



American Hippotherapy Association Issue Brief: "Therapeutic Riding"

Horseback riding is an enjoyable sport and activity for many individuals. Participation in horseback riding for individuals with special needs has grown in popularity and in public recognition. The AHA Inc. has concerns about claims being made by riding instructors regarding the habilitative or rehabilitative benefits of this activity. There are some inherent benefits of any sport activity, however, that does not replace the skilled intervention provided by a licensed therapists.

The training and educational background of horseback riding instructors can vary widely, with there being no minimum requirements or qualifications in most states in the US. Riding instructors generally have experience in horsemanship and riding. It is imperative that riding instructors working with individuals with special needs also have additional experience in adapting equipment, teaching style and the environment to facilitate success for a rider with special needs. When riding lessons are misrepresented as therapy, consumers can be vulnerable to misinformation and could be under the impression that professional therapeutic services are being provided.

It is the position of the American Hippotherapy Association Inc. (AHA, Inc.) that therapeutic riding instructors are not licensed therapists and do not receive the education in habilitation or rehabilitation necessary to deliver therapy.

Licensed and credentialed healthcare professionals such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech language pathology, and mental health professionals, who have completed additional continuing education in the use of equines in treatment are most effectively able to prioritize intervention objectives and coordinate planning for ideal outcomes in treatment of functional limitations and impairments. Therapy services incorporating equines differ significantly from the participation in adaptive sports such as therapeutic horseback riding. It is unethical for individuals without the appropriate education and training to imply that they can make assessment decisions and or provide habilitation/rehabilitation for individuals with special needs through the teaching of an adaptive sport.

Further, it is the position of AHA, Inc. that the term therapeutic may imply "therapy", therefore, in the best interest of consumers and the public, AHA, Inc. recommends that the term used to describe this activity is "adaptive riding".