

Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy by Keren Bachi

Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) is a form of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) that involves horses and takes place in and around the natural surroundings of the stables. Discussions about how animals can be involved in the therapeutic process were absent from professional literature until the 1960s. Levinson (1962, 1987), who was the first to address professional concepts in the field of AAT, contended that a connection to animals, especially during childhood and old age, could positively affect the human condition (see also Kruger, Trachtenberg & Serpell, 2004; Levinson & Mallon, 1997). Although Equine-Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAA/T) are relatively new fields, references to recovery processes in the context of human-equine relations can be found in the writings of Oribasius, Galen, and others from Greco-Roman times. Hartel pioneered the concept of Therapeutic Riding in the 1950s (Butt, 1981).

Most references to EAA/T emphasize its physiological benefits (Baker, 1996; DePauw, 2000; Taylor, 2001; Vidrine, Owen-Smith & Faulkner, 2002).

However, an independent branch of EAA/T was established in the 1990s. It focuses on the mental and social benefits and is called EFP.

The Equine-Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA) defines EFP as an experiential psychotherapy that includes equine(s). EFP is facilitated by licensed, accredited mental health professionals, working with an appropriately accredited equine professional (EFMHA, 2009). EFP often gets confused with Therapeutic Riding and Hippotherapy.

Therapeutic Riding is an equine-assisted activity that teaches people with special needs about horsemanship and how to ride.

Hippotherapy is an equine-assisted therapy that is related to physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy.

EFP is used to help a variety of people who are challenged by

emotional and mental health conditions. It promotes the personal exploration of feelings and behaviors and allows for their clinical interpretation. EFP requires an ongoing therapeutic relationship with clearly established treatment goals and objectives developed by the therapist and the client. An example of an EFP approach is for a client to observe and talk about observations of the behavioral dynamics in a horse herd. This can be a window into the client's internal world. Together, the client and therapist can then try to explore these projections (Bachi, 2005). Notably, EFP is not appropriate for all people because of safety issues associated with horses and the open environment in which this therapy takes place (EFMHA, 2009).

Since the 1990s, the use of EFP has grown rapidly in the United States and Europe. There are now more than 700 centers in the US that provide at least one form of EAA/T. There are a few internationally recognized associations that service thousands of professional members and clients. Two of the leading associations are EFMHA and Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGLA), which present different models for practice. There are more than 80 therapeutic boarding schools and numerous residential treatment facilities that offer EAA/T as part of their regular program. Institutions offer undergraduate as well as Master's degrees in the fields of EAA/T. By 2004 the Horses and Human Research Foundation was established with a mandate to fund research in EAA/T. In addition, health insurance companies now pay for the services provided by mental health professionals who offer this kind of therapy (Hallberg, 2008).

References

Bachi, K. (2005). *The influence of Equine facilitated psychotherapy on self-image, self-control, trust of adolescents in a residential treatment facility. Unpublished master's thesis*, in partial requirements for a MSW, Bob Shafel School of social work, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv (Hebrew).

Baker, L. (1996). Learning Disabilities and Therapeutic riding. *NARHA Strides magazine*, 2. No.1.

Butt, E. (1981). NARHA- Therapeutic Riding in North America Its First Decade 1970 to 1980. In: Engel, B. T. (Ed.). (2001). *Therapeutic Riding 1, Strategies for Instruction, Part 1*. Durango: Barbara Engel Therapy Services.

DePauw, K. P. (2000). The Review of Research in Therapeutic Riding. In: Engel, B. T. (Ed.). *Therapeutic Riding 2, Strategies for Rehabilitation*. Durango: Barbara Engel Therapy Services.

Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA). (2009, October). *What is EFMHA?* Retrieved from http://www.narha.org/SecEFMHA/WhatIsEFMHA.asp

Hallberg, L. (2008). *Walking the way of the horse*. New York: iUniverse, Inc.
Kruger, K. A, Trachtenberg, S. W., Serpell, J. A. (2004). *Can Animals Help Humans Heal? Animal-Assisted Interventions in Adolescent Mental Health*. Unpublished Work. Center for Interaction of Animals and Society: University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine.

Levinson, B. M. (1962). The dog as a co-therapist. *Mental Hygiene*, 46, 59-65.

Levinson, B. M. (1978). Pets and Personality Development. *Psychological Reports*, 42 1031- 1038.

Levinson, B. M., & Mallon, G. P. (1997). *Pet-oriented child psychotherapy*. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas.

Taylor, S.M. (2001). *Equine-facilitated Psychotherapy: An Emerging Field* Unpublished master's thesis, Saint Michael College, Vermont.

Vidrine, M., Owen-Smith, P., & Faulkner, P. (2002). Equine-facilitated Group Psychotherapy: applications for therapeutic vaulting. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 23, 587-603.