

Practices of therapists using equine facilitated/assisted psychotherapy in the treatment of adolescents diagnosed with depression: A qualitative study

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Abstract: This qualitative study explored the practices of credentialed therapists using Equine Assisted/Facilitated (EAP/EFP) psychotherapy in the treatment of adolescent depression. A purposive sample of 15 licensed therapists experienced in EAP/EFP was recruited through membership roles in 2 leading EAP/EFP organizations. Respondents treated inner-city, suburban, and rural adolescents, representing diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This study explored the role of the horse in EAP/EFP and identified theoretical influences that informed this type of treatment. Respondents perceived that interactions and exercises with the horses provided feedback mechanisms to the adolescents, as well as object representations of past and current relationships in which therapeutic change could take place. Respondents perceived EAP/EFP aided in increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as decreasing isolation in the depressed adolescents treated. Cognitive behavioral therapy, experiential therapy, Gestalt therapy, as well as object relations theory, were cited as theoretical and clinical approaches in EAP/EFP.

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