few sessions was absolutely amazing! Over a relatively short period of time, he started making friends, entered into a relationship with a significant other for the first time in his life, managed to work towards a promotion at work and moved out of his parental home and into his own apartment. All of this due to the realisation and mobilisation which the EAP process and experience offered this man. It's a therapy like no other.

The best therapists have four hooves...

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**References available on request.** 