



Frequently Asked Questions

What is equine therapy?

“Equine therapy” (equine is the scientific word for horse) is a general term that can refer to a few different horse-assisted therapeutic services.

Equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP): The horse is a third member of the therapeutic team, along with a mental health professional and an equine specialist. This service takes talk therapy from the office to the barn, where horses can help clients see, understand and work through challenges as well as achieve goals. As natural prey animals, horses are always living in the present moment. If there is no threat, they are content and reserve and restore energy by grazing and enjoying the companionship of their herd mates. When there is a threat, they immediately alert the horses around them through vocalizations and body language. As soon as the threat passes, they release their stress in a variety of ways (such as rolling, snorting, or licking and chewing) and then return to their peaceful grazing.

We can lean on their feelings and honest reactions to the world around them (including us) to foster therapeutic discussions. For example, if a client comes to a session with high anxiety that shows in that person’s mood, vocal tone and body language, the horse will respond to that in a few ways. We can talk about that horse’s reactions, how the client interprets and feels about it, and then translate that into similar situations in everyday life, while also collaborating on skills to work through anxiety-producing situations.

While EAP generally uses only grooming, horse observation and ground-based activities in which the horse and client interact, riding can be incorporated if it is relevant to a client’s goals and appropriate for the client’s abilities. This is decided on a case-by-case basis. Equine Therapy of NJ is currently assessing the feasibility of adding a riding component in the future.

Therapeutic riding: Clients learn to ride a horse while also working toward therapeutic goals that may include physical strength and improved core function and motor skills, as well as mental and cognitive skills such as focus, memory, and logic and reasoning. A certified therapeutic riding instructor leads sessions, and there may or may not be horse leaders and side walkers to assist clients depending on their needs and skill level.

Hippotherapy: The horse is employed as a therapeutic tool to help with neurological, physical and cognitive abilities. Horses’ walking motion mimics ours, which can help build muscle strength and mobility. Clients always need two side walkers and a horse leader due to the nature of their disabilities, which may include physical, mental and/or speech. Sessions are led by a credentialed physical therapist, occupational therapist or speech pathologist. This is not a lesson to learn to ride a horse for recreation or sport.

Equine Therapy of NJ is currently assessing the feasibility of adding a therapeutic riding component to the service options. We currently only offer EAP sessions.

What will we do during an equine-assisted psychotherapy session?

Our first session will start with a discussion of your challenges and goals. You may also have an opportunity to meet the horses if time allows.

Future sessions may include observing the horses in the pasture, grooming a horse or completing ground-based activities in partnership with horse. All of these incorporate an awareness and interpretation of how you and the horse interact, with the goal of translating that into your daily life and interactions with other people. We want to help you work through unhealthy thoughts and behavioral patterns while also gaining and healthy coping skills to navigate life with more confidence and stability.

In every session, you will work with a horse, an equine specialist (a person with extensive horse experience who guides the activities and ensures the horse's and your safety) and a licensed mental health professional.

How long do sessions last?

Our sessions are 45 to 50 minutes long. This allows for transition time between sessions.

What should I bring to my session?

- We're outside, so dress appropriately for the weather — winter, spring, summer or fall!
- Wear closed-toed shoes, preferably sturdy boots with a high ankle for support and to keep your feet clean, dry and comfortable.
- We also recommend bringing a water bottle.

Do you take insurance?

Yes. [Click here for more information](#). We now also accept Tricare military insurance.

When are sessions available?

Monday through Saturday. Please call 201-919-6180 to inquire about available session times.

I love horses, but I'm also afraid of getting too close to them. Can I still do EAP?

Yes! We can help you work through your discomfort with horses at your own pace while also focusing on your therapeutic goals.