

EQUINE CO-FACILITATED PSYCHOTHERAPY

Equine Co-Facilitated Psychotherapy:

Utilizing Equine Communication and Partnership Rituals as a Model for the Treatment of
Adolescents.

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Abstract

The use of animals as objects in the provision of experiential psychotherapeutic services is not new to the clinical world, however, the use of a horse as a co-facilitator certainly tests the limits of traditionally minded clinicians. Equine co-facilitated psychotherapy, using the newly developed Equine Communication and Partnership Rituals, is an effective model for the treatment of adolescents with emotional, social, and behavioral deficits. The basic psychological make-up of a horse and the application of the equine rituals in the provision of treatment are outlined for a clearer understanding of why the use of horses as therapeutic partners is an effective method of treatment for this population.

From the very beginning of equine and human coexistence, horses have become an integral part of our societies and cultures. They have been utilized as beasts of burden, companions, friends, and a variety of other similar roles. People have ascribed to horses various spiritual, mystical and magical powers of intuition, communication, understanding, and even healing. As a result of this ascription, horses have been utilized in various ways to support the provision of psychotherapeutic services over the years. While the larger treatment community may question, or even scoff at, the effectiveness of using horses as partners or co-facilitators in treatment, those who have embraced the model know unequivocally that the utilization of horses in this manner adds a seemingly magical element to the treatment process which can be obtained through no other known treatment methods.

In recent years, as more treatment providers embrace equine co-facilitation in the provision of clinical services, many ideas and theories explaining the reasons this model's effectiveness have been proposed or hypothesized. The majority, if not all, use anecdotal references to spiritual and/or magical connections between the horse and client and ascribe intuitive qualities to the horse which transcend human communication and understanding. These processes, while believed to be understood at a spiritual or intuitive level by the clinician, are not easily substantiated by empirical processes designed to identify what is really happening and if it truly is as effective as the provider believes. For this reason, providers of equine co-facilitated clinical work are then viewed by the scientific community as liberal horse lovers who manipulate a client's natural awe of animals to create a feel-good situation which convinces the client significant therapeutic work is occurring. While some in our profession may have legitimately earned this pejorative description, those who have an understanding and command of legitimate and effective clinical theories and skills, if they are willing to sincerely observe and explore the

use of equine co-facilitated work, will begin to see that there truly is something about ECP that profoundly and positively impacts the client's progression in treatment (while simultaneously forging a much desired and necessary healing companionship between the horse and the client).

Once convinced of the effectiveness of ECP, treatment providers also begin to understand the need for empirical exploration and support of the work. If the work is to be recognized in the professional community as a bona fide and legitimate form of treatment provision, empirical, not just anecdotal, evidence must be gathered to support it. While numerous theoretical papers and articles have been published to develop interest in the work, little empirical research currently exists to support or refute the efficacy of ECP. As it stands, there are many who emphatically believe in ECP's effectiveness but not can prove, via the use of scientific methods, it is the miraculous technique it appears to be. So begins the precarious journey of research to identify what this work is really made of and how effective it truly may be.

A quote from Chaia King, the daughter of talk show host Larry King and an avid horsewoman, in a book by GaWaNi Pony Boy (2000) gives the reader a small snapshot of the perspective most equine co-facilitated clinicians would agree with.

Sharing a relationship with a horse creates an opportunity for personal discovery and expansion. Connections made between us and horses are composed of multiple layers. The deepest layers are nonverbal and difficult to express because they touch the deepest part of the human spirit. Many animals offer us a similarly layered bonding, yet the equine-human relationship is unique. The horse, with its ability to carry a rider, provides us with an opportunity for unequaled collaborative effort. This collaboration creates progressively rich experiences that can powerfully affect our lives. Harmony is the element instantly recognizable in the bond shared by humans and horses and it is the final goal of any equine endeavor. Bonding with a horse gives the gift of balance to one's life: physical, emotional and spiritual. The unspoken communication, which serves as therapy in the form of touch between human and horse, can open your heart and heal your body and mind. Balance is the target of every key area of human life, and by working toward this goal with a horse, we can achieve harmony that benefits all relationships. For relationships are the canvas of our lives...

To fully understand the reason horses are better suited to the process of ECP, one must have some basic understanding of the psychological makeup and behavioral predispositions of horses. The key word here is “basic.” It is not meant for the reader to become an expert in horse psychology but to have enough understanding to make sense of the process. Pay particular attention to the number of references which begin, “Horses, like humans...” this should serve as an indicator as to why the horse is best suited for therapeutic work with people.

Horses develop cognitively in a manner which, for the most part, mimics adolescent development. This means that the motivation for most equine behavior is similar to that of children at various stages of their development. For example, two year-old horses are cognitively and behaviorally very similar to an eight or nine year-old child. A fully matured horse will be behaviorally motivated by the same types of things as a 12-14 year-old child. These behavioral and cognitive similarities create excellent metaphors for adolescents working with horses and trying to get behavioral consistency. This process basically puts the adolescent into a parental role with the horse, and miscommunication, aggression, coercion, and other maladaptive relationship skills on the part of the adolescent result in misbehavior, defiance, and withdrawal on the part of the horse. The resultant frustration minimally leads to a willingness to explore better methods of engagement, and often leads to the classic “Aha” moment wherein the adolescent starts to draw parallels between his/her own behavior and the horse’s behavior.

In the food chain of life, horses are prey animals. They have spent their entire existence learning to protect themselves from predators and, in order to survive, see everything in the world as a potential threat. While horses are capable of fighting potential predators, if necessary and left with no other options, flight rather than fight, has proven to be the most effective choice.

Horses tend to engage all new situations with an “approach and retreat” strategy until it is determined if the situation is safe or that escape routes are possible (Anderson, 2004).

Instinctively horses continually observe their surroundings for potential threats or danger. Experience and instinct have taught the horse that to fail to pay attention is to be injured, die, or, at the very least, be made uncomfortable.

Observation of horses interacting with humans reveals another facet to this process. Domesticated horses are continually exposed to the presence of humans and, over the years, have developed a natural desire to want to trust people. The desire for trust allows a horse to enter into interaction with humans from a place of caution but not outright fear. Unless and until the human give the horse a reason to flee, the relationship can develop without undue fear-driven stresses.

In a nutshell, a domesticated horse’s basic survival process with humans is as follows: Desire for trust, flight, and, lastly, fight. A horse will first seek to trust, and, if no threats are perceived, will remain present and calm. If threats are perceived, the horse will be nervous, skittish, pull back, bolt, or even run away. If escapes are blocked or aggression handling is used to keep the horse present in the face of danger, the horse will more often than not choose to fight. It should be noted that horses naturally will not choose fight just for fight’s sake. Fight is used as a last resort and for the purpose of creating opportunities for flight. Unlike humans, horses, by nature, are not inclined to interpersonal aggression.

Another key aspect of horse behavior is energy conservation. Horses must always be prepared to respond to a potential threat by either fighting or running away, both of which require significant expenditure of energy. Horses wearied from running, playing, or unnecessary expenditure of energy do not have the energy reserves necessary to fight or run from a predator

or dangerous situation. Experience and instinct have also taught the horse that unprepared and tired horses are usually injured or killed by predators. For this reason, horses will not usually spend time or energy engaging in unnecessary activities or behaviors (Rashid, 2000).

Horses, like humans, have hierarchically structured needs. Unlike humans, horses' needs are not as complicated and are limited to four items: Safety, food, comfort, and stimulation (Anderson, 2004). Horses need to feel safe in order to be able to function in all other areas of life. Due to the primitive and instinctual nature of the fight or flight response, which is the primary mode of response for a horse, the perception of danger overrides all other cognitive functions. Thus, a horse who feels unsafe is not likely to be able to do much more than run or fight, including paying attention to basic life sustaining activities, such as eating. For this reason, safety is the first and most important level of the hierarchy.

Horses, like all living creatures, require food and water in order to survive. Without appropriate sustenance horses will become ill and ultimately die. If all safety needs are met, horses naturally will be engaged in a continual search for food and water. Wild or undomesticated horses spend the majority of their lives engaged in the search and consumption of food.

Horses, like humans, also seek to be comfortable. Anyone who trains horses understands a horse's tendency to shy away from pressure or minor discomfort is a basic tenant of training. Pressure is applied, the horse moves away from or changes behaviors in order to have the pressure reduced and comfort restored. Discomfort or the threat of discomfort can alter a horse's behavior as it seeks to be as comfortable as possible given each situational context.

Like their human counterparts, horses will seek stimulation once lower-rung needs are met. If safety is assured and the need for energy conservation is less apparent, horses will seek

mental and physical stimulation. This is the basic energy behind typical horse pasture antics such as playful engagements and unprovoked running, kicking, and jumping behaviors. This need also provides the energy for “barn mischief” behaviors such as cribbing, destruction of pens, panels, fences, troughs, and other fixtures. Curt Pate identifies that the natural daily behavior of an undomesticated horse, once safe, is to be searching for and consuming food. This leaves little time for mischief. In contrast, penned or stalled horses that are fed only once or twice a day with no other activity or focus in between tend to lack adequate stimulation and will engage in mischievous and destructive behavior to fill the void. (Pate, 2004). The key to stopping counterproductive behavior is to provide adequate stimulation, activity, and structure to daily activities. In this regard, there is a significant parallel to adolescent behavior.

Horses, like humans, are social animals. The social aspect of horse behavior plays into all aspects of the equine need hierarchy. There is safety in numbers. The search for food is better achieved by numerous searchers. Comfort can be derived from the presence of companions. Stimulation occurs through social engagement with herdmates.

Horses form definite social attachments to other horses and to humans if humans engage in developing those attachments in a manner in which the horse understands and depends. A horse separated from herdmates will continually look back toward them, whinny, and attempt to return to the safety and security of the herd. It is not uncommon to see an isolated horse playing with a dog, cat, rabbit, or a human being. Because of the horse’s need for social connections and engagements, they are well suited for the formulation of therapeutic relationships with humans.

Horses, like humans, socialize utilizing structured rituals. These rituals are the rules of social engagement, discipline, and survival for herds and follow a specific, although not linear, structure. Foals, from the time of birth, are socialized to the rituals. Much like human infants,

they spend significant time and energy testing the limits of the rituals and being corrected by their mothers or others within the herd. The herd, or larger community, instructs the foal on proper adherence to social norms and necessity for respect of elders. Respect for these rituals allows for continual herd survival, and, obviously, failure to render proper attention or respect to the social structure and rules can lead to dire consequences, even death. Carolyn Resnick in her book *Naked Liberty* calls these rules or rituals The Seven Waterhole Rituals (Resnick, 2005). Her work was the foundation for the development of the Equine Communication and Partnership Rituals. A detailed description of the rituals is contained later in this paper.

Horses, like humans, communicate primarily through the use of non-verbal language. It is reported that 93 percent of human communication is done non-verbally and through the use of body language, facial expressions, eye contact, verbal tones, vocal inflection, and gestures (Mehrabian, 1981). With this definition of non-verbal communication, horse communication would be 100 percent non-verbal. With exception of verbal inflection horse non-verbal communication is largely the same as human forms. Some key areas of horse non-verbal communication include: ear position, head movements, muscle tension, foot movements, whinny tones, grunts, and tail movements. A person who has learned to pay attention to and appropriately interpret equine communication can usually identify with accuracy the message the horse is communicating and ultimately predict subsequent behaviors.

In connection with equine psychology and behavior, it is important to note that humans as participants or members of the food chain of life are predators. In predation, predators take things from prey through deception, manipulation, threats, or violence. Predators are continually on the lookout for opportunities for predation and must develop the skills necessary to be successful in their efforts. This naturally places predators and prey in an adversarial posture, and

the development of relationships between prey and predators is obviously going to be greatly complicated as a result.

In nature, predators prey on others for the express purpose of survival. Animals don't prey on others to be vindictive, to gain money or power, or for other manipulative purposes. This is not to be confused with the violence associated with defending territory, establishing social order, or mating rituals wherein animals often do inflict injury upon each other. In contrast, as predators, humans are quite capable of preying on others for a variety of selfish and manipulative reasons. Humans also uniquely possess the ability to perpetrate such predations verbally and through the art of deception and persuasion. As a result of this characteristic, humans have developed an array of defense mechanisms to protect themselves from such predators, such as pretense, coyness, mixed messages, verbal and non-verbal deception, and other skills designed to verbally and mentally confuse the identified adversary. Because the threat, until proven otherwise. Predation is continual in most human relationships, people, more often than not and usually unconsciously, engage in communication and relationships utilizing these defense mechanisms. These mechanisms, as originally intended, lead to verbal and mental confusion, cloud the issue, send mixed messages, and leave the participants unsatisfied and looking for alternatives. One often selected alternative is to abandon relationships beyond the superficial level and have one's needs met in alternative arenas, such as internet, video games, text messaging, drug and alcohol usage, sexual promiscuity, and other unhealthy forms of achieving relationship validation.

Horses, unlike humans, do not possess the cognitive ability to engage in deception, pretense, or other similar manipulations. Horses, like humans, can learn how to perform or behave in the best way to get their needs met. In its strictest definition, this would be termed

manipulation, but the key difference is that a horse does not manipulate for reasons outside of basic need fulfillment and is incapable of calculating or disingenuous motives.

In the establishment of human relationships, especially in the beginning phases, there is always an underlying current of uncertainty, coyness, boundary testing, and trial and error. If we say or do the wrong thing, through astute observation and command of certain skills, we can quickly correct ourselves and try a different approach until the correct tactic is discovered. We are continually testing the other person and adjusting our approach in order to make the relationship process flow more smoothly. The process is much like walking through a minefield or walking on eggshells, with successes feeling like battlefield victories and failures creating feelings of embarrassment or interpersonal mortification, if not outright humiliation. Over time we develop skills to assist us to negotiate the process with increased success and decreased risk of injury, insult, rejection, and shame. These skills, like many other defense mechanisms, are not always derived from a place of authenticity, sincerity, or genuineness and may take on a tactical, protective, and manipulative flavor. These tactics, while effective and maybe even necessary in human relationships, have no effect on the horse. Horses cannot be emotionally manipulated and do not respond to pretense. They do not possess the cognitive ability to engage in or respond to the subtle manipulative elements typically found in human communication and relationships.

For the above stated reasons, a relationship with a horse forces genuineness on the part of the human. Typical negative skills developed to be effective and protected in human relationships, due to the cognitive purity of the horse, are rendered ineffective in equine relationships and alternative skills must be developed. In the absence of genuineness and other skills which a horse understands and responds to, there is only frustration on the part of the person. If the person truly wants to formulate a mutually beneficial and satisfying relationship

the frustration will usually lead to exploration and a willingness to look at alternative methods of engagement. And, as noted above, since the horse is not possessed of the ability to respond to subtle manipulations so typical of human communication, the person is forced to come from a place of genuineness and sincerity.

The physical size of the horse is also a benefit to the process of establishing relationships. The massiveness of the horse with its associated power, serve continually to remind anyone around it of the risks of a deteriorating relationship. Sometimes the fear of, but more often the respect for, the horse's size and power propel a person to engage actively and appropriately in order to maintain personal safety. To be complacent, neglectful, or abusive could lead to serious injury. In this regard, the horse's size acts as a relationship equalizer between the predator and the prey animal.

In order to effectively communicate with a horse a person must adequately understand horse communication. This skill, while attainable, is not something that comes naturally and requires continual focus while engaged with a horse. Typical human communication habits must yield to the horse's communication needs in order for things to move smoothly, effectively, and safely. The focus necessary to pull this off requires a person's entire presence. There can be no distractions or drifting of attention as the relationship is being built. Like human relationships, after the foundation is built, it can withstand a small amount of inattention but never as much as a human relationship could tolerate. For these reasons, horse relationships require complete immersion in order to be effective.

Unlike humans, a horse's disposition naturally allows for the forgiving of legitimate mistakes. If a horse does not possess the cognitive ability for subtle, or even egregious, manipulations or malevolent motivation, then it certainly does not possess the capability to hold

a grudge. This is not to be confused with a horse's ability, for the purposes of survival and self-preservation, to associate certain people and objects with patterns of pain or abuse, which can lead to negative reactions every time that person or object is introduced. In the absence of such patterns which can indicate a person's negative motives, horses, once relatively sure the person does not intend to harm them, will forgive mistakes, missteps, and unclear cues. This element of a horse's psychology makes them ideally suited for working with people who don't have command of good relationship skills but have a pure motivation for wanting to be in the relationship. This element also creates safety on the part of the person. The horse's natural disposition of tolerance for non-predatory motives, creates a safe environment without the complications of human fickleness in order to practice relationship building skills.

Horses are hard-wired to want relationships and, if treated appropriately, will bond with people (Gates, 2008). Horses, unlike humans, are simple in what it takes to treat them appropriately. Without having to figure out the intricacies and mysteries associated with particular individuals, people working with horses can experience more immediate success in developing a relationship. This initial success leads to improved willingness to continue to develop skills and can ultimately lead to the perseverance and skills necessary to build and sustain human relationships.

In the world of today, human relationships and the skills necessary to sustain them are not as necessary in order for people to survive as they were in times past. The advent of technological advancements such as the internet, text messaging, television, and other such methods of communicating has led to a loss of relationship building skills and an almost unlimited buffet of methods for having our needs met if we are unable or unwilling to engage in human relationships. For this reason, there has been a tendency for human relationships to

become more transactional in nature. People engage in relationships with others in the same way one would go to the store and purchase a wanted item. They identify the cost of the item and pay only the amount necessary to acquire it. Then, without no more obligation or investment, they pocket the item and leave. No concern for the person involved. No social skills needed. There is no further social obligation or responsibility associated with the transaction. The ability to function within society no longer requires the ability to be social. Most items can be purchased on-line, and those not available on-line can be purchased in the self-serve aisle at the grocery store. Relationships and people are becoming obsolete.

Relationships for the sake of companionship are beginning to look very similar to the transactions identified above in that the cost of gaining the desired outcome is identified and delivered without consideration for the humanness and needs of those involved. No investment or understanding is necessary, only the ability to give what is minimally expected for the desired payoff. Because payoffs can and do occur without much investment, there is little motivation to do differently. A meaningful relationship with a horse, on the other hoof, because of the cognitive purity of the horse, cannot be conducted in a transactional manner. In order for a meaningful relationship to culminate, a sense of responsibility and obligation for the horse must be present. Horses, in captivity, require sustained care in order to survive. The dire consequence for the horse if care is not provided creates an obligation and responsibility on the part of the caregiver. For many adolescents, this obligation to provide care for a horse is the first time they have ever had to make a sacrifice for the benefit of something not themselves. This process opens the door to a greater sense of social responsibility and obligation.

On the coattails of obligation, responsibility, and the decrease of transaction-based relationships, comes the movement away from objectification in relationships. In order to ignore

the humanness in relationships a fair amount of objectification must occur. People simply cease to be people and become objects to be used and discarded. Horses treated like objects are likely to respond with negative behavior. If a response is desired from a horse, consideration must be given to what is necessary to convince the horse to give the desired response. This consideration, in the language of the relationship, requires empathy, understanding, cooperation, and respect. If those elements are present, it is likely the response will be favorable. A horse treated with respect is likely to be more predictable in its responses and certainly a more willing participant in what is being requested.

Both the horse and the human come into the relationship with potentially intimidating power bases which can complicate relationship progress. Humans come to the relationship as a predator with all of the prowess naturally associated with that role. Horses come with massive size and physical strength which could easily wound or even kill the human. In order for the relationship to be successful, there must be some balancing factors. Humans must learn skills which allow them to compensate for the horse's size and power, and since it is unlikely the human will be able to overpower the horse, relationship and negotiation skills are the best bet. In a struggle of raw physical power there is simply no way a human could win. This understanding is key to the process of relationship development. People working with horses must be continually aware of and adjusting their behavior to compensate.

Additionally, the human in the relationship must always be aware of and compensating for the way in which a horse is likely to perceive and interpret seemingly predatory acts. It would only seem fair that since the human has to develop skills to compensate for the horse's power, that the horse should have to develop skills to compensate for the human's predatory power, but this is not the case. As the most evolved and cognitively advanced being in the

relationship, the human must compensate for both sides. The compensation for predatory behavior means that the human must always be aware of his motives, gestures, and behaviors and adjust accordingly so as to be perceived by the horse as a companion rather than a threat. This process requires continual introspection and examination of one's motives as well as a shift in behavior. For an adolescent who typically doesn't consider cause and effect in relationships, this process forces cause and effect into the forefront, because to do otherwise could lead to getting hurt. Respect for size and power leads to forward thinking.

As with all relationships, trust is a key component. In ECP the necessity for mutual trust is emphasized when riding is introduced into the process. In riding relationships, especially on unpredictable trails with a variety of obstacles, the human typically relies more on the horse than the horse on the human for things to be safe. The human is on the horse's back and needs the horse to perform in a predictable and controlled manner in order for the human to remain safe. One seated on a horse's back while negotiating uneven, rocky, and hostile terrain has a profound sense of vulnerability and dependency. It becomes crystal clear that the only thing between yourself and serious injury is the horse and the horse's behavior. Any old cowboy when teaching someone to ride under these circumstances would simply say, "Trust your horse." The only way true trust, not blind trust, can come is from having confidence that the horse is going to perform as expected. Good performance comes from commitment to and a willingness for the task. Willingness, in animals, comes from two places: a desire to please based on trust or a fear of punishment. As with human beings, the immediate fear of punishment can be overridden if either the fear of the current situation is greater or if the intensity of past maltreatment-generated resentment is greater. In short, if the horse fears the situation more than he fears punishment, or if his resentment is such that he would act out in spite of the fear of punishment, the rider can

expect trouble. Safety for both the horse and the rider necessitates a previously established relationship of trust. This dynamic forces continual attention toward relationship creation and maintenance due to the interdependence necessary to have a healthy riding relationship. (In short, if you have a bad relationship when you get on, your time in the saddle could be short and your health may suffer.) Clinton Anderson, illustrating this point, tells how he was taught as a young trainer that the more you get bucked off while riding, the better your ground work will become (Anderson, 2004).

The last element related to the effectiveness of this work, especially with adolescents, relates to the typical unwillingness of an adolescent to listen to anyone. Due to the size and power differential and an understanding that the horse incapable of ridicule and moral judgments, messages communicated and lessons taught by the horse tend to be perceived and received more, readily, poignantly, and meaningfully than human communication.

Horses are prey animals. In the world of humans, unprotected children are prey animals as well. The key difference between horses and children is that horses know they are prey and adjust their behavior accordingly so as to be protected as much as possible. Children don't believe they are prey and, as a result, oftentimes place themselves in harm's way. They can easily become targets and victims of human predators who, through skillful manipulation, will take advantage of the child's youth, innocence, and trust. If horses raised our children they would be taught how to set and maintain healthy boundaries, to be vigilant, and to respect and abide by the rituals necessary for survival. Parents attempt to teach these principles to their children with varying degrees of success. For those who really won't learn them, the consequences usually result in being placed in treatment. In ECP, children are taught these lessons by horses in a manner in which they are willing to listen.

Because horses and children are prey animals, they need and seek leaders who can provide protection for them. Their very existence requires the leader they chose be worthy of the task and able to consistently provide protection. The only way both horse and children can know if the leader is worthy of that position is to continually test that leader for leadership worthiness. Leadership worthiness is established through consistent adherence to boundaries, keeping the overall best interests of the family or herd in mind regardless of the popularity of the decisions, a willingness to stand alone if necessary, and a willingness to sacrifice personal wants for good of the family or herd. Testing or checking behaviors test to see if the boundaries or rules are, in fact, really boundaries. If the boundaries hold sometimes and fall at other times, then there is no consistency. If there is no consistency, there is not safety. If there is no safety, the leader must be displaced and a worthy leader found. Leadership displacement comes through aggressive, disrespectful, and disloyal behaviors. Loyalty is given to those perceived as worthy, but worthiness is dynamic and requires continual action and consistency.

Horses have three distinct types of personality which closely parallel human personality types: Leaders/protectors, dominators, and submissives. In equine vernacular, leaders/protectors are referred to simply as lead horses, dominators as dominant or bully horses, and submissives as submissive or passive horses. Humans, with significant complications, fulfill similar roles.

Lead horses, like effective parents, provide protection and watch over the safety and needs of the herd. Lead horses often graze on the periphery of the herd and are ever watchful for danger. With the lead horse doing its job the rest of the herd can graze without having to be as vigilant. They simply pay attention to the lead horse and respond to his direction. This is illustrated when a strange person walks into a pasture where a herd of horses is grazing. The lead horse will alert and face the person. The remaining horses will turn to face the lead horse

and will watch his signals. If the lead horse determines there is no threat, he will return to grazing while keeping the person always in view. The other horses will stand down and return to grazing but always watch the lead horse for signs that things have changed. If the person is determined to be a threat, the lead horse will signal to the others by appearing panicked and turning to run. The herd will follow and won't stop the exodus until the lead horse stops, looks back, and determines it is safe to stop running.

Horses, like children, are taught at an early age by their mothers and other horses in the herd to pay attention to the lead horse. Specific hazing rituals occur throughout a horse's life to remind him of the necessity to remain respectful of the lead horse and ultimately live. These horses are taught to move when the lead horse wants them to move, yield to the authority of the lead horse, and surrender territory and food if the lead horse demands. The motive behind this behavior is teach respect and vigilance and is not intended to be a show of force or power for the sake of domination. This hazing, with a few minor differences, is similar to the teaching a human mother gives her child. A key difference is that human children do not always listen and must learn these lessons the hard way, and usually with life altering consequences.

Dominant or bully horses are just that, bullies. They, like humans, tend to lack the confidence and skill necessary to be leaders but want to be able to have the privileges and respect lead horses have. They will often push around submissive horses and other bully horses of lesser stature. The untrained observer will often mistake the dominant horse as the lead horse because the dominant horse is always pushing another horse around. The difference is the motive behind the pushing around.

Dominant horses often have to be corrected by lead horses. This is accomplished by kicking, biting, or striking behaviors intended to get the dominant horse's attention and submission to the authority of the lead horse.

Submissive or passive horses are, as the name implies, submissive. These are the horses in the herd who easily respond to the lead horse and are often the targets of dominant horses if there is a power struggle. Submissive horses usually comprise the bulk of the herd, tend to be non-confrontational, and respect the authority the lead horse. Submissive horses can become lead horses if there is not a horse in the herd strong enough to be the leader. It is not uncommon for a horse to be submissive in one particular herd and to be a lead horse in another. Submissive people possess similar attributes but aren't often given the opportunity to emerge as leaders.

Key elements related to ECP:

- Lead horses and parents provide protection and watch over the safety and needs of the herd.
- Horses and children must learn to watch and obey the lead horse (parents) in order to remain safe.
- Dominant and submissive horses and children must always be testing the lead horse for worthiness. Testing occurs through misbehavior. A lead horse (parent) found to be unworthy is disrespected and displaced. It is important to understand the process of testing is not personal. It is not a personal attack on the lead horse or parent although it certainly can feel personal to the one being tested. Testing is necessary to ensure continued safety.
- Lead horses and parents must continually assert their leadership in order to remain in a position of respect.
- Horses and children who do not learn to watch and obey the lead horse or parents usually end up in situations that compromise their safety and wellbeing.

One basic tenant of ECP is the belief that true bonds are born from a place of freedom. This means choice is a key element in all relationships, including relationships developed with horses. Old cowboys have been known to say horses need to do what is expected of them without fail or they should be disciplined until they comply, and some parenting styles are similar. Experience has taught those of us in the therapeutic profession that force doesn't yield lasting fruits. One

may gain short-term compliance but, in the long run, force ultimately leads to defiance. It is the same with a horse.

EQUINE COMMUNICATION AND PARTNERSHIP RITUALS (adapted from Carolyn Resnick's Seven Waterhole Rituals)

As a child, Carolyn Resnick spent many years observing a mustang herd near her home near the Mojave Desert. In her book, *Naked Liberty* (2005), she describes her experiences as she attempted to get the herd of mustangs to accept her presence without fear. Over the course of her observations and attempts to integrate with the herd, she identified seven ritual-like behaviors which governed the overall herd's behavior as well as the individual horses within the herd. She also found the same rituals to be intact with domesticated horses and identified these seven rituals as the keys to horse communication, socialization, order, and safety. This understanding led her to develop a system of working with horses which utilized the horse's natural methods of communication and socialization. She and others she has trained have been using this method successfully for several years to train horse owners to better communicate with their horses and decrease the classic misunderstandings between horses and humans which have led to so many horse behavioral problems and resultant dangerous situations.

Up until recently the Seven Waterhole Rituals has been used exclusively for training horses and owners for the purpose of better equestrian performance and safety. Until discovered by the authors, the Seven Waterhole Rituals had not been clearly identified as a potential clinical tool. After participating in several training seminars with Robin Gates (2008), a Carolyn Resnick trained trainer, and with the purpose of expanding their equestrian skills so as to better provide Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) services, the authors began to understand that the horse, used as an object, was not allowed to maximize its full potential as a co-therapist in the

treatment process (Burr, Lyman, and Knutson, 2009). Additionally, the authors began to personally experience the power of the relationship as they engaged in the training and became more adept in using the rituals to effect relationships with their own horses. With continued work in this area, an emerging clinical model began to appear. The horse's contribution to the treatment process was identified as clearly more significant and profound than that of an assistant. The title of co-facilitator more clearly defines the role the horse plays, especially when utilizing the Seven Waterhole Rituals as the foundations for the therapeutic relationship. The name of the services was changed from Equine Assisted Psychotherapy to Equine Co-Facilitated Psychotherapy.

Furthermore, as the developmental work of the model continued, it was identified that the Seven Waterhole Rituals would need to be further adapted to facilitate its application to work with human beings. In order to further this adaptation, and out of respect for and protection of Carolyn's work as it applies to horses and horsemanship, it was determined the name for the process should be changed to something that would more accurately reflect its connection to a treatment model. After careful consideration of the how the rituals truly manifest themselves in the model, the name Equine Communication and Partnership Rituals (ECPR) was selected. The basic elements of Carolyn's theory as still present but some adaptations for human interaction and processes have occurred.

It should be noted that the term "rituals" was carried over because of the nature of the process is, in fact, very much a ritual, right of passage, and even a natural law associated with equine communication, socialization, and behavior. Humans also follow precise rituals and laws in order for the perpetuation of the species. The difference between horses and humans here is that humans, with a more advanced capacity for thought and reason, have, over the years,

attempted to improve upon, modify, and even reject some natural laws and rituals. This has culminated in a tragic loss of requisite relationship and socialization skills and has created the transaction-based relationship economy mentioned above. Horses have not deviated from the rituals as time has passed and have preserved them in their simplicity and fullness for the benefit of equine societies and, now, for the benefit of human society.

While the discussion of the ECP Rituals is conducted in a linear fashion, it should be noted that the application of the rituals is not necessarily linear. More discussion of the application of each will follow.

The first Equine Communication and Partnership Ritual is Sharing Territory. Sharing territory is just that, sharing space. In human relationships two people must peacefully co-exist in the same relative space prior to beginning any further relationship building processes. It is no different with horses. Horses introduced into a new herd or to a new horse companion must first share space without expectation while respecting the rights and personal space of the others until it is determined the environment, and those inhabiting it, are safe to be around. Two key elements: to simply be present without expectation or placing demands on others, and to respect the personal space of those who already possess the space. Horses practice this ritual and expect the same from others, humans included. Humans, on the other hand, typically have an immediate agenda and usually can't co-exist with others without trying to impose some demand or expectation on others. The absence or infrequent application of this ritual leads people to approach almost all new relationships from a place of suspicion and trepidation, which have a snowball effect. Suspicion and trepidation lead to avoidance. Avoidance leads to isolation. Isolation means little or no social stimulation which leads to having one's social needs met through some non-human method such as video games, internet, pornography, substance abuse

and so on. Society is replete with examples of social isolation leading to maladaptive coping responses.

Sharing territory is a basic skill necessary for the establishment of mutually beneficial and gratifying relationships, albeit this simple skill does not seem to be possessed by many adolescents anymore. Sharing territory with a horse teaches adolescents how to engage with humans in the same process. As discussed earlier, the horse is ideally suited for teaching this skill because it lacks the ability to hide uncertainty or displeasure in response to ill-timed or overbearing social overtures.

Sharing territory is the basic building block to bonding and acceptance. It creates an environment for testing the safety of the companionship and establishing common ground. It allows for companionship without interaction, expectation, or demands. Simply stated, sharing territory allows two beings to peacefully co-exist without pressure. The process of sharing territory begins the communication process and tells the other three basic things about you: Who you are, what you want, and how you operate. In order to discern these three things, both participants must be paying attention to and understanding non-verbal and social cues. This process permits the horse to determine if the situation is physically safe. Humans are assessing primarily for emotional safety, but, both are ultimately looking for safety.

In human relationships, sharing territory is equally important. Spending time with others without an agenda is an essential building block for bonding and attachments, and the same basic three elements are revealed: Who you are, what you want, and how you operate. It is during the sharing territory ritual that human beings decide if they want to continue to invest in relationship or if it is time to move in a different, and likely more safe direction.

Successful negotiation of the first ritual sets the stage for the next ritual, Saying Hello. Saying hello is similar to sharing territory in that there can be no agenda other than offering a greeting. In most human interaction, there is an ulterior motive for saying hello to someone. Consequently, most of us are suspicious of someone who walks up to us and offers an unsolicited greeting. We are waiting for the hook, the request, or the demand, so we tend to offer back a perfunctory response and get away as quickly as possible. This response does not foster further building of relationships and pushes us toward the perceived safety of isolation.

In order to build a trusting relationship with a horse, the human must approach without an agenda, offer a greeting, and then walk away. The greeting is offered in the form of a light touch to the horse's nose. The human, upon making contact, then turns and leaves. There is no further touching, handling, haltering, or other engagement until the relationship is further strengthened. The process of offering a greeting in this motive-free manner helps to build trust. The greeting is not followed by an expectation. It is simply a "hello" for the sake of saying hello. How we say hello is important and reveals our intent for the relationship while setting the stage for how others will approach the relationship with us.

In ECP students are taught to approach the horse while paying attention to horse's body language. They are also taught to be mindful of their intentions and how those intentions may be communicated through their body language. As they approach the horse, the horse's response communicates how the student is being perceived. If the horse is curious and not threatened, it will allow the student to continue to approach. If it feels threatened, it may simply turn its head, take steps away, or run away. If any of these occur, the student is taught to retreat and make the environment (territory) safe by removing the threat. Assessment of the approach, what went wrong, and what needs to be adjusted occurs and the approach for greeting is repeated. This

process continues until a successful hello is achieved and then the activity is terminated. No subsequent engagement follows until the relationship is built and solid enough to support further growth. The horse is left with the understanding that a greeting was all that was desired and the foundation for trust is built. The student learns how his/her motivation, attitude, and body posture negatively and positively impact relationships and communication. This process is repeated numerous times with different horses until the student has mastered the art of saying hello and is mindful of his/her motives, attitudes, and postures. This exercise is invaluable in working with students with dyssemia, which is the inability to accurately interpret non-verbal cues (Nowicki and Duke, 1992,2002). Dyssemia, a term coined by Nowicki and Duke (1992, 2002), refers to any significant difficulty in understanding or sending non-verbal information.

Parents of adolescents in treatment also learn from this ritual. As a parent, think of the last time you walked up to one of your children and offered a sincere greeting and walked away with no further agenda. These incidents are rare at best and illustrate how human society has lost its ability to engage in relationship building behaviors at the simplest levels. It is no wonder adolescents presently lack these skills.

Sharing territory and saying hello, with horses and humans, must be applied linearly. Bonding and trust are the initial building blocks to relationships and, from time to time, require some remedial work. If, for whatever reason, a relationship begins to deteriorate, a return to the basic elements of sharing and trust building is necessary. Students are taught during subsequent rituals to return to the first two if things begin to deteriorate.

The next ritual, Taking Territory, is not necessarily a linear ritual and in some cases is not necessary. Taking territory is a boundary setting and holding ritual, which is used for those who lack respect for boundaries and require a lesson in respect. Disrespectful horses, who will not

respect authority within the herd, are pushed off of their space by lead horses as a means of teaching them to respond to the leader's requests. This pushing occurs through biting, kicking, striking, chasing, or other aggressive acts. Initially, the lead horse might simply pin its ears back. An attentive and respectful horse would recognize the warning and move away without further incident. A disrespectful horse would either be oblivious to the lead horse or would ignore the warning, both of which precipitate a more aggressive act. Once pushed away, the lead horse holds that space until he decides he doesn't want it anymore or until the pushed horse becomes appropriately respectful. This process is repeated continually until appropriate respect is rendered. Taking territory teaches horses to be respectful and to accept direction from the leader. In the world of predators, horses who are not paying attention to the lead horse in times of danger often do not survive. Taking territory is not perceived as a personal attack unless done by a dominant (bully) horse, and in those cases, the lead horse will usually offer a correction to the bully to stop further abuses. Horses do not resent having their territory taken. They understand this process to be the natural consequence of either testing the boundaries or of having failed to pay attention. It is all a part of the natural order of things.

Humans who test boundaries and fail to yield proper respect for authority have their territory taken similarly. Sometimes their actual space is taken, but more often their territory is taken in the form of a clarification, verbal reprimand, or consequence. In any event, the taking of territory is associated with the establishment and maintenance of boundaries. When we cross another's boundaries, we are essentially taking territory that doesn't belong to us. If the true owner of the territory wants to keep what is rightfully theirs, they must appropriately take it back. If continually allowed to take others' territory in the absence of defense, humans become rude, impolite, entitled, and incorrigible. The taking of territory in human relationships is simply

consistently keeping our boundaries and applying appropriate consequences for breaches. The key word here is “consistently.” A lack of consistency leads to intermittent rewards. Basic psychology teaches that behaviors driven by intermittent rewards are the hardest to extinguish. This basic truth is the premise for a majority of parent-child conflicts.

In ECP, students learn to appropriately take territory from a disrespectful horse and hold it. The methods for taking territory are the same used by horses: an assertive and quick approach and usually by surprise, a kicking behavior is simulated by the cracking of a whip, and a firm stance in holding the territory is taken. If the horse attempts to return or reclaim the territory, a whip snap indicates the inappropriateness of the behavior. The importance of holding boundaries is emphasized here.

The consistent establishment and maintenance of boundaries in conjunction with the natural and logical application of consequences for breaches is the basic foundation for leadership worthiness. As mentioned earlier, horses will displace an unworthy leader. A leader who does not hold boundaries is deemed unworthy and is displaced through disrespectful and aggressive behavior. Horses will bully, kick, bite, push, and displace an unworthy leader. It is also common for them to prevent access to food and water for short period of time, or at least until all the choicest portions are consumed. This process is not different in the human world. Parents who do not consistently keep and defend their boundaries will lose the respect of their children and will be displaced. Displacement occurs through sustained disrespectful and disloyal behaviors. Adolescents will give their loyalty and respect to the most consistent figures in their lives regardless of how rational those figures might be. Like with horses, consistency is perceived as safety. Gang leaders, substances, and negative attention are, if nothing else, consistent and relatively predictable.

Once territory has been taken and the foundation for respect for leadership is established, the next ritual is Leading From Behind. Leading from behind, for horses, fosters sustained willingness to accept leadership and respect authority. It is very much a maintenance exercise which, if properly done, can decrease the likelihood of future territory taking. Leading from behind is a gentle method for the lead horse to continue to assert his authority and help others to remain willing to yield to his directions. With horses, leading from behind occurs when attentive horses watch the movements of the lead horse and adjust their own movements accordingly. The lead horse, not from the front but from the back of the herd, can direct the herd to move in a certain direction by moving that direction himself. The lead horse, without a lot of energy, begins to move north. The other horses, calmly but ever mindful of the non-verbal communication given by the leader, also begin to move north. Horses who do not respond to this subtle direction will likely have their territory taken until they begin to pay attention and adjust their behavior accordingly. Voluntary adherence demonstrates cooperation and willingness to accept the leadership of the lead horse and ultimately survive (Rashid, 2004).

In human relationships, specifically parent-child relationships, children who don't learn to pay attention to the subtle leadership of their parents often end up in troublesome, if not dangerous, situations. Children, like horses, must learn to pay attention to the subtle leadership of their parents. Parents, like lead horses, must learn to lead from behind, to model healthy behaviors, and to appropriately take territory in order to keep respect and willingness alive within the family group. It should be noted that leadership within a horse herd is typically conducted passively and by example. Aggression is only used when necessary and is not used for personal gain or vindication.

In ECP, students learn to lead horses from behind in a manner similar to saying hello, with attention being given to motive, attitude and posture. The art of passive leadership requires continual focus and practice. The key to passive leadership and to leading from behind is to be respected but not perceived as a predator. And, because humans are predators in the natural order of life, significant adjustments to approach and personality style must be learned here, otherwise the process simply becomes a predator chasing prey rather than a leader subtly guiding a willing subordinate.

The next ritual, Eye Contact, is closely connected to and could easily be considered a prerequisite of leading from behind. Horses engaging in this ritual maintain continual focus on their leader and are able to respond appropriately to given instructions. One reason this ritual is not a prerequisite of leading from behind is that a horse could survive by watching the horses who are watching the leader rather than watch the leader personally, and it could be argued that submissive horses do just that. The key difference is that horses who participate in this ritual are learning to become leaders and will possess the requisite skills when opportunity presents. Submissive horses will never possess the skills necessary to be effective leaders and will always be dependent upon other horses for survival. The same is true of adolescents who gauge their behavior based on watching other adolescents rather than paying attention to the parents. They are not learning effective leadership skills, can be easily misled, and their safety may be jeopardized.

Eye contact, as in human communication, is a sign of respect. In the horse world, eye contact increases response time during crisis and improves the chances for survival. Those horses who pay attention to the leader will be able to respond more quickly to potential danger than those who are watching other horses. Horses who do not make eye contact have their

territory taken and are led from behind until they learn to pay attention. Failure to pay attention, for horses and humans alike, can have dire consequences.

In ECP, students learn about this process in their own lives as they communicate with horses in similar fashion. The goal for the student is to be perceived by the horses as a leader. If the student's leadership skills warrant respect, they will have the eye contact and attention of the horses they lead. If eye contact and attention are lacking, the student must consider two options in descending order: adjustments to his/her personal leadership style which will facilitate respect, and the need to take territory to establish respect if the leadership style is pure.

If the student has not mastered the interpersonal skills necessary to be proactive in relationships, the horse will not yield the necessary respect and trust to permit the next ritual, Companion Walking. This ritual is a culmination and manifestation of kinship successes achieved in previous rituals. In companion walking, the horse trusts the human leader to the extent that the horse will choose, without any form of restraint, to be at the side of and walk in concert with the student. In companion walking the synchrony and magnetism of the relationship is manifested. In order to maintain the bond, mutual trust and respect must be present and the relationship must be steadfast. If companion walking cannot occur, it is a message to the student something is wrong with the relationship and remedial work must be done to create the relational glue needed to sustain this level of connection. A key understanding here is that the problem is almost always with the student even though, in the early stages of ECP, students tend to blame all problems on the horse.

Horses, in their natural environment, will companion walk with other horses once trust and respect are established. This process as observed by humans is not that impressive since it is a process natural to the equine species. Horses companion walking with humans is not a natural

equine behavior, and for them to choose human companionship over that of other horses is an amazing testament to the power of relationships.

The last ritual, Go Trot and Come Up, is a further manifestation of the strength of the human-equine relationship and absolutely cannot occur unless the other six rituals are solidly in place. In horse herds, this ritual is associated with the development of independence, self-mastery, and is present when a foal reaches the maturity to leave his mother and live independently. It is also used in playful expression between other horses when the all basic needs are met and stimulation is sought. In go trot and come up the horse can run away, kick, and jump for the express purpose of being playful and even showing off to others. This behavior is an appropriate expression of independence, is not aggressive, and does not threaten the security of the herd. At the conclusion of the playful expression, the horse returns to the structure of the herd and assumes all previous responsibilities. The behavior can be repeated as often as appropriate and as long as no more pressing issues are present.

In human relationships, especially parent-child relationships, this process occurs when the child has developed enough trust and self-control to leave parental supervision and ultimately to live independently. This ritual is practiced in trial and error fashion as the child tests the limits of his skills, makes mistakes, loses trust and privileges, regains trust, and is again permitted to leave parental supervision for a time. As skills improve and the child matures, he is eventually prepared to leave for good. The come up part is always present in healthy adult relationships in that adult children usually remain connected to their parents and return home for visits and commemorative events throughout their lifetimes. Parents, at this stage, like elder horses, are now allowed to step down from the day to day responsibilities of leadership and protection, and,

having raised their children using the communication and partnership rituals, can allow their children to assume leadership/protector responsibilities and know they are safe.

In ECP, the student, after companion walking and like a responsible parent, learns to send the horse away to act independently and relies on the strength of the relationship to ensure the horse will eventually return. A parallel for what awaits the student in due time is drawn and processed therapeutically, and the student learns how the strength of healthy relationships can transcend distance. If the horse does not willingly return, the student learns of the need for additional work on the relationship.

As described above, the developmental similarities, needs, and motivational drives of horses and children, make the horse an ideal companion therapist in the provision of clinical services to behaviorally and developmentally challenged children and adolescents. The similarities of equine social responsibilities and herd discipline to parental responsibilities and rearing of children add additional efficacy to this model in the treatment of families. With proper training and experience, suitably motivated clinicians can master the use ECP for use in practice with at-risk youth and their families in both residential and outpatient settings. With exploration and research, the authors are confident ECP will ultimately become an empirically supported and recognized form of treatment.

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