



## **Revised Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy Definition and New EFP Guidelines**

### **EFP Definition:**

EFP is defined as an interactive process in which a licensed mental health professional working with or as an appropriately credentialed equine professional, partners with suitable equine(s) to address psychotherapy goals set forth by the mental health professional and the client.

### **Guidelines for Providing Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy: PATH International's Unique Approach:**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to inform PATH International members, health care professionals, and education professionals about Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP).

EFP is a popular and emerging service provided by hundreds of PATH International centers and thousands of professionals in the United States and increasingly in other countries around the world. Evolution and growth has resulted in a wide variety of EFP approaches, methods, and programs.

PATH International's unique approach to EFP provides support for a diverse group of professionals serving an increasing range of clients. Services include clinical interventions conducted by licensed mental health professionals, as well as long-term psychotherapy.

The common denominator in all PATH International EFP services is the interaction with and participation by the equine.

The following information helps professionals interested in EFP interpret some of the key characteristics of the service.

**EFP is defined as an interactive process in which a licensed mental health professional working with or as an appropriately credentialed equine professional, partners with suitable equine(s) to address psychotherapy goals set forth by the mental health professional and the client.**

#### **I. About EFP**

- a. EFP is an interactive process in which individuals of all ages participate in clinically-structured equine activities to improve and enhance mental, emotional, and social functioning.
- b. Through relationships with equines, humans may recognize maladaptive behaviors. In order to feel safe throughout the process of healing and growth, it is essential that trust

and respect are developed between the human and the equine. Therefore, teaching clients about equines is beneficial in order to provide a deeper understanding and awareness of the equine partners.

- c. EFP professionals must obtain a signed “informed consent” from their client. This document describes the professional’s services, goals, credentials and philosophy for including equines in psychotherapeutic treatment.
- d. EFP differs from Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) as it is a form of psychotherapy and thus involves the processing of experiences, feelings, and thoughts while EFL involves discussion and educational content. EFP is client driven and the goals may vary where EFL usually has an end goal in mind at the start of the lesson.
- e. The goals for EFP range from making the unconscious conscious to treating maladaptive patterns and behaviors caused by mental illness, addiction, trauma, or abuse.
- f. Currently insufficient research evidence exists to substantiate best practices or evidence-based practices in EFP. Nonetheless, EFP professionals strive to implement evidence-based interventions when possible and seek to contribute accurate data to the growing research and literature in the field.

## **II. The Professional**

- a. EFP is provided by a mental health professional who is appropriately licensed or credentialed in his/her state of practice, is dually trained (licensed mental health professional and equine specialist/therapeutic riding instructor) or is partnering with an equine specialist or therapeutic riding instructor, and skilled or certified to provide EFP.
- b. It is the responsibility of the mental health professional to obtain the necessary training, education, supervision, and experience in any specialty area of practice.
- c. EFP is developing rapidly and therefore requires continuing education.
- d. EFP professionals may choose to provide EFP individually, or may use a team approach (licensed mental health professional, equine specialist, and/or other support staff). This treatment decision is made by the professional based upon their comfort with the method and the therapeutic needs of their client(s).
- e. EFP professionals are trained to interpret the equine/client interactions and provide feedback regarding the equine’s behavior, and in answering questions and/or assisting the client in the process of interpreting what the equine is communicating.
- f. If the needs of the client/participant exceed the training/practice of the EFP professional, procedures must be in place to refer the client to additional appropriate services.

## **III. The Client**

- a. There should be a written treatment plan in place that supports the use of EFP as a clinically appropriate intervention and includes criteria for discharge.
- b. Use of EFP as a clinically appropriate intervention should be adapted to the client’s goals, personality, and diagnoses. Clients should be screened for precautions and contraindications (see Standards for Accreditation and Certification Manual)
- c. The EFP professional should make informed decisions about when a client is suited and emotionally ready for such an interaction and when it would be contraindicated. Continued re-evaluation of the EFP service is critical to ensure appropriate use of the method.
- d. The professional is responsible for maintaining HIPPA compliant records.
- e. EFP professionals should be educated, familiar, and experienced in understanding equine behavior and the psychological and physiological factors that influence equines.

## **IV. The Equine**

- a. There should be a procedure in practice to select appropriate equines for EFP and to periodically reevaluate each equine for suitability.
- b. EFP professionals should be highly attuned to and aware of their equine partners. When the equine is responding to stimuli, these reactions and responses can facilitate a therapeutic or learning experience for the client/participant. In this manner, the EFP professional and the equine work together in partnership to facilitate the experience.
- c. The welfare of the equine should be assured at all times and the EFP activity must cease in the event that an equine displays unhealthy stress, fear or discomfort. Continued re-evaluation is critical to ensure that both client and equine needs are met.
- d. An EFP session should count towards the work day limit for an equine.

#### **V. The EFP Session**

- a. EFP can be delivered using a variety of approaches including but not limited to; ground work activities, mounted activities, driving, or vaulting.
- b. If the EFP professional uses mounted work, he or she must be certified as a PATH Intl. Therapeutic Riding Instructor.
- c. If the EFP professional chooses to use only ground work, he or she can be certified only as a PATH Intl. Equine Specialist.
- d. If driving or vaulting are utilized, the EFP professional must be certified in those areas.
- e. There must be written documentation available to support b, c, and d.

#### **VI. The Equipment**

- a. The EFP professional should consider the possible psychological impact of using certain equipment with or around clients. Such equipment could include lunge whips and lunge lines, wands, chains, and activities equipment like blindfolds, masks, etc.
- b. The EFP professional needs to consider the appropriateness of the equipment for his/her equine partners.

#### **VII. The Location**

- a. EFP must be provided in a confidential setting that is both physically and emotionally safe for clients.
- b. The EFP professional must ensure that the facility's practices align with safety and health guidelines as outlined by PATH Intl. standards.

#### **VIII. Personnel**

- a. The use of a support team can be helpful to mental health professionals in some situations. Support staff may be certified therapeutic riding instructors, equine specialists, or may have other training and skills that make them appropriate in supporting an EFP provider. The responsibilities of the support team will vary with the needs of each provider, client, and equine.
- b. Paid and unpaid personnel involved with EFP sessions should go through orientation training specific for the EFP service.
  - i. The training should specifically address confidentiality and basic counseling skills.
  - ii. It should address mental health diagnoses that the personnel might encounter as well as potential goals that might be addressed through the EFP service.
  - iii. It should cover roles and responsibilities for all personnel.

- iv. There should be a pre and post session briefing/debriefing to ensure that personnel are supported in their efforts.