

Book Review
Submitted by Lelia Sponsel
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Equine Facilitated Mental Health: A Field Guide for Practice

By Leslie Moreau, LMSW-ACP, and Boo McDaniel, M.Ed.

Available through Boo McDaniel, 13 Pony Farm Lane,
Temple, NH 03084 USA.
300 pages

The authors, both experienced in the field of equine therapy, have cooperated to produce this valuable book, which in a sense is a “primer” for mental health professionals and riding instructors alike. Leslie Moreau, author and editor, has 25 years of experience counseling as well as 14 years experience in Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFT) while Boo McDaniel, author, has 25 years experience running a riding school which is very involved with Equine Facilitated Mental Health (EFMH). These are the voices of experience that speak to us throughout the 300 pages. Every chapter is thought provoking and informative. Other health professionals and practitioners in the field of EFMH have contributed articles, which give us insight into studies and research.

This comprehensive book is indeed a book to “read, learn and enjoy”. It is written not only for health professionals who wish to become involved with EFT but also for all riding instructors wishing to understand the equine facilitated mental health riding programs.

The book is a most useful reference guide for riding instructors and therapists involved in therapeutic riding, as so many of their clients have more than one disability. The many varied articles in the book’s twelve chapters are for the novice and experienced teacher/therapist alike. I found the book well presented and quite easy to read with well explained points.

I strongly recommend that all therapeutic riding centres purchase this book. I am certain the A Field Guide for Practice will lead to:

- A better understanding of our riders/clients
- Better team work
- Better teaching
- Better quality of life for our clients

Thank you Leslie Moreau, Boo McDaniel and all contributors for enriching my mind.

The following brief outline of the main points of each chapter give the reader a clearer understanding of the book’s comprehensive contents.

In **Chapter 1, An Introduction**, we are introduced to key terms, the difference between EFMH and EFT, the general issues to be considered, the essential teamwork and the need for collaboration with the facility/stable.

Chapter 2 concentrates on **The Horse**, its selection and training, which the authors feel should include groundwork. Much emphasis is placed on the need to monitor horses, their need for stroking and relaxation and the importance of careful training. In this chapter are most helpful suggestions for matching horses and riders. For example, the rider with HDHAD is better served with a more stubborn horse, while a rider with DD needs a more willing horse.

Chapter 3 concentrates on **Teamwork**. The professionalism of the instructor, the necessary collaboration, the questions to ask of parents and caregivers, the program director's administration work, the type of support needed, and the necessary planning that makes a successful program.

Chapter 4 has excellent tables on normal **Human Development**, split up into nine different age groups, giving three parallel streams: physical, psychological and cognitive development. Disruption of normal Human Development follow this, again for the nine age groups. The table is divided into three parallel streams:

- Transitional crisis and source of conflict
- Symptoms of collapse and possible diagnosis
- EFT intervention and social service recommendations

Chapter 5 concentrates on description and diagnosis of **Mental Illness**. In the 60+ pages we find information about Mental Retardation (DD in Canada), LD, and about disorders such as Substance Related Disorders, Mood Disorders, etc. There is advice on:

- Assessing clients
- Communication skills giving the reader specific sentences and questions to employ
- Reducing anxiety/agitation
- Methods for relaxation

It is the type of chapter one would revisit frequently.

Chapter 6 deals with **Equestrian Therapy with Children and Adolescents**. Again we find a most helpful article for the instructor who might at times wonder about the benefits and objectives of relatively simple tasks such as tacking up a horse. To give an example, haltering addresses control of fear, spatial relations and success; while saddling teaches self-control and thoughtfulness. We are reminded that therapeutic riding offers skill-development and risk-taking decision-making before, during and after the riding lesson.

Chapter 7 is the 16-page **Games** chapter. We find well-defined objectives: A clear description of the equipment set up, the riding skills to be enhanced and the learning skills, motor skills as well as social skills to be fostered. The chapter underlines the value of games, giving the instructor insight into the variety of skills that are fostered in every lesson.

Chapter 8, The Brain, the Body and EFP contains seven very interesting papers. We learn about the interplay of mind, body and health, and about how one affects the other. The article on Psychoneuroimmunology "...proposes that activities and the way we think about "things" affects our physiology, our immune system and our well being". Other articles are on Experiential Learning and Therapy, Overview on Learning Theories, Medications and Effects.

Chapter 9 discusses the **Special Considerations** required for a variety of possible clients who do not fall into any particular category: Juvenile Delinquents, People with Eating Disorders, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and others who come with issues where therapeutic riding is known to help them "over the hump".

Chapter 10, Programs in Action, presents valuable and varied guidelines on: how to collaborate with the school system, possible pitfalls when running a program, and funding the organization.

Chapter 11 deals with (Psychiatric) **Treatment Planning and Third Party Billing**. Guidelines are given to the mental health professional working with the team in order to coordinate the various components of the clients' treatment.

Chapter 12 completes the book giving many essential **Forms** for clients. We need forms to learn about our clients and to plan and evaluate the therapy.

