



# EQUINE THERAPY

*Using Animals to Foster Acceptance, Growth and Self-Esteem*

Equine therapy is a therapeutic venue that allows patients to gain perspective on the behaviors and the feelings that are causing them pain.

Horses are beautiful animals and play a vital role in a wide range of sports and leisure pastimes, but they can also be helpful in the treatment of a variety of issues, including co-occurring disorders and substance abuse. Animal-assisted therapy is one of the most effective forms of experiential therapy and has been implemented since the 1800s, when doctors realized that patients were healing more quickly when they were around animals. Animal-assisted therapy has been shown to be successful in helping individuals with numerous issues, including substance abuse, eating disorders and emotional problems in adolescents. Equine therapy is a form of therapy in which the individual works with horses as a means of rebuilding responsibility and growing as a person.



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Animals have the ability to mirror exactly what human body language is telling them.

## ***Equine Therapy in Practice***

In equine therapy, horses are used as a means to provide metaphoric experiences in order to promote emotional growth. Equine therapists are trained to teach a variety of lessons on the ways in which horses learn, react and follow instructions. Often, when students are just beginning a horse therapy program, the instructor will ask students to get the horse to

move outside of a large circle without touching the animal, or they may be asked to lead the horse. They often try to force or coerce the horse into doing their bidding, which doesn't work. By learning instead to work with the animal, they get the result they want. As animals offer unconditional acceptance, patients feel safe and are more apt to let down their guard, reducing stress.

## ***Equine Therapy in Substance Abuse Treatment***

Most people who have struggled with drug or alcohol addiction arrive at treatment with their personal relationships strained. Friends and loved ones may have been hurt or judgmental throughout the individual's addiction, and it has taken a toll. In equine therapy, when an individual forms a bond with a horse, that animal is a blank slate. It arrives into the relationship with no pre-conceived notions or opinions about the recovering addict. This is an opportunity to start completely fresh. It provides a chance for the individual to understand how his or her behavior affects others and can often lead to a therapeutic breakthrough.

Equine therapy can be worked into the treatment day of nearly any substance abuse program. There is simply time set aside for the individual to tend to his or her horse. Counselors play a role in equine therapy as well, talking to patients about their experiences while caring for the horses and building a metaphor between these tasks and the rebuilding of an individual's life.

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**However equine therapy is approached, positive lessons learned by the individual will become tools he or she can use to get sober and maintain that sobriety long-term.**

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### ***About Foundations Recovery Network***

Foundations Recovery Network is recognized as the premier leader in integrated treatment for co-occurring addiction and mental health concerns. Our award-winning model combines evidence-based addiction treatment with innovative therapies for emotional and mental health to effectively address a Dual Diagnosis. Results demonstrate that FRN patients are twice as likely to maintain sobriety one year post-treatment as compared to those who attend traditional programs.

### ***Creating Positive Change***

Equine therapy is an important step in the addiction recovery process, but it's not just about the horses. These majestic animals don't hold some sort of magic healing power. Anything that re-teaches responsibility and brings about

introspection is going to elicit positive results. Equine therapy is also valuable because it replaces drug use with a positive activity. It can also provide a soothing, fulfilling distraction from some of the more focused therapy going on during the treatment process, allowing much-needed time to absorb the lessons being learned. Foundations Recovery Network utilizes equine therapy to facilitate positive change in patients' lives.

