

Implementing Best Practices in a
Therapeutic Riding setting at the
Colorado Therapeutic Riding Center, inc.
Longmont, CO

Moving from study design and theory to action!

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Colorado Therapeutic Riding Center

- *The Mission of the Colorado Therapeutic Riding Center is to promote the physical, psychological and social well-being of persons with disabilities through their interaction with a therapeutic team consisting of a horse, an instructor and/or a therapist, and volunteers.*

CTRC...

- 30 year old program with well established organizational structure
- NARHA premier accreditation
- 5 Advanced instructors
- Fully evolved and expertly managed program areas: administration, volunteer, horse, rider, facility

CTRC...

- Operations manual for all program areas
- TR program with well defined indicators of success for therapeutic and horsemanship goals
- NARHA student instructor mentor program
- Field placement site for graduate interns from the School of Social Work in Denver

Research study numbers:

- In the summer of 2008 CTCR served 15 riders in the study. Three groups of 4 riders and one group of 3 riders. Instructors: Mary and Amy
- In the fall of 2008 CTCR served 12 riders in three classes. Instructors: Penelope and Amy
- In the Summer of 2009 CTCR served 16 riders in 4 classes. Instructor: Jody

Rider evaluations: Getting started

- All riders participated in a one on one evaluation that took approximately 1 hour.
- Pre – evaluation work included:
 - Reviewing medical forms and other paperwork
 - Screening for precautions and contraindications – NARHA Standard’s Manual
 - Asking about helmet tolerance
 - Children’s hospital pre-testing

Structure of the evaluation

- Evaluations consisted of an office, and mounted portion.
- We conducted the office portion first in order to go over safety rules, introduce beginning structure and develop rapport.

Office component of evaluation

- Address participant, have toys and appropriate distractions available

Asked about:

- Physical function
 - Muscle tone, range of motion, strength, sensation
- Cognition and processing
 - Attention, following directions, safety awareness, learning style
- Communication
 - Receptive and expressive language, means of

office component of evaluation...

- Emotional/behavioral/social challenges
- Sensory processing
 - Tactile, noise, sensory seeker or avoider
- Hobbies/interests
- Horsemanship and therapeutic goals

Mounted component of evaluation

- Mount
- Hold reins
- Walk on / whoa
- Trot
- Dismount /thank you's

Mounted component of evaluation

document on:

- Followed directions?
- Receptive and expressive communication
- Followed safety rules?
- Skills attained?
- Posture/alignment
- Horse & equipment recommendation, number of volunteers, type of mount

evaluations...

- Decide on your routine and follow it from the start even at the evaluation.
- Have picture schedule ready and available
- Be "ready to roll" after getting the helmet on in case of difficulty with helmet tolerance

evaluations...

- Be ready to provide visual demonstration (helmet so you can show mounting, picture of correct posture, bouncy trot)
- Are incredibly inspiring
- Anticipate attachment to horse
- Conducted testing for inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability

- As part of the study instructors completed a questionnaire for each rider (after evaluations and each ride) called the "Aberrant Behavior checklist -Community rating scale (ABC -C)
- Examples of questions (there are 58 in total)
 - Preoccupied,; stares into space
 - Talks to self loudly
 - Easily distractible

Inter-rater reliability

- Because there were 4 of us teaching the classes it was imperative that we were scoring riders similarly when filling out the ABC-C and other CTTC paperwork
- IRR is a statistical tool that describes the amount of agreement among raters when filling out forms

Penelope's thoughts on Inter-rater reliability

When I tested for IRR it shed a lot of light on the organization (or TR in general). At CTRC we switch around a lot of riders between instructors (which I think has its positives and its negatives) and I could not help but think about how differently we all approach/look at things (and I mean in a way that is beyond just different styles). So, IRR was a very helpful "shedding of light" to expand my awareness.

Placing riders into groups

- After all 15 (summer) 12 (fall) and 16 (summer '09) riders were evaluated they were placed into groups of varying ability levels.
- Considerations:
 - Age
 - schedule constraints
 - level of functioning
 - fear
 - horse
 - weight limits
 - volunteer availability
 - riding ability as reflected in evaluation

Environmental considerations related to scheduling

- How busy is the barn, office, arena?
- Heat, cold, weather, ability to communicate discomfort
- Volunteer availability – the Friday afternoon factor etc.
- Smells

Setting goals

- After riders were evaluated and placed into groups it was time to start planning for the TR lessons!
- Goals, both therapeutic and horsemanship, were developed with parent/rider input (collected during evaluation). Goals for the 10 week session were set after week 2

goals...

- CTRC has developed Therapeutic Indicators and Horsemanship Indicators to standardize goals/curriculum and to track rider progress.
- Therapeutic goals at CTRC fall into 4 areas:
 - physical,
 - psychological
 - cognitive
 - social

goals...

- Process for setting goals:
 - Complete Therapeutic Indicators for each rider after week 2
 - Consult rider's evaluation
 - Highlight areas in TI that need addressing
 - Add individual goals if necessary beyond those outlined in TI form

Goals- physical

Demonstrates Balance

(e.g. re-balances after changes of speed and direction)

Exhibits muscle strength/stamina

(e.g. maintains proper position throughout entire lesson)

Exhibits motor planning

(e.g. adjusts reins /body position for transitions)

goals- psychological...

Enjoys self

(e.g. mounts willingly; smiles; laughs)

Shows confidence

(e.g. demonstrates leadership; tries new skill)

Transitions appropriately

(e.g. moves from one activity to next)

Shows impulse control/patience

(e.g. takes turns; waits to be called on)

Controls irritability/anger

(e.g. expresses self appropriately; participates in class; accepts authority)

goals- cognitive...

Demonstrates problem solving

(e.g. keeps correct spacing between horse and others)

Manages sensory input

(e.g. auditory, vestibular, visual, touch, olfactory)

Follows directions/stays on task

(e.g. 1 step = 1; 2 step = 2; 3 step = 3)

Demonstrates expressive speech/language

(e.g. cues to horse; interaction with volunteers; responds to instructor questions)

goals- social...

Engages with others
(e.g. talks to volunteer; makes eye contact with another rider; cheers rider on)

Shows empathy
(e.g. toward horse, volunteer, rider)

Responds appropriately to questions & feedback

Cares about safety of self and others

goals...

Therapeutic goals correspond with what Dr. Gabirels works on in a clinical setting and fortunately the goals she works on with clients in a clinical setting are also goals that we have in our therapeutic riding setting!

Horsemanship goals

Riding Skills Beginner Level
Mounts willingly.

Maintains balanced riding position at halt and walk (head and shoulders in line with hips).

Able to say or cue "walk-on" and "whoa" and uses them in correct context.

Rider holds the reins with correct hand position.

horsemanship goals...

Rider is able to execute turning (steering) both left and right.

Rider is in beginning stage of learning 2pt position. Rider is able to push up out of saddle and maintain position for length of arena at walk.

Rider trots on lead, either 2pt or sitting.

goals- horsemanship

Equine Education for Beginners

Rider can identify the horse they ride.

Rider can identify basic grooming tools and how to use them.

Rider can identify the reins, saddle, stirrups, and girth.

Class format- before class

BEFORE CLASS:

- Participants arrive around 10 minutes before class start time
- Offer bathroom when appropriate
- Check in with side walker and/or instructor
- Put on helmet
- Wait on bench
- Use picture schedules for these steps

Class format –during class

Mounting (for higher functioning groups introduce Horsemanship Lesson to discuss with volunteers while others are mounting, otherwise, include fun easy activity to work on).

- Warm up
- Review from last week
- New skill
- Game/activity
- Cool down
- Dismount

Class format –after class

Riders will complete one activity in each of the following un-mounted activities steps. Use picture schedule for these steps:

- Dismount
- Lead or walk with horse to tacking area
- Help with un-tacking and grooming
- Say thank you to volunteers and horses
- Put tack and grooming bucket away
- Take off helmet
- Leave

Lesson planning and curriculum development

- We sat down before starting and sketched out a loose 10 week progression to follow
- Mary and I talked each week and planned lessons together with similar objectives for the different groups based on that 10 week sketch.
- In the fall Penelope and I worked from what we had done that had worked well the session before
- At the end of it all we took all of the lesson plans, sat around the table and developed the "skill modules" packet. Jody utilized the skill modules in the summer 09 groups.

Penelope...

- *As I think back to teaching the Children's hospital riders, the things that come to mind that I gained from the experience were standardization and the lesson plan format. The lesson plan format is far more professional and thorough (therefore helping you think through more of the lesson content and continuity within lesson content). Of course, as we all know, instructors must be extremely flexible, but this was still a huge help!*

Teaching techniques
 or, how we tried to teach in order to meet those goals...

- Visual learning strategies
 - Use your own body to demonstrate
 - Teach volunteer's to help demonstrate
 - Use pictures of the skill (2 point, horse parts, horse expressions, posture/alignment)
 - White board
 - Ask rider to demonstrate or bring in someone else
 - Draw in the dirt
 - Arena props
 - Others

teaching techniques...

- Language is important. Very concrete and literal: "pull your hands back to your pockets to whoa", "I don't have pockets". Or "pick up your stirrups", rider reached down and picked them up. Safety: "its time to jump off our horses".
- Picture schedules were posted on arena door, by mounting area and we kept them handy in the arena on a barrel.

teaching techniques
picture schedules...

Penelope: While I've read about schedules and know that they help children with autism (and even use them in camp some) actually getting one for TR and the versatility of it (velcro) and then actually putting it to use felt much more "in tune" when teaching the riders in the study group. It also turned a theory into an effective practice, therefore driving home for me the reality of how much a visual, thorough schedule for children with autism is a powerful tool in teaching.

teaching techniques
picture schedules...

Mary: Having the picture schedule available for everyone was helpful. Even for the older students that felt it was 'silly' - I think it helped - plus it was a great learning opportunity for volunteers and a safe time for the older students use the picture schedule without having to ask for it

Volunteer management

- How many volunteers on the team, how we decided
- Posted lesson plans every week
- Solicited volunteer feedback after each class
- Had a brief meeting before each class
- After 2nd week let volunteers know rider goals for the session.

volunteers...

- Week 1 volunteer briefing (standardized)
 - Individual to the rider-index card with age, hobbies, sensory needs
 - Individual to the horse
 - General info on Autism
 - Importance of attendance
 - **no excess talking**

week 1 volunteer briefing...

- General for the class (went over the rider evaluations and came up with some general themes).
- No natural sense of danger, reminders needed for safety
 - Leave decisions about behavior mgmt to instructor and we will develop a team approach. Limited verbal skills can lead to frustration.
 - may not pick up on body language or social cues (you or horse)
 - Developing empathy with horse very important
 - Sensitive to noise and smell

Horse Selection

- Height and weight of the rider and other practical considerations.
- Amount of vestibular input needed -sensory seeking rider vs. sensory avoidant rider.
- Muscle tone, strength and endurance
- Equipment
- Behavior, behavior

Equipment

- English saddles
 - 2 point work
 - fit to horses
 - Rider muscle tone
 - Exceptions were made for larger teen riders
- Reinbow reins
- Neck strap
- As always: fit and comfort to horse

Demonstration Lesson

- Sample lesson plan (format used in the study)
- What to look for in the demonstration lesson
 - Use of visual teaching techniques?
 - Followed the lesson format?
 - Use of specific praise?
 - Use of picture schedule?
 - Objectives PM, TM or UM?
