

# **Program Development and Interim Evaluation of Riding Free™: Equine Therapy for Children Diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

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# Background

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disabling anxiety disorder in children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events.

The National Comorbidity Survey-Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A) estimated that 31.9% of children in the United States suffer from a type of anxiety disorder.

Of that 31.9%, 10.3% met the clinical criteria for PTSD. Yet very few programs exist to meet community needs.



# Riding Free™: Two Stages

## Program Development

### YEAR ONE

- ▶ Focus groups were held to collaborate with community stakeholders to assess the need in the local population.
- ▶ Extensive research in current ET research, PTSD in children, and available, pre-validated measures.
- ▶ 12 objective driven lesson plans were drafted to address the specific needs of the afflicted children and overall goals of the program.

## Research and Implementation

### YEAR 2, 3, and GOING...

- ▶ Research approved by an FDA/FWA credentialed Institutional Review Board (IRB)-Arcadia University
- ▶ “Dear Doctor” letters were distributed in the community to create awareness in the field.
- ▶ Doctors recommended the program to their clients.
- ▶ Enrolled children to the program
- ▶ Study launched and healing began!
- ▶ Current Research Status: N= 20; 16 completed, 3 currently in program, last participant to start in November.



# Purpose

Research shows equine therapy is beneficial in children with various emotional and behavioral disorders, including PTSD.

The Riding Free™ equine therapy program was designed by the author for individuals diagnosed with PTSD. The program goals are to improve the quality of life and reduce PTSD symptoms.

The purpose of this study was to conduct an interim evaluation to assess feasibility of the program, demonstrated by retention rate and participants' achievement of program objectives.



# Methods

- ▶ Developed after thorough research in PTSD in children, equine therapy, and effective program development.
- ▶ Focus groups were held to address PTSD needs in the community. Weekly quality circles were held to discuss program details during implementation with first five children.
- ▶ Implemented at Sebastian Riding Associates, a non-profit, therapeutic riding facility located in Collegeville, Pa.
- ▶ Complementary program to add to participants' existing therapy.
- ▶ Children diagnosed with PTSD, ages 7 through 17.

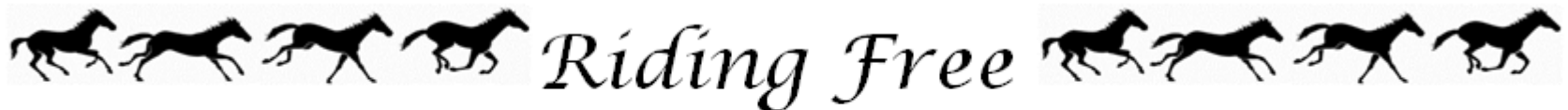
# The Riding Free™ Program

## Mission

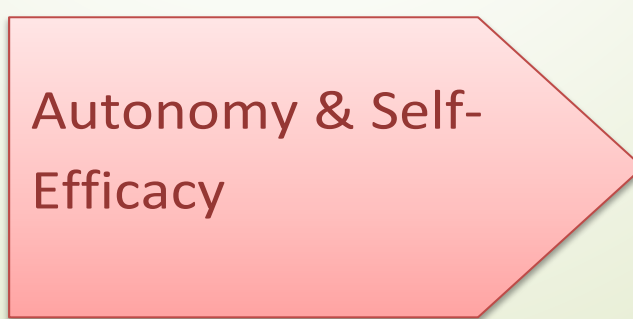
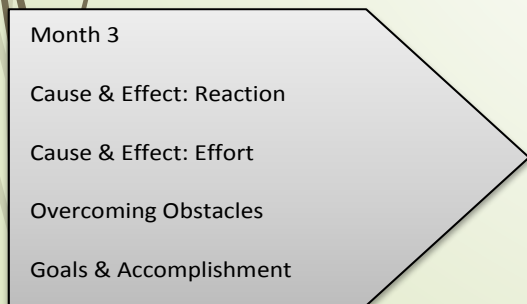
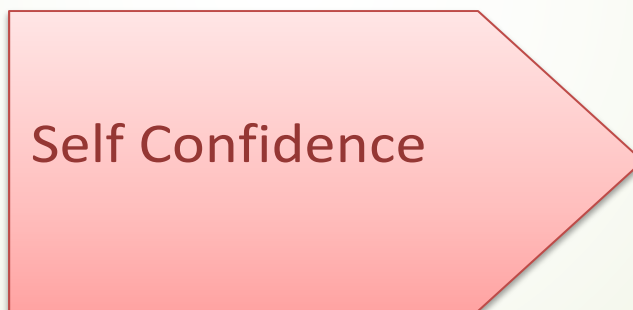
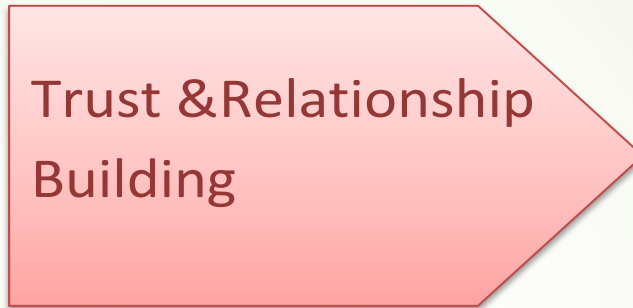
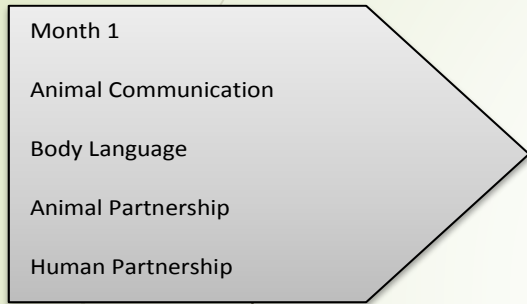
To improve the quality of life and lower PTSD symptoms in children diagnosed with PTSD through Equine Therapy.

## Goals

- to improve trust & relationship skills
- To improve self-confidence
- To improve self-efficacy/autonomy



# Conceptual Model: Theory of Implementation





# Methods



- ▶ Program consists of twelve goal-driven sessions to improve social skills/trust, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.
- ▶ Total of 49 session objectives, based on learning and skill acquisition.
- ▶ Records from the first 9 participants to complete the program were evaluated.
- ▶ Attendance was recorded and achievement of objectives was noted in participants' Student Activity Charts.
- ▶ The retention and program completion rates were assessed by reviewing attendance records. The objective achievement rate was assessed by reviewing participants' Student Activity Charts.





# Results



- ▶ There were no participant withdrawals.
- ▶ Each participant completed all 12 program sessions, showing a **100%** attendance rate.
- ▶ The group's average for achieving session objectives was **97.96%**.
- ▶ The most common objective not met was trotting independently.



# Parent Responses

- Child learned communication, expectations, achievement, trust, relationships, learned boundaries;
- Healed the family, as a whole;
- Child grew emotionally, gained confidence, verbalized trauma;
- Child learned that they are in control of their life, not the trauma, just like she can control a huge horse.
- Child came with a lot of fears, and has now learned to conquer them;
- Passion! Drive! Child now wants to be a vet;
- Child came off medication (off of 8 out of 10);
- Can't imagine not ever having this experience for child and family;
- Brings child to a peaceful state, which is hard to come by;
- Need to offer the program to more children with PTSD.



# Conclusions

The **100%** retention and attendance rates demonstrated the high feasibility of the program. Likewise, it indicated a dedicated engagement from both the participant and parents.

The high rate (**97.96%**) of achieving objectives demonstrated both the high feasibility of the program and appropriateness of session plans.



# Conclusions

- ▶ Results suggested the session objectives are attainable, yet remain challenging at an appropriate level.
- ▶ Results suggested the program sessions do not need modifications. However, to improve the overall objective achievement rate, it is suggested that any unmet objectives be repeated in later sessions, if possible.
- ▶ Results show the Riding Free™ program was feasible, engaged the participants and their families, and that its session objectives were achievable, supporting the goals of the program.