

Welcome

Founded in 1999, EAGALA is the leading international nonprofit association for professionals using equine therapy to address mental health and human development needs. Our vision is that every person worldwide will have access to these services known as [Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Equine Assisted Learning](#).



There are now [over 600 EAGALA programs](#), with professionals [trained and certified through EAGALA](#), providing services helping change the lives of people with a diverse range of struggles such as street children in Mexico and South Africa, those suffering from addictions, depression and trauma, and improving relationships in families and groups. EAGALA has over 4,000 members in [49 countries](#). [Support our efforts](#) and [learn more](#) about this exciting approach to helping people through horses!

What is EAP and EAL?



Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) incorporates horses experientially for emotional growth and learning. It is a collaborative effort between a licensed therapist and a horse professional working with the clients and horses to address treatment goals. Because of its intensity and effectiveness, it is considered a short-term, or "brief" approach.

EAP is experiential in nature. This means that participants learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses, and then processing (or discussing) feelings, behaviors, and patterns. This approach has been compared to the ropes courses used by therapists, treatment facilities, and human development courses around the world. But EAP has the added advantage of utilizing horses, dynamic and powerful living beings.

Not all programs or individuals who use horses practice Equine Assisted Psychotherapy. For one, licensed (in the U.S.) and properly qualified (outside the U.S.) mental health professionals need to be involved. The focus of EAP is not riding or horsemanship. The focus of EAP involves setting up ground activities involving the horses which will require the client or group to apply certain skills. Non-verbal communication, assertiveness, creative thinking and problem-solving, leadership, work, taking responsibility, teamwork and relationships, confidence, and attitude are several examples of the tools utilized and developed by EAP.



EAP is a powerful and effective therapeutic approach that has an incredible impact on individuals, youth, families, and groups. EAP addresses a variety of mental health and human development needs including behavioral issues, attention deficit disorder, PTSD, substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, relationship problems and communication needs.

Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) is similar to EAP but where the focus is on learning or educational goals. EAL still involves the team of mental health professional and horse professional working with the clients and horses. The focus however is on education and learning specific skills as defined by the individual or group, such as improved product sales for a company, leadership skills for a school group, or resiliency training for our military warriors. The potential applications for both EAP and EAL are limitless! For more information on the possibilities, contact us at EAGALA.



Why Horses?



Those who are familiar with horses recognize and understand the power of horses to influence people in incredibly powerful ways. Developing relationships, training, horsemanship instruction, and caring for horses naturally affects the people involved in a positive manner.

The benefits of work ethic, responsibility, assertiveness, communication, and healthy relationships has long been recognized. Horses naturally provide these benefits. The use of horses is growing and gaining popularity with the rise of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Equine Assisted Learning.

We are often asked, "Why horses? Why not other animals?"

Naturally intimidating to many, horses are large and powerful. This creates a natural opportunity for some to overcome fear and develop confidence. Working alongside a horse, in spite of those fears, creates confidence and provides wonderful insight when dealing with other intimidating and challenging situations in life.

Like humans, horses are social animals, with defined roles within their herds. They would rather be with their peers. They have distinct personalities, attitudes and moods; an approach that works with one horse won't necessarily work with another. At times, they seem stubborn and defiant. They like to have fun. In other words, horses provide vast opportunities for metaphorical learning, an effective technique when working with even the most challenging individuals or groups.

Horses require us to work, whether in caring for them or working with them. In an era when immediate gratification and the "easy way" are the norm, horses require people to be engaged in physical and mental work to be successful, a valuable lesson in all aspects of life.

Most importantly, horses mirror human body language. Many complain, "This horse is stubborn. That horse doesn't like me," etc. The lesson is that if they change themselves, the horses respond differently. Horses are honest, which makes them especially powerful messengers.



What is the EAGALA Model?

The EAGALA Model provides a standard and structure for providing Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Equine Assisted Learning sessions. Practicing within a model establishes a foundation of key values and beliefs, and provides a basis of good practice and professionalism. The EAGALA Model provides a framework of practice, but within that framework, there are infinite opportunities for creativity and adaptability to various therapeutic and facilitating styles.

The EAGALA Model

- **The Team Approach** – An Equine Specialist, a Mental Health professional, and horses work together with clients in all EAGALA sessions.
- **Focus on the ground** – No horseback riding is involved. Instead, effective and deliberate techniques are utilized where the horses are metaphors in specific ground-based experiences.
- **Solution-Oriented** – The basis of the EAGALA Model is a belief that all clients have the best solutions for themselves when given the opportunity to discover them. Rather than instructing or directing solutions, we allow our clients to experiment, problem-solve, take risks, employ creativity, and find their own solutions that work best for them.
- **Code of Ethics** - EAGALA has high standards of practice and ethics and an ethics committee and protocol for upholding these standards, ensuring best practices and the highest level of care.

The EAGALA Team

- **The Horse:** Horses have many characteristics which lend them to being effective agents of change, including honesty, awareness, and ability with nonverbal communication. The role of the horses in an EAGALA session is to be themselves.
- **The Equine Specialist (ES):** The ES chooses the horses to be used in sessions, works with the MH to structure sessions, keeps an equine log to document horse behaviors in sessions, stays aware of safety and welfare of clients, horses, and team, and makes observations of horse SPUD's (an EAGALA-developed observation framework taught in the certification training program) which can bring in potential metaphors.
- **The Mental Health Professional (MH):** The MH is responsible for treatment planning, documentation of clients, and ensuring ethical practice. The MH builds on the ES's horse observations, bringing in the metaphoric and therapeutic/learning relevance of the session.

