

## *WHAT IS THERAPEUTIC RIDING? (EQUINE ASSISTED ACTIVITIES)*

Therapeutic Riding incorporates specialized horse-assisted activities that provide physical, mental and psychological benefits to individuals with special needs. It has been recognized as providing therapeutic benefits to people with disabilities. Therapeutic Riding highly emphasizes the combination of learning a rewarding activity (horseback riding) while achieving the best physical and functional levels possible. This approach includes working toward goals in the areas of sport, recreation, education and communication. A specially trained therapeutic riding instructor directs either a group lesson or a private lesson depending on the needs and goals of the client. These clients begin as young as 4 years of age. The weight limit typically is 200 pounds for safety of horse, rider, leader and side-walker(s). It is important that specific procedures and standards are followed by each therapeutic riding program to ensure the optimum safety of all participants and to achieve the desired goals of the program.

## *WHAT IS HIPPO THERAPY? (EQUINE ASSISTED THERAPY)*

The Greek word "Hippos" means horse. "Hippotherapy" is defined as therapy with the use of a horse. In other words, a physical therapist, occupational therapist or speech-language pathologist uses the horse as a tool for treatment to achieve therapy goals. Hippotherapy sessions are directed and performed only by one or more of the following **licensed therapists: Physical, Occupational and/or Speech-Language Pathologists**. The horse's training and handling is overseen by an expert trainer and horse handler. The Hippotherapy sessions are based on individual goals determined by the **therapist** for each client. These clients begin as young as 2 years of age. The weight limit typically is 200 pounds for safety of horse, rider, leader and side-walker(s). The therapist and trainer choose each horse according to its size, movement and gait pattern. Emphasis is placed on achieving **therapy goals**, rather than on achieving horseback riding, educational or social skills. Special equipment and various developmental positions are used to help the client reach these **therapy goals**.

## *WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HIPPO THERAPY?*

The three-dimensional pelvic movement of the horse, which closely simulates the pelvic movement of the human while walking, is a unique and valuable tool for treatment to achieve the therapy goals. This consistent, rhythmical movement, along with the warmth generated from the horse, promotes many benefits, such as, increased circulation, increased trunk and pelvic mobility, improved balance/coordination, improved postural control, improved sensory processing and improved communication and vocalization.

\*\*\*There are many questions that should be asked by anyone interested in taking part in this challenging activity. Whether you are a parent, a rider, a volunteer or a donor - take time to ask questions in order to gain a better understanding and knowledge of Hippotherapy and/or Therapeutic Riding. The following questions will help you in assessing the safety and quality of the program in which you may choose to become involved.

- **Is the program affiliated with an approved operating center through the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) or the American Hippotherapy Association (AHA)**
- **What are the qualifications of each therapist/riding instructor?**  
Equine and educational background? NARHA instructor certification? (i.e., registered, advanced..) Hippotherapy Specialist Board Certified? AHA registered therapist in Classic Hippotherapy?

- **Are the therapists/instructors familiar with the precautions/contraindications associated with Hippotherapy/Therapeutic Riding?**
- **Does the Hippotherapy/TR program require a Physician's Prescription and/or release for participation or treatment?**
- **What is the equine background of the horse handler?**
- **Are the clients seen one at a time or in a group?**
- **What type of activities does the therapist do before/after the session?  
Does the instructor consult with PT,OT or SLP as needed?**
- **Does the program use appropriate safety equipment?**
  - ASTM-SEI approved helmets
  - Safety stirrups
  - Handholds, safety belts, etc...
- **Do they have a safely built, fully enclosed indoor/outdoor arena accessible to people with disabilities?**
- **Is the program equipped with a NARHA approved ramp and mounting block?**
- **Is the staff trained in FIRST AID/CPR?**
- **What is the program's emergency procedure(s) and are all of the volunteers and staff trained in this procedure?**
- **What are the roles of the volunteers and do they receive special training?**
- **What type of selection process is used to determine which volunteers will be used during the lesson?**

### **RESOURCES:**

#### **North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA):**

NARHA is the national association for Therapeutic Riding. It establishes industry standards, policies and procedures that promote safety to all participants in the program. It is an excellent resource for obtaining extensive information regarding Therapeutic riding or information on a particular center in your area. Call 1-800-369 RIDE (7433) or [www.narha.org](http://www.narha.org)

**Note:** Being NARHA accredited or affiliated does not guarantee that a center will be safe, accident free or appropriate for individuals with disabilities. However, adhering carefully to the NARHA standards is a good indication of a conscientious riding center.

#### **American Hippotherapy Association, Inc. (AHA):**

The AHA is an affiliate partner of NARHA and promotes research, education and communication among those therapists who use the horse in a treatment approach based on principles of classic hippotherapy. Call 1-888-851-4592 or [www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org](http://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org).