

Methods and equipment for equine facilitated intervention in children with neurodevelopmental disorders

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Equine facilitated intervention (EFI) affects clients using a comprehensive biopsychosocial approach. In addition to the direct effect of interaction with the horse, we also use other methods and equipment. The aim of EFI in Equine Facilitated Therapy centre *Kamenitý vrch* is to enable the development of motor and cognitive functions up to the full potential of clients and to transfer the achieved improvement to everyday life. In cooperation with occupational therapist, art therapist and music therapist we create therapeutic tools (therapeutic toys, communication cards, aids for fine motor skills training etc.) that connect the theme of horses with everyday life activities. We are looking for partners for further cooperation in this project.



Figure 1: Equine facilitated intervention



Figure 2: Therapeutic toy based on a real horse character, Batylda from Kamenitý vrch centre

EFI sessions usually take place once a week for 3 months. The evaluation of the client's condition takes place at the beginning and at the end of this period. In general, there is an improvement in communication, cognitive and motor functions. In our program children usually participate in EFI together with their parents, who can further practise their children's recently acquired skills every day at home using our therapeutic tools. EFI therefore increases motivation for complementary home-based occupational therapy.

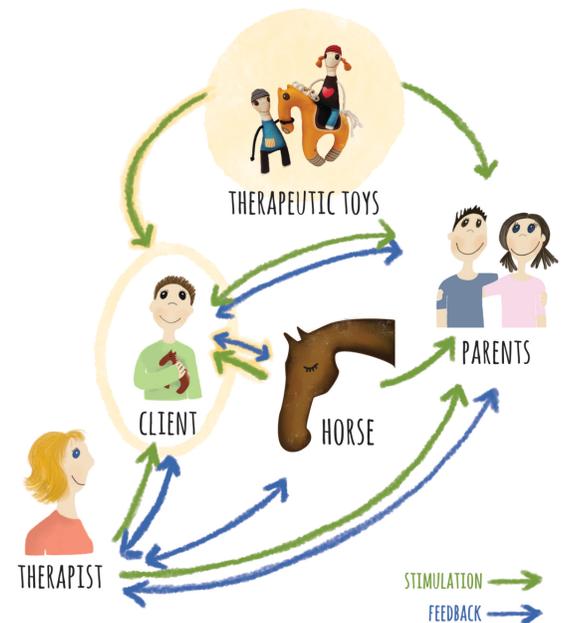


Figure 3: Basic concept of interaction



Figure 4: Equipment for adjunctive home-based occupational therapy

The combination of home-based occupational therapy with EFI reminds children of time spent with horses and connects home-based training with these memories. The parents of children receive a box with our therapeutic tools for home-based therapy. Each week there is a new set of activities divided into four areas: gross motor or sensory motor skills, fine motor skills, activities related to music or painting (art worksheet, rhythmic exercises with music, etc.) and oral muscle stimulation according to the HANDLE approach. All activities are interconnected.

The first week, for example, a child creates a horse puppet made of paper and the second week the same horse is used as tool for a rhythmic exercise with music. Or clothespins, which are used to decorate a horse's mane during EFI, are used as a tool for practicing fine motor skills while the child pins them on the mane of a toy horse. As a part of occupational therapy, the child removes a picture of a horse pinned to a clothesline and sticks it on larger pictures of the farm. The child knows the actual horse's name and has memories of the time they spend together during EFI. Thanks to these connections, home-based training is more interesting. The comprehensive therapy improves gross and fine motor skills as well as cognitive functions and communication.