



# In The Presence of Horses

2011 Newsletter

## GREETINGS FROM IN THE PRESENCE OF HORSES!

### EQUINE ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY (EAP) AS AN ADJUNCT TO TRADITIONAL OFFICE THERAPY

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy can be used as an adjunctive service with your office clients. On several occasions, with only one or two EAP sessions, we have helped therapists and clients move through those periods of “stuckness” that frequently happen during the therapeutic process. Here are seven ways EAP can help you and your clients succeed!

1. Interactive sessions with horses allow clients and therapists to “see” where the problems are and find ways to solve them. In the sessions, the focus is on doing, being active in-the-moment and finding solutions that provide faster, more permanent change. It is effective for clients of all ages and conditions.
2. Uncovers the REAL client quickly. Through experiential activities, EAP helps you immediately see how couples and individuals act and react to different situations, giving you a clearer picture of what you need to do to help.
3. Professionalism with flexibility. Our treatment team is certified by EAGALA—Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association. EAGALA certification requires intensive training, continuing education, and adherence to a high standard of practice and ethics. The EAGALA model provides a framework of practice, but within that framework there are infinite opportunities for creativity and adaptability to various therapeutic and facilitating styles.
4. Makes the process more engaging. Because EAP is active and effective, the process is more engaging for both you and your clients. Once a horse enters the equation, everyone is instantly attentive and engaged in the process.
5. Gets clients past the sticking points. Everyone can hit a wall in therapy where the client remains stuck in old patterns and attitudes. The EAP session(s) can help you and your clients get out of the rut and back on track.
6. Great for individuals and groups. Whether working with individuals or groups, the horses provide powerful opportunities to address social skills, communication issues, and other dynamics necessary for healthy, meaningful relationships.
7. Provides real solutions. In EAP, therapists and clients alike are excited about the process. Whether used for treating all forms of addiction, trauma, social and behavioral disorders, or other issues, clients find the sessions meaningful—leading to real and long-lasting changes!

(Some material in this section derived from EAGALA publication)

*“EAP is a wonderful adjunct to in-office sessions. I got to observe my client processing and problem solving in a new setting, full of metaphor. She benefited from the mirroring the animals offered and I got to see her through new eyes. The approach is very strength-based and can safely take a client into a core, primal place where their connection to the animals and their core self can be very healing” - Nicole Laubach, LCSW*



A Team Approach

*Photo courtesy of EAGALA*

### GROUPS AVAILABLE

In the Presence of Horses offers several Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) groups. These are “closed” groups and will serve children (ages 8 to 12), adolescents and adults as listed below:

#### EAP Groups (for Children and Adolescents):

Treatment for Sexual Abuse Survivors  
Grief and Loss  
Horses Healing Trauma

#### EAL Groups (for specified age ranges)

Social Skills (Children & Adolescents)  
Stress Management (Children & Adolescents)  
Parenting from the Barn (Adults)

## What IS EAP/EAL?

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) is a highly effective and rapidly emerging professional field within which horses are partnered with to foster emotional growth and personal development.

EAP/EAL is a collaborative effort between a licensed therapist, a horse professional, the client(s) and horse(s). Because of its intensity and effectiveness, it is considered a short-term or “brief” approach.

EAP/EAL is experiential in nature. This means that participants learn about themselves and other by participating in activities with the horses, and then processing (or discussing) feelings, behaviors and patterns. But EAP/EAL has the added advantage of incorporating horses, dynamic and powerful living beings.

EAP is a powerful and effective *therapeutic* approach that has an incredible impact on individuals, youth, families and groups. EAP addresses a variety of mental health and human development needs, including behavioral issues, attention deficit disorder, substance abuse, eating disorders, trauma-related issues, depression, anxiety, relationship problems and communication needs.

EAL provides unique learning experiences which strengthen and develop life skills. Equine activities present participants with challenges that simulate work, school and other life situations. This approach has been compared to the ropes courses used by human development organizations around the world. EAL is also effective in addressing staff development issues, corporate team building, leadership training, development and managing strategies, and conflict resolution.

## PRESENTATIONS

### CAMFT Annual Conference—May 2011

At the CAMFT Annual Conference in San Francisco, we co-presented “*Equine Assisted Psychotherapy: A Growing Modality for Emotionally Disturbed Children*”. This interactive workshop introduced participants to this experiential modality to show how it can be applied as an effective intervention with even the most challenging emotionally disturbed children. The workshop was well-received, with many excellent questions from the attendees.



### EAGALA Annual Conference—March 2011

At the EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association) Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, In the Presence of Horses presented a workshop on “*Horses Healing Trauma*”. Informed by the works of Peter Levine, Bessel Van der Kolk and others, this workshop provided Mental Health Professionals and Equine Specialists with a foundational understanding of the physiological causes and effects of trauma, and how EAP interventions, using the horse as a model for specific self-regulation techniques can help people learn to discharge some of the energies that are causing debilitating symptoms of trauma. Using case studies (with photos), attendees learned specific EAP interventions practitioners can use in treatment with clients of all ages.

*Some of the feedback:* “I loved this presentation—most of my clients have experienced some sort of trauma. I have more specific ideas about what I can do with EAP to help these clients”

“I loved the connection of how trauma affects the body and brain and how horses can help bring sensory awareness.”

“...learned a lot about the different ways horses can provide relief—some in the simplest ways.”

## WHY HORSES?

A common and obvious question we often hear when we talk about EAP/EAL is “*why horses?*” I am not sure there is an answer that can fully address this seemingly simple question. We can give some of the practical reasons often offered. Such as:

Horses are prey animals and, as such, are keenly attuned to their environment and everything in it that could be a predator or a threat to their survival. Humans are predators and horses are instantly and continually assessing us. They react to us and mirror exactly what human body language and energy is telling them. For example, is the human approaching them as a predator might, or is the approach more passive to the horse’s mind? They respond to what they perceive without judgment, agenda or distortion. If the human does not present as a predator might, the horse may stand still with its head lowered, versus raised in alert, as if it perceives a potential threat. They are ever vigilant, much like a client who has experienced trauma.

If a horse’s response is perceived as not “positive”, a client is more likely to listen to the horse’s message without shame or defensiveness. Horses can read what we hide, including what we hide from ourselves. They can tell when we are not congruent and will not want to connect with us. This is powerful feedback and can teach clients mindfulness and how to live more congruently in the present.

So why do we do therapy with horses and not other prey animals? Why not cows or sheep or deer? Perhaps it is because horses have a very long history of relationships with humans. They have served with humans in work, war, transport and agriculture, to name a few. The most amazing thing about horses is their willingness and capacity to work with humans and form close relationships with us.

Like humans, horses are social animals and have unique organizational cultures. They live in families, or *herds*, providing vast opportunity for metaphor. They have distinct personalities, attitudes and moods. In other words, what works for one may not work with another, requiring humans to change their attitudes, behaviors and thoughts. This can be transferred to other arenas in one’s life where there are problems.

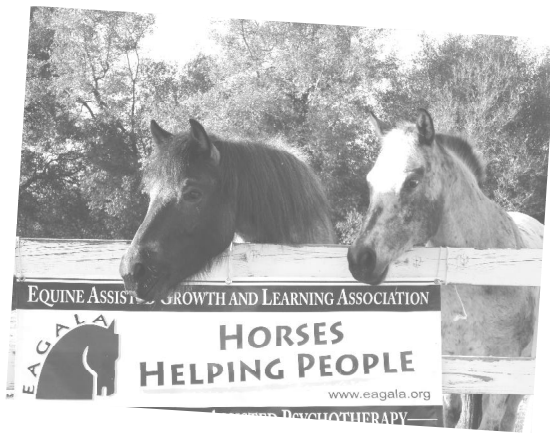
Horses require work. Clients must engage physically and mentally to be successful, a valuable characteristic in all aspects of life. Their size and power creates a natural opportunity for some clients to overcome fear and develop confidence, thus providing wonderful metaphors when dealing with other intimidating and challenging situations in life.



So, those are some of the practical, more tangible reasons. What is it that happens to us when we are *in the presence of horses*? That feeling we get when we see a horse grazing or running playfully across a pasture? How do we explain how a horse *knows* to wrap its neck around a sad child? In a recent session with a mother and daughter, all three of the horses in the corral walked over and surrounded the mother, forming a circle around her. She identified them as supporting her, yet did not know why. When she returned the following week, she told us she thought about the horses all week, and learned — after our session — that her father was very ill. She said, “How did the horses know?”

We have a multitude of such stories. We are constantly humbled by these amazing creatures and their ability and power to deeply touch and read our hearts. Horses bring many gifts to the table of healing and growth and all are channeled through their huge heart capacity and desire to show up for us. Their hearts and wisdom allow them to provide service to the healing and transformation of humanity, including the field of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy.

Those who have had meaningful experiences with horses understand the power they have to influence people in incredibly powerful ways. They also understand that there is **something else** that words cannot adequately express. What is that **something else**? Horses have a mystical and mythical past. Is that what we experience every time we are in their presence? Is that the **something else**?



EAGALA is an international organization that sets standards of practice, provides training of therapists and horse professionals and establishes safety and ethical standards of practice for *EAP*. Susan Byrne is certified as an Advanced Level Practitioner. In addition to *EAP*, Susan has a more traditional office practice where she often incorporates *Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)* with a therapy dog. She initiated an AAT program for a major mental health agency in Placer County and introduced AAT to schools and other practitioners in the area.

In addition to traditional office therapy, *In the Presence of Horses* and Susan Byrne, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, serve children, adolescents, and adults, offering the highly effective modality of *Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)* to address a variety of mental health and human development needs. *EAP* is a rapidly growing and accepted professional field in which horses are partnered with for emotional growth and learning. *In the Presence of Horses* uses the EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association) model.

Located between Auburn and Grass Valley, *In the Presence of Horses* is conveniently located to serve people in both Nevada and Placer Counties. To learn more about *In the Presence of Horses* and/or to visit our facility contact:

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