

# PSYCHO-EDUCATION

## applied in Equine Assisted Therapy

The presentation was produced as part of the European program, approved by ERASMUS+:

**“Horses teach me how to find «my way»”**

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On behalf of **Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece**  
**T.R.A.G.**



under  
**Erasmus+**  
**Program**





*“Tell me  
and I will forget.  
Show me  
and I might remember.  
Make me participate  
and I will understand”*

Confucius, 450 BC



# PSYCHO-EDUCATION

## MEANING - DEFINITION

- Education offered to individuals to empower themselves and deal with their condition in an optimal way. The person's own capabilities, resources and coping skills are strengthened and used to contribute to their own health and wellbeing on a long-term basis (Bäuml 2006)
- Education about a certain and/or a series of situations and conditions that cause psychological stress. Once people better understand a condition, they feel more in control of the situation and this in turn reduces the stress associated with it. (Cummings, 2007)
- Method that promotes personal and interpersonal maturity/ development and prevent future difficulties by implementing collective educational, developmental and systemic strategies in the context of interaction in the here-and-now. (Association of Specialist in GroupWork, ASGW)



# PSYCHO-EDUCATION

## TYPES - PURPOSES

### ➤ **Educational / Learning**

Teaching skills and activities promoting individual learning

### ➤ **Skills Training**

Instruction of life-skills, interpersonal communication, problem solving.

### ➤ **Team Building and Group Training**

Training in group working, resolving conflict, effective communication.

### ➤ **Personal Development**

Make people understand themselves (personal & interpersonal issues), through interacting in a safe-supportive setting.

### ➤ **Group Therapy and Support Groups**

Acquiring knowledge and skills for facing emotional difficulties and being functional in a personal and social way.

### ➤ **Life-transitions Groups**

Helping individuals understand, accept and adapt to life changes, challenges or situations.



# PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL SESSION STRUCTURE

## ❖ **Opening phase**

Preparation for the session, news exchange, connecting to previous teachings.

## ❖ **Working phase**

Introducing activities, work upon them, connection to the treatment goals

## ❖ **Processing phase**

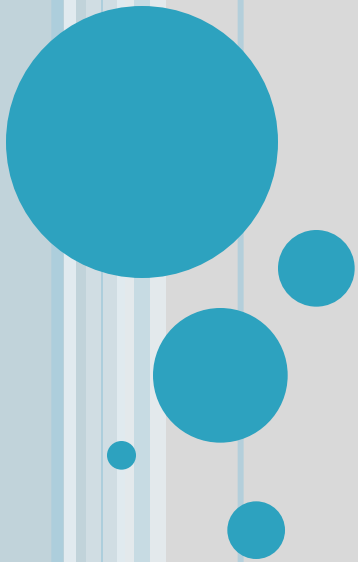
Understanding what happened to the working phase, by observing (oneself / others), feeling or discussing.

## ❖ **Closing phase**

Building deliberate & positive termination of session and transition to the environment out of the session.



**HOW AND WHY  
PSYCHO-EDUCATION HAS A  
THERAPEUTIC IMPACT IN INDIVIDUALS  
WORKING WITH  
THE HORSE**



# HOW HORSES AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT SERVE PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHO-EDUCATION

## Horses

- U Non-judgemental quality of the horse, as a basic instruction in Psycho-Education, ensures the *safe & supportive setting*
- U Social character of the horse, gives constant *opportunities for interaction* (verbal / non-verbal)
- U Horse's ability to mirror human feelings/behaviors helps people develop *self-awareness* in a non-verbal way, (most effective)
- U Horse's responsiveness is the best tool for *projective learning*
- U Horse's basic input: Movement, which is the major human need for mental & body health

## Horse Environment

- U Naturalistic environment as the best tool for essential & long-lasting learning
- U Multi-setting environment (stable, yard, field, track, arena) helps generalization in multiple settings in life (home, school, playground).  
*People do not just acquire a skill in a specific place, or under specific circumstances.*
- U Multi-stimuli environment enhances self-educating, by having multiple opportunities for exploring and experiential learning

# WHY PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL PLAY IS IMPORTANT IN THERAPY WITH THE HORSES

## Play - Human treatment

- ☺ Trains people in emotional, cognitive, behavioral and social skills, in all developmental stages, which
- ☺ fulfills psychological, cognitive, social and behavioral needs, and
- ☺ emotions, thoughts and wishes are freely projected during playing and to playing objects.
- ☺ Provides distance from real existing problems, that
- ☺ gives freedom and opportunity to experience situations, without the limitations and fears of reality, so
- ☺ Searching, testing and applying of new strategies of problem solving.
- ☺ Role play give safety distance  
*(in-and-out of the role, change roles)*

## Play - Horses

- ☺ Play is an experience-based action and matches the way horses are also learning!
- ☺ Horses understand and respond to non-verbal cues, therefore, we have maximum interaction with people!
- ☺ With horses we have optimum sensory stimulation in various ways, and at the same time, chances of discharging.
- ☺ Maximum combination of – simultaneous- motor, cognitive, social and emotional skill building.
- ☺ Horses love to play!  
*(Be aware of respecting their needs and having them introduced to the procedure with horse-based manner)*





## Playing

**Erik Erikson:** *“Play is the medium, by which the child decreases stress and achieves catharsis”*

**Melanie Klein:** *“Through play unconscious fantasies, conflicts and stresses are expressed”*

**Fred Donaldson:** *“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play, children learn how to learn”*


**Vygotsky:** *“Child’s play is a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired”*



## PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL METHOD ENHANCES PEOPLE'S THERAPY WITH THE HORSES

- ❑ Is based on the resources of people for initiations (*not forcing to an activity, not preaching for teaching*)
- ❑ Can be applied in Single and Group Treatment
- ❑ Intervenes on various different areas of difficulties: Sensory, Motor, Emotional, Social, Psychological, Cognitive, Behavioral and combines them simultaneously.
- ❑ Serves –also- as a precautionary method, since, it allows non-realistic situations to be experienced and explored.
- ❑ Is applied in various ways of engaging the horse and allows various combinations of members (*In-hand leading, Back-leading, Triangle leading, Without hands, In the lunging line*)
- ❑ The Psycho-Educational session structure can include all activities, that Horses' qualities provide us.

Indicative example:

- Opening phase: Grooming, Tacking, Leading
  - Working phase: Riding, Vaulting, Playing
  - Processing phase: Rehearse activity, discuss upon it, self-observing
  - Closing phase: Relaxation on riding, leading, un-tacking, free time
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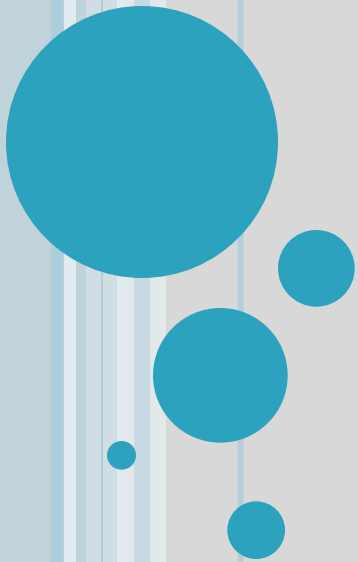


## Examples of Activities

- Explore horse's body
- Get familiar with tools and tack
- Groom the horse
- Tack the horse
- Lead the horse
- Play with the horse from the ground (*material free or with*)
- Ride the horse
- Vaulting
- Role play with the horse and/or group members
- Relaxing exercises on the horse
- Exploring freedom, choices from the ground
- Get "in touch"
- Say goodbye (*treat? hug? Look??*)



# **INDIVIDUAL TREATMENT IN PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL THERAPY WITH THE HORSE**



# EXAMPLES when to choose Individual Treatment

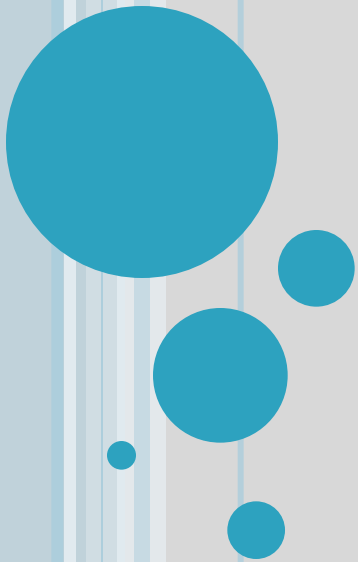
- ✓ If safety issues cannot be guaranteed (*ex. excessive need of attention, need of continuous body support, etc.*)
- ✓ If you wish to maximize information transference in a manner that is uniquely suited to the person's circumstances
- ✓ If the person wishes to retain privacy & confidentiality and that, prevents him of being expressive -although he wants to- (*ex. Psychotic: paranoid/ obsessive ideas are usually a taboo for people that have them*)
- ✓ If the person is seriously threatened by group situations (*ex. feeling anxious/stressed at the thought of it*)
- ✓ If the person is being a threat for other members of a group (*ex. Highly aggressive, homicidal or suicidal*)
- ✓ If the person has been bodily or sexually abused

However...

- ❖ Individual Treatment can serve as a “preparation” for entering a Group session, since,
- ❖ persons have the chance to focus in their own thoughts & emotions, explore their resources and difficulties.



**GROUP TREATMENT  
IN PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL THERAPY  
WITH THE HORSE**



# Factors of Effective Psycho-Ed Group Treatment

➤ Goal setting and aim of the forming group

Having a clear view of the goals and aims of the group, helps people understand the reason of belonging to such a team.

➤ Size of the group and selection of members

Members should be of similar developmental stage, *not necessarily* of similar chronological age or pathology.

➤ Rules that determine the structure and function of the group

All members must feel safe in a structured setting with justice and fairness.

➤ Experienced trainer/therapist & Horse handler

The place of meetings and setting should be safe, comforting & relaxing promoting the facilitation of free expression and interaction.

➤ Session Plan

Having a plan for each session (Theme-Goals-Method-Activities-Structure) helps keeping the **flow**, which is mostly important to Psycho-Ed.

➤ Flexibility

The coordinator should have the ability to sense the current dynamics of the group or individual members, have a repertoire of activities and adjust the structure accordingly, in order to keep cohesiveness, embodiment, etc.



# Factors of Effective Psycho-Ed Group Treatment

## ➤ Building trust & communication

In a climate of acceptance, understanding & lack of criticism, members feel confident to interact and communicate their inner thoughts, or even their maladaptive tendencies in a productive way.

## ➤ Careful method of working

- **Individually:** Members have the chance to focus in their own abilities, emotions and thoughts and then share them in the group.
- **In groups of two:** Members experience the difficulties and advantages of one-to-one interaction (closeness)
- **In subgroups:** Members are challenged to work for their team, take different roles, experience cooperation and competition, towards success or failure. At the same time, members feel safer to exchange ideas & emotions, therefore, differentiations can be worked more effectively.
- **Entire group:** Members have the chance to listen and learn through others experiences, resources and difficulties. Find common elements with others and get the sense of belonging!!





# Factors of Effective Psycho-Ed Group Treatment

- **Coordinating ability** of the trainer/therapist (leader of the group)
  - Ability to overcome crisis and challenges
  - Having empathy, respect, lack of criticism and honesty cause successive influences that encourage development and evolution of the cooperation.
- **Dynamics and Motivation**

Keeping the dynamics of the group high and the level of motivation for members and horses, maximizes the development of communication and interaction among all.
- **Role of the coordinator**
  - Maintaining a comfort & safety climate, so that everyone takes the time & rhythm needed for thinking, processing, reacting, etc.
  - Act like a facilitator of the circumstances, rather than, of the members
  - Reframing situations and give meaning (cause-effect processing)
  - Coordinate but also teach
  - Adjust his role according to the need of the group (Aim: progressively less involvement and interference.







*THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR ATTENTION*

