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continued[®]

Horses and Mental Health

An OT Perspective

Presented by:
Gina Taylor, OT

continued[®]

- **Presenter Disclosure:** Gina Taylor received an honorarium for presenting this course. Non-financial: Gina Taylor has no relevant non-financial relationships to disclose.
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Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Contrast the frames of reference used for hippotherapy to those used when addressing mental health.
- Identify three interventions that incorporate horses and people with mental illness.
- Define the OTPF and how to apply interventions that incorporate horses into mental health treatment.

continued[®]

Introduction

- Occupational therapy takes a holistic view of all people and mental health is a priority for all clients, families, and systems that we work with.
- Occupational therapy practitioners address psychosocial deficits throughout the lifespan.
- Occupational therapy provides intervention for intensive, targeted and universal interventions.

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Terminology

- Therapeutic/adaptive riding
- Hippotherapy
- Equine assisted/facilitated psychotherapy
- Equine assisted learning/coaching
- Equine therapy

continued[®]

Medical and mental health applications with horses

Hippotherapy

- refers to how occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology professionals use evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement as a therapy tool to engage sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive systems to promote functional outcomes.
- Best practice dictates that occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology professionals integrate hippotherapy into the patient's plan of care, along with other therapy tools and/or strategies.

Equine assisted psychotherapy

- defined as an interactive process in which a licensed mental health professional working with or as an appropriately credentialed equine professional partners with suitable equine(s) to address psychotherapy goals set forth by the mental health professional and the client.

Methods and Models

Hippotherapy

- Dynamic Systems
- Biomechanical
- Motor learning
- Sensory Integration
- Principle of NDT

Psychosocial

- Task oriented
- Psychodynamic
- Cognitive Behavioral

Hippotherapy FOR

Dynamic Systems - the movement of the horse impacts multiple systems in the client

Biomechanical - the movement of the horse impact the clients' capacity for movement in daily occupations.

Motor learning - the horses' movement provides repetitive practice to improve motor outcomes

Sensory Integration - the movement of the horse is a multi-sensory experience and can be graded to improve processing and integration

Principle of NDT - weight bearing, weight shift, and key points of control are overlaid with the horses' movement

continued

Psychosocial Frames of Reference: Task Oriented

- The group interacts together to complete a project. The leader assists the group in directive or facilitative leadership.
- Some examples of working with horses in a task-oriented group include:
 - leading the horse through an obstacle course created by the group members,
 - cleaning the barn and making a nice “home” for the horses,
 - and completing a bulletin board for the facility about the different horses personalities.

Q2**continued**

Psychosocial Frames of Reference: Psychodynamic

- The psychodynamic frame of reference uses themes and symbols to focus on the client's ability to view themselves realistically and to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses.
- Examples of OT sessions incorporating horses would be
 - looking at the horse as a metaphor for other people or relationships in the client's life,
 - working with the horse as a living canvas and painting on the horse, or discussing the horse as a symbol.

Q3

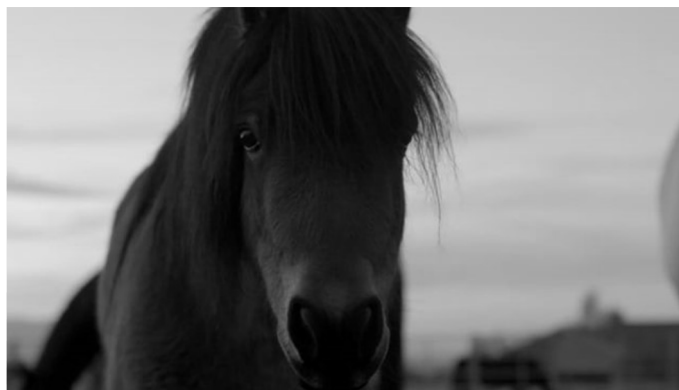
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Psychosocial Frames of Reference: Cognitive Behavioral

- Cognitive behavioral frame of reference focuses on the thoughts and behaviors of the client as an avenue of change. The client or group will examine thought patterns and belief and develop behavioral strategies to direct desired changes.
- Examples of OT sessions including horses and using CBT are:
 - examining the clients' or group's perceptions of the horses' behavior - "The horse didn't like me," or "That brown horse always walks away from me."
 - Other aspects may include journaling about sessions and working on stress management and coping skills.

continued

Horses and human health



Video Credit: [EAGALA](#)

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An OT perspective

- Occupational therapists working on mental health and illness with clients and incorporating horses have ample opportunity to draw from established OT frames of reference and treatment groups.
- Horses add an experiential learning component to the OT sessions that allow the OT practitioner to address task completion, self awareness, coping skills, and stress management and occupational performance through novel situations presented by the horse or horses in the group.

continued

Intensive Interventions

- Characterized by AOTA as interventions directed at clients with a mental illness or diagnosis.
- The OTP is working with a specific client or group to address occupational performance deficits associated with their diagnosis.
- Example: The OTP runs a group for veterans with PTSD every week to address ADL and IADL skills. The horses provide opportunities for the group members to practice skills, assess their own physiological reactions to stress, and develop coping skills while performing IADL skills.

Q6

continued

Targeted Intervention

- Targeted interventions address groups or populations of people at-risk for developing mental illness.
- The OTP is addressing performance skill deficits or occupational performance areas to improve mental health and impact risk-factors.
- Example: The OTP is working with 4 children in foster care to address issues of trust and attachment. The horses provides a stable partner for developing trust and bonding.

continued

Universal Interventions

- Universal interventions are aimed at promoting mental health.
- The OTP is providing outreaching and prevention groups or services.
- Example: The OTP works with a school to provide a bullying prevention program. The school children observe a herd of horses and discuss the role of the herd leader and what horse behaviors may look like in groups of people.

Q4

Why horses?

- Horses are herd animals and respond to social interactions with others.
- Horses are prey animals and respond to factors in their environment.
- Horses live in a social hierarchy and can include humans in their hierarchy.
- Horses have complex neurological and sensory systems and humans can interact with these systems.
- Clients can participate in horse care to improve ADL and IADL skills.



Vigilance

- Horses are keen observers of their environment and the herd members in their group. This vigilance is something that many clients in OT sessions can understand.
- Clients with anxiety, OCD, and PTSD also struggle with vigilance or hypervigilance.
- Horses may mirror a client's behavior or emotions. This can allow the OTP to direct the client towards self-reflection.
- The OTP can use the horse's behavior and interactions for feedback and opportunities for the client to check in and process what is happening in the moment.

continued

Congruence

- Congruence is the fit between the person's internal state or feelings and their outward behaviors. Incongruence would be acting confident or tough when feeling scared. When you are congruent, your internal state of being matches your external state of being.
- Horses can feel the person's internal state doesn't match their facial expressions, words, or their body language.
- The OTP can use the horses' reactions to confront the client or group on their incongruence.
- Congruent behaviors are key to successful human relationships

Q5

continued

Co-regulation

- Horses have a well developed central nervous system that seeks homeostasis and is impacted by the behavior of other horses.
- Humans can impact and be impacted by the state of the horses' nervous system. The OTP can mobilize the calming effect of the horse to provide a co-regulation effect on a dysregulated client.
- Higher functioning clients can work on self-regulation to produce a calming effect on a dysregulated horse.

Horse CARE Protocol

- The Horse CARE protocol is an example of a 10-week mental health and wellness program designed on the science in the book “Four Ways to Click: Rewire Your Brain for Stronger, More Rewarding Relationship.”
- This group protocol incorporates horses and follows an OT centered view and intervention focus.
- Topics include ADL's, roles, rhythms, and social interactions and engagement in meaningful activities.

Q7

Occupations: ADLs and IADLs

Self-care is an activity of daily living. We engage in ADL's for our own health and well-being as well as those we are responsible for. Grooming and hygiene can be a daily calming routine.

- Introduce “body scan,” “arousal regulation,” and “co-regulation.”
- Discuss in the context of grooming and daily routines.

- Grooming can be an activity of co-regulation. This is an opportunity to assess the clients' autonomic state through self-assessment and equine feedback.
- Focus on forming a limbic connection between the horse and human allowing a co-regulation to flow between both parties so that both feel calmed and soothed. Brushing relaxes both the horse and client.
- Facilitator brings attention to what the horse is communicating.

Calm - Smart Vagus Nerve (SVN)

- Develop a trustworthy relationship
- Herd= relational safety group
- Use Anchors to refocus
- Identify a positive relational moment (PRM) with the horse

continued Habits, Routines, and Roles

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What roles have you occupied over time (daughter, son, student, warrior, patient, worker, wife, husband, father, mother, caretaker)? What roles do you identify with? What are the behaviors expected by society of these roles? What activities do you do to "fit in" to these roles? Where do you feel that you fit in? What internal feedback do you experience when you feel "left out" of a core group or role that you identify with? 	<p>For horses, being part of the herd is essential and being left out is dangerous. Clients will complete a herd observation of a group of horses in an arena or pasture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does the client see in the herd? Are there metaphors for their life or groups that they are part of? <p>Horses function within a herd, while maintaining their own personalities. They are accepted as whole.</p>	<p>Accepted - Dorsal Anterior Cingulate Cortex (dACC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling part of a group or feeling that you do not belong to a group Soothe and process feelings of social anxiety/isolation
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continued Performance Skills

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you "see" yourself? Create a picture of yourself in arts/crafts media or descriptive language. What roles do you identify with? What activities are part of these roles? Humans possess internal "maps" of themselves. Body mandala is a term for the harmony of the mind's picture of the body. Pictures will be taken throughout the session to provide a literal aspect to the mirroring of the client and horse. Clients will complete a body scan prior to the exercises today and use feeling/thoughts language. Experiential practice helps the client bridge the learning to their daily life. 	<p>Horses are aware and cautious about new objects in their environments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clients observe herd members exposed to novel stimuli and practice reading the horses' emotions. Clients self-reflect to see if they felt any changes in their body as they watched the horses experience a spectrum of feelings regarding the novel objects. Clients receive feedback regarding the intensity of the horses' reactions. Clients then work with the horses desensitizing them to objects that raise their caution and curiosity. Clients can name themselves, the horses, and the novel objects in metaphorical terms. <p>Working through challenges allows both partners to mirror positive emotions such as trust, respect, and courage.</p>	<p>Resonant - the Mirror system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Seeing" another in a literal and metaphorical sense Practice reading emotions Cultivate awareness of emotions in your body Emotional spectrum/shades practice Rhythm of connection and disconnection Feeling/thoughts In-person practice/experiential
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OTPF Review

The OTPF can be used to provide a framework for OT sessions incorporating horses. This allows us to communicate with other OTPs and professionals in a way that is consistent.



The OTPF can be used to describe client factors and performance skills as well as the OT process and outcomes such as to promote, create, or restore.

continued

Application of the OTPF: Occupations/ADLs

- OTP's focus on addressing meaningful occupations with clients; when incorporating horses many ADLs can be addressed:
 - Clients can groom a horse and reflect on the ADL of hygiene in their own life. How did the horse look before and after grooming? What purpose does grooming a horse serve?
 - Dressing: Horses wear a variety of tack and blankets during certain weather. Clients can assist in tacking up a horse or putting on blankets for turnout. The OTP may be assessing the skills needed for the client to improve independent dressing.

Q8

continued

OTPF: Performance Patterns: Habits, Routines and Roles

- Performance patterns assist clients in achieving personal goals such as employment, education, independent living, or sobriety.
- OTPs can work with clients or groups and horses to address habits, routines and roles (or role acquisition).
- Habits - horses like familiarity and prefer to be approached and haltered the same way every time
- Routines - horses expect to be fed and cared for at the same time of day; clients can assist in everyday barn routines

continued

OTPF: Performance Skills

- Common areas to address include sensory and praxis skills, social skills, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication.
- Through the understanding of the horses' physiology the OTP can work with clients and groups on stress management, anger management, or executive functioning.
- Group activities and team building sessions are common interventions to include horses into OT sessions.

Q9

Performance skills examples

- Sensory and praxis skills can be addressed by having clients find a sit spot in a field of horses and tune into the natural sounds of the horses grazing, moving, and vocalizing.
- Social skills can be addressed by having a group of clients problem solve together how to safely move a horse into a box or area of the arena without touching the horse.
- Emotional regulation can be addressed through having a client with anger issues work with a horse that is sensitive to incongruent behaviors.
- Interpersonal communication skills can be targeted through task-oriented groups that have clients plan and execute an activity around the barn to improve the stable or promote the facility to others with similar mental health needs.

Occupational Therapy Outcomes

- Create/promote: Clients develop health living routines by caring for horses (physical activity).
- Establish/restore: Client address social skills and communication in a group with several horses.
- Maintain: Clients attend as volunteers at the facility in a peer support group to maintain sobriety.
- Modify: not directly applicable, but OTP may address with information gained in interventions with horses
- Prevent: develop a list of stress management cues to prevent illness symptoms from interfering with work roles

continued

CASE STUDY



continued

8-week group to address social skills



6 Adolescents with identified learning and emotional disabilities



3 veterans that have self-identified as isolating from social interactions



1 client with bipolar disorder who is having difficulty with her marriage and relationships with her children

continued

Outcomes: What can we expect?

- Group 1: Adolescents will use appropriate social greetings one another.
- Group 2: Veterans will identify benefits of social interactions.
- Client 3: Client will improve her ability to be congruent in her verbal and non-verbal communications.

Interventions: what will we do?

- Group 1: Adolescents will develop a greeting habit with horses. The group members will practice approaching the horses showing the back of their hand and touching the horses' shoulder before haltering.
- Group 2: Veterans will do a herd observation and discuss the benefits of living in a herd. The discussion will be facilitated to explore the ways the horses interact and how they can seek these interactions in their daily life.
- The client will work with one horse and attempt to accomplish the task of catching, haltering, and leading the horse to the barn. The client will need to demonstrate adequate self regulation, congruence, and communication skills to be successful. The OTP will lead the processing to help the client apply the experience to her interactions with her family.



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Questions?

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