

## **EQUINE THERAPY**

### **What is Equine Therapy?**

EFL is a therapy where the children learn about themselves, other people and interacting with the world. It's not about teaching riding or horse care skills and the children don't need any previous experience of horses.

EFL has proven to be particularly useful for children with autism, attention deficit disorder (ADD) and bipolar disorders - all of whom may find it difficult to communicate, interact with other people and carry out instructions.

The results are startling. Even those showing severe anti-social and aggressive behaviour become calmer and more communicative.

### **Why Equine Therapy?**

Horses react as a mirror to the person who's with him they are prey animals so he wants to feel safe and is always on the lookout for predators. A horse will become very fearful if he's with someone who's aggressive, noisy, disrespectful or too controlling. On the other hand, if the person makes requests rather than demands the horse will begin to cooperate. Horses are always looking for a leader.

This is why horses are so good to use as therapy for children. A child who is given just a little insight into dealing with a horse in the right way can become the natural leader the horse is looking for. The horse in return feels safe and peaceful and will cooperate with what the child asks of him.

Children, even those with emotional or mental disorders, can often manage a horse more easily and more quickly than adults. Children accept things at face value and are more open to developing an equal relationship rather than trying to control.

A horse is looking for simple and clear commands, and a child, with the right encouragement and in the right situation, can carry these out very effectively. "Go, stop, back up, turn this way or that way" is all that's needed.

For children with mental and emotional disorders the positive benefits of getting a horse to carry out these commands are often profound

"Children with ADD will focus on the horse for long periods while grooming or leading the horse when usually they can't concentrate long enough to do anything much. Autistic children who are withdrawn and living very much in their own world will begin to express themselves - often using new words or gestures they've never expressed before.

"Once children realize what they can achieve their self-esteem increases in leaps and bounds. Imagine what it must feel like to lead an animal through an obstacle course,

stopping and starting when you want to, when you usually find it difficult to concentrate, communicate or stay in control?".