

# IS IT THERAPEUTIC RIDING OR HIPPO THERAPY?

## **THE SIMILARITIES:**

The Horse: We both utilize a horse to achieve our objectives. We require horses that are 'bomb proof' and sound.

The Students/Clients: We both have students/clients that have some kind of disability.

The Volunteers: We both need and rely on well trained volunteers.

The Facility: We both require a safe area to conduct our lessons or therapy sessions, while using the horse.

The Staff: We both require staff that is dedicated, trained, and flexible.

The Physician: We both require approval from the student/client's Physician.

The Therapists: We both utilize a licensed/registered therapist.

The Therapeutic Riding Instructor: We both require a NARHA Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor.

The Equipment: We both use specialized equipment.

Fees: We both have a fee for or cost of our service.

As you can see we have a lot of similarities. We both utilize the same personnel, horses, students/clients, and equipment. To the average person this may appear as though we are doing the same thing. When you take a close look, there are a lot of differences on how we use the above factors.

## **THE DIFFERENCES:**

### *The Horse:*

Therapeutic Riding: The horse is used in a variety of gaits. The horse is chosen to meet the student's needs to achieve a specific riding and/or social goal. The horse may be walked, trotted, or even cantered. The horse is chosen because of its build, movement, and training. The horse can be lead by a leader or controlled independently by the student.

Hippotherapy: The horse is specifically chosen for its unique movement qualities. The horse is mostly used at a walk and usually has a leader responsible for controlling the horse. In most cases the client does not control or steer the horse.

### *The Student/Client:*

Therapeutic Riding: The student usually has enough sitting balance and head control to sit in a forward position on the horse. Compensations for the student are usually made to enable the student to effectively control the horse or to perform specific riding skills. The Therapeutic Riding Instructor uses various teaching techniques to achieve specific riding goals and/or skills.

Hippotherapy: The client is usually more involved and may not have enough control of their head or trunk to sit forward. Alternative or Developmental Positioning may be utilized. The client is manipulated or facilitated by the therapist in order to utilize specific muscles in order to achieve a specific therapy goal. The therapist utilizes various treatment techniques in conjunction with the movement of the horse.

### *The Volunteers*

Therapeutic Riding: Utilizes volunteers as leaders and sidewalkers. The sidewalker is trained on how to safely keep the student on the horse. The leader is trained on how to safely and effectively lead the horse. They are trained and supervised by the Therapeutic Riding Instructor. There is usually more than one student in the ring at a time. The volunteer's role is to keep the student safe before, during, and after the riding lesson. The riding instructor informs and teaches the volunteer about lesson strategies and proper hand placement.

Hippotherapy: Utilizes volunteers who sidewalk to assist in the manipulation of the client on top of the horse and strategic placement of their hands in order to facilitate or inhibit a specific response. The therapist constantly and directly instructs the volunteers at all times. Usually a fewer number of volunteers are needed, because the Hippotherapy Sessions are provided on a one to one basis.

### *The Facility*

Therapeutic Riding: The arena may need to be larger to accommodate a bigger class. Therapeutic Riding lessons usually have two or more students in each class. They may require additional space to conduct a ground/classroom lesson.

Hippotherapy: The arena may be smaller because there usually is just one client at a time. The ratio of therapist to client is 1:1. There needs to be an area to assess the client before and after riding and/or to stretch or prepare the client for the therapy session on the horse.

### *The Staff*

Job Descriptions are different as explained elsewhere.

### *The Physician*

Therapeutic Riding: Requires a physician's release form for the student to be enrolled in a Therapeutic Riding Lesson.

Hippotherapy: Requires a physician release form to utilize Hippotherapy as part of a therapy treatment. A physician's prescription for either Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy or Speech Therapy must also be on file in order to legally provide Hippotherapy. (May depend on your state guidelines)

### *The Therapists*

Therapeutic Riding: Therapist can only function as a consultant to the Therapeutic Riding Instructor. As a consultant the therapist can suggest compensations, adaptive equipment, or positioning in order to assist the student in achieving a riding skill or goal. They cannot teach therapy techniques or conduct a treatment session. If the therapist is wearing her therapist hat, she should only give recommendations. If a therapist is also a Certified Riding Instructor she has to be clear of her role. Is she providing treatment or teaching lessons. The two should not be mixed. In Therapeutic Riding the therapist does not establish the goals to be achieved or document the progress. Therapeutic Riding is not considered a medical treatment.

Hippotherapy: The therapist is in control of the session and of the client at all times. They may consult with a Therapeutic Riding Instructor on equipment use and fit or choice of mounts. The therapist is only utilizing the horse as a therapy tool to achieve specific therapy goals outlined in their Initial Evaluation of the client. They must document progress in accordance to the State Guidelines of their respective profession. This is a medical treatment, and needs to be conducted as such, by a Registered or Licensed Physical, Occupational, and/or Speech Therapist.

### *The Therapeutic Riding Instructor*

Therapeutic Riding: The Therapeutic Riding Instructor is in charge of the lesson. They establish the riding skills and goals to be achieved. They document the student's progress. They are in charge of the entire class. (volunteers, horses, clients, bystanders) They ensure that the lesson is safe, and that everyone involved is doing their job.

Hippotherapy: In some Hippotherapy programs the Therapeutic Riding Instructor is the horsehandler. The Therapeutic Riding Instructor ensures that the horse is conditioned, trained, and safe to be used in the therapy session on the horse. The Therapeutic Riding instructor is responsible for the horse or the horsehandler; the therapist is responsible for the client and sidewalker. The Therapeutic Riding Instructor is not in charge of the session, the therapist is.

### *The Equipment*

Therapeutic Riding: Therapeutic Riding lessons utilize various equipment including; saddles, bridles, surcingles, and reins. The purpose of the equipment is to provide stability to the student and to enhance their ability to control the horse in order to achieve specific riding skills and goals.

Hippotherapy: Hippotherapy treatment sessions generally use more pads and surcingles, in order to allow for position changes. The purpose of the equipment is to allow the movement of the horse and client positioning, to assist the therapist when using various therapy techniques to achieve a specific therapy goal. For example: reins are not used to control the horse, but to work on grasp or eye-hand coordination.

### *The Fees*

Therapeutic Riding: Therapeutic Riding Centers may or may not have fees to cover the riding lesson. Therapeutic Riding is a riding lesson, which caters to individuals with disabilities and requires specific training. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors are trained how to give riding lessons and to make goals for individuals with disabilities, not how to provide a therapy treatment. Insurance companies can not be billed for Therapeutic Riding.

Hippotherapy: Hippotherapy is a treatment tool utilized by licensed or registered Physical, Occupational or Speech Therapists. The therapists are conducting a medical treatment and charge as such. The therapists have specific training in providing therapy; they are not giving a riding lesson.

A clear distinction needs to be made, so we can correctly label the activity and service we are providing. We are ethically and legally bound to perform only the activities we are trained for. As a therapist cannot teach a riding lesson, neither can a Riding Instructor conduct a therapy session. This is clear. Even though a Riding Instructor has specific training on disabilities, it does not qualify them to provide therapy and they cannot perform Hippotherapy.

Hippotherapy provides the base and building blocks for individuals to eventually possess the ability to be successful in a Therapeutic Riding program. A few individuals will even further progress into competition.

If a client does not possess the ability to be successful in a Therapeutic Riding program you are only hurting that client if you do not refer them to a therapist, which utilizes Hippotherapy. In the same respect if you have a client in Hippotherapy, who is ready to learn appropriate riding skills and you do not refer them to a Therapeutic Riding Program; you are preventing that client from progressing and becoming an independent rider.

Penny Clark, Physical Therapist  
Registered AHA Therapist And Certified NARHA Registered Riding Instructor