

We're All in this Together:

Addressing Compassion Fatigue and Unleashing Resilience through Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy and Coaching

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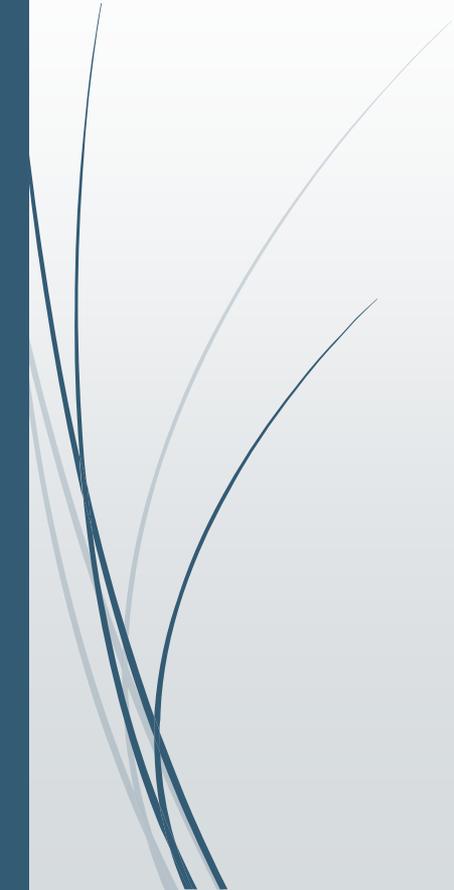


LOOK OUTSIDE THE BOX

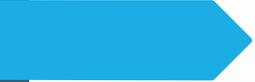




Learning Objectives



- ❖ Learn about the process and efficacy of equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) and animal-assisted psychotherapy (AAP) and how this approach can also “help the helpers” unleash their own resilience and potential through resilience-focused Equine-Assisted Coaching.
- ❖ Learn about recent research on EAP and the human-animal bond and take away tools on how animals in our own lives can help build rapport, trust and connection more effectively with ourselves and those we serve.
- ❖ Experience equine-assisted coaching in an interactive, experiential exercise, gain insight into your own resilience in the face of challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic.



Introducing Resilience: The Skovholt Assessment



AAT and EAP: What? Why? How?



- ❖ But first, a few notes on terminology
- ❖ Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)
 - “Psychological and socially integrative interventions with animals for children, youths, adults and senior citizens with cognitive, social-emotional and motoric disabilities, and mental problems, and for focused support. It also includes health- promoting, preventive and rehabilitative measures,” (Battacharya and Mukhopadhyay, 2014)
 - Very broad
 - Studied in many species, including dogs, cats, rabbits, farm animals, birds, aquarium fish, reptiles, and horses
- ❖ Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)
 - Includes ridden and ground-based activities with horses
 - EAGALA

EAGALA - What, Why, and How



- ❖ What
 - Ground-based, experiential therapy which harnesses' horses unique nature and abilities to facilitate personal growth and exploration in clients (Thomas et al., 2016)
 - Can be structured or unstructured activities



EAGALA - What, Why, and How (con't.)

❖ Why

- Horses are social herd animals, authentic, and real; are most themselves and most effective within their natural environment
- For humans involved in sessions, horses can also function as metaphor and as a novel stimulus, providing opportunities for personal growth and reflection.

❖ How

- Two facilitators -- a mental health professional and an equine specialist, present to ensure the horses' wellbeing and monitor for any safety issues
 - Both provide guidance and ask questions to facilitate clients' processes of self-exploration and growth



AAT/EAP Research and Why it Matters: Theories of AAP/EAP

- ❖ Biophilia hypothesis
 - Posits that animals have a "healing presence" (Bhattacharyya & Mukhopadhyay, 2014)
 - More "magical," harder to validate
- ❖ Physiological hypothesis
 - Considers the measurable physiological changes humans have when in contact with animals
 - Decrease in heart rate and blood pressure and increase oxytocin and other pleasure chemicals
 - Animals generally have a calming effect on people.
 - Animals as "anodyne," (Fournier et al., 2021)
- ❖ Various lines of AAP research indicate reduction in physical and mental distress



AAP/EAP Research and Why it Matters: But, does it work?

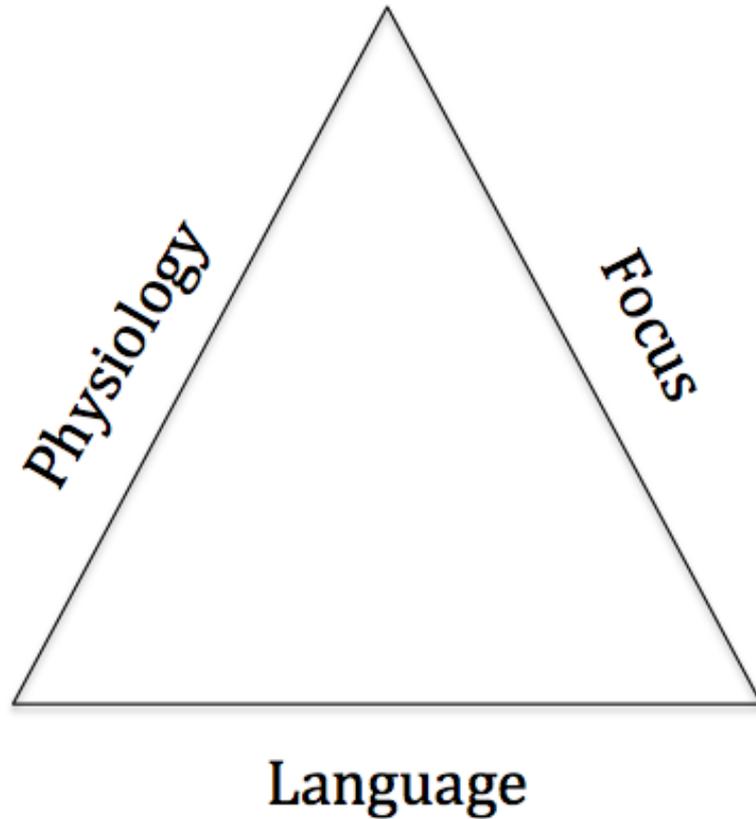
- ❖ Efficacy has been demonstrated with...
 - Canine-Assisted Therapy
 - Internalizing and externalizing disorders in adolescents, including anxiety, PTSD, and anger (Jones et al., 2019)
 - Donkey-Assisted Therapy
 - Improving wellbeing in individuals with intellectual disability
 - Feline-assisted therapy
 - Increasing physical activity; improving mood, memory, and concentration; reducing stress, loneliness, and isolation in elderly individuals living in nursing homes
 - Aquarium fish
 - Increasing positive nutritional lifestyle choices
 - Reptiles
 - Decreasing externalizing and internalizing symptoms in children with emotional issues (Murry & Allen, 2015)
- ❖ So, yes, *but*...
 - More good quality research is still necessary, despite an explosion in popularity
 - Studies have suffered from no control groups, lack of random assignment, lack of follow-up data (Anestis, et al., 2014), and confounding variables (Utz, 2010)



AAP/EAP Research and Why it Matters: AAP/EAP and Resilience

- ❖ Having animals (specifically dogs, as studied by Martinez, 2019) in sessions may help counselors be less disengaged and more effective, due to the perception of increased social support.
 - Incorporating creative therapeutic approaches may also help reduce disengagement and stress
- ❖ Pet ownership, generally, is associated with better physical health (, companionship (including spontaneity, relaxation, shared pleasure, and increased quality of life; McNicolas, et al., 2005)
- ❖ Pet owners also have greater life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing (Bao & Schreer, 2016)

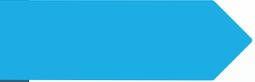
Animals and the Triad



Animals and Resilience (Joy)



- ❖ What animals can teach us
- ❖ Companion animals as helpers
 - Owning pets has physical benefits
 - Pets can decrease depression, anxiety, and sympathetic nervous system arousal
- ❖ Skovholt & Trotter Mathison (2016): Nurture the self to increase personal and professional vitality and prevent burnout
 - Humorous self
 - Loving self
 - Physical self
 - Playful self
 - Recreational self
 - Relaxing self
- ❖ Animals also provide companionship and social support (one-way caring relationships)



Conclusion (Liz)

*Live life as if
everything is rigged
in your favor.*

-Rumi



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