



# EQUINE-ASSISTED SERVICES DEFINITIONS GUIDE FOR RESEARCHERS

Over the past 50 years, services that incorporate horses to benefit people have diversified and expanded. Along with the exponential growth has come the proliferation and use of unclear and imprecise terms for naming and describing these services. Adverse impacts of this ambiguous language have generated serious problems that include confusion and inadequate protection of consumers, reimbursement obstacles for certain types of legitimate therapies that incorporate horses, and misinformed policies and barriers to scientific advancement through research.

To mitigate confusion concerning terminology for referring to equine-assisted services in the United States, a consensus building summit with a consortium of experts and representatives from prominent organizations associated with equine-assisted services was convened in July 2018. The summit culminated in terminology recommendations that were further refined by a group of six summit members. Recommendations for optimal terminology and for the discontinuation of problematic terminology were published in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine in an article titled, "[Optimal Terminology for Services in the United States That Incorporate Horses to Benefit People: A Consensus Document](#)" (November 2020).

## EQUINE-ASSISTED SERVICES

Equine-assisted services (EAS) is a term used to refer to various services in which professionals incorporate horses and other equines to benefit people. It is consistent with terminology used for animal-assisted services or interventions.

Three areas of EAS have been identified: **Therapy**, **Learning** and **Horsemanship**.

The term EAS should be used only when referring to diverse services where the horse is the common thread. EAS is not intended as an over-arching term to imply all three areas of services are subsumed under one industry or line of work. All recommendations for terms for these areas of service below reflect the outcomes of the terminology consensus summit group, and it is anticipated that as equine-assisted services expand and diversify, new challenges related to terminology will need to be addressed.

On the following page is a chart showing the three areas of EAS and what types of services may be found within each area. Following the chart are the descriptions of the three areas of EAS as defined in the peer-reviewed article.



## THERAPY

- ▶ Counseling
- ▶ Occupational Therapy
- ▶ Physical Therapy
- ▶ Psychotherapy
- ▶ Speech-Language Pathology
- ▶ Recreational Therapy

## LEARNING

- Equine-Assisted Learning in:
- Education
  - Organizations
  - Personal Development

## HORSEMANSHIP

- ▶ Adaptive Equestrian Sport
- ▶ Adaptive Riding or Therapeutic Riding
- ▶ Driving
- ▶ Interactive Vaulting

## THERAPY

Therapy is provided by licensed/certified medical or behavioral health professionals working within their scope of practice in counseling, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychotherapy, recreational therapy and speech-language pathology. The therapist determines how equine interactions, equine movement or aspects of the equine environment may enhance the client's individualized treatment plan with the goals of improving the client's sensorimotor, cognitive, behavioral, emotional or psychological function for improved health and wellness.

Best practice dictates that therapy professionals obtain specialized training focused on the safe inclusion of horses in treatment.

When discussing therapy, indicate the therapy/therapist first followed by how the horse is included. This is considered **'therapy first' language**.

Examples of this are:

- Physical therapy including hippotherapy/equine movement
- Occupational therapy in the equine environment
- Counseling or psychotherapy with equine interactions
- Speech-language pathologist who incorporates horses in treatment
- Recreational therapy incorporating equines

Therapy professionals may work with a treatment team, including PATH Intl. Certified Equine Specialists in Mental Health and Learning and trained staff/volunteers, to support session safety and care for the horses.



# EQUINE-ASSISTED LEARNING

This area is a non-therapy service comprised of equine-assisted learning (EAL) in education, in organizations and in personal development. Specially trained or certified professionals leverage experiential learning activities involving interactive mounted and/or unmounted activities with horses and the equine environment to benefit participants.

- **Equine-assisted Learning in Education:** Professionals with a knowledge of learning theory and teaching methodology focus on life skills, including leadership, character-building and academic skills. They may develop contracts with schools and integrate specific educational strategies, academic standards and character education within their curricula and provision of services.
- **Equine-assisted Learning in Organizations:** Professionals assist members of corporations, organizations and other work groups in building effective teams and leaders that enhance work dynamics and performance. They must have knowledge of organizational theory, team building, strategic planning or leadership development and may integrate a variety of strategies.
- **Equine-assisted Learning in Personal Development:** Professionals assist individuals and groups in handling life challenges and opportunities by developing skills in effective problem-solving, decision-making and communication. Service providers must have extensive training or certifications in facilitation, coaching or teaching, and knowledge of the distinct differences between personal development and psychotherapy.

Equine-assisted learning sessions are provided by individuals such as teachers, organizational strategists and life coaches with the inclusion of a certified equine specialist to support session safety and care for the horses.



## ADAPTIVE OR THERAPEUTIC HORSEMANSHIP

An area of non-therapy services focused on various riding disciplines, carriage driving and interactive vaulting for individuals or groups with diverse needs. Qualified equine professionals with specialty training or certification develop lesson plans that may include mounted and unmounted activities and fun, creative games to develop horsemanship skills and provide the healthful benefits of interacting with horses.

Adaptive or therapeutic horsemanship sessions are conducted by a team that includes a certified instructor and the number of center volunteers deemed necessary by the instructor for the activities in the lesson plan.

**TERMS: Adaptive/Therapeutic Riding, Interactive Vaulting, Driving, Groundwork**

# UNDERSTANDING OPTIMAL TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO RESEARCH

Following are suggested questions that may be asked when evaluating or proposing research related to EAS1.

1. **What service incorporating equines to benefit humans is being investigated?** Is it clearly identified as within, or a comparison between, Therapy, Learning or Horsemanship?
2. **What is the intervention/approach/tool that is being investigated?**
3. **Who are the professionals/what disciplines are applying the intervention/approach/tool being investigated?**

*If it is an investigation about therapy, then therapists should be carrying out the research intervention with the subjects. If it is a study about interpreting horse behavior for horsemanship activities, the professionals carrying out the research intervention should be equine experts with credentials in that area of service.*

4. **Who are the human and/or equine subjects and how were they chosen/excluded?**

Is there an appropriate match between the research subjects and the investigated intervention/approach/tool?

*For example, a study about the efficacy of psychotherapy with the inclusion of horses would have patients or clients as subjects, and not horseback riders receiving instruction in a riding discipline.*

5. **Given the challenges of past use of terminology, has consideration been given to the descriptions in previous research and whether it is consistent with the current research topic?**

*Reading and interpreting the research will be the only way to establish relevance to the current topic as reliance on previous terminology may not be prudent.*

6. **Are the terms used in the current research paper, including keywords, consistent with current suggested optimal terminology?** If not, what is the discrepancy? Ideally use of current terminology will assist in the article being retrievable and relevant going forward.

## RESEARCH EXAMPLE

Research subject is the use of Equine-assisted learning in Education for adults with developmental disabilities.

This would be considered in the Learning area of service, a non-therapy service that focuses on educational interventions with the inclusion of horses.

The practitioners providing the service should be identified as **educators with associated credentials in education** and additional equine related credentials, or in partnership with credentialed equine professionals.

The subjects of the study are **adults with developmental disabilities** with specific criteria for inclusion in the study. These would be students or possibly clients, not riders, athletes or patients.

The literature review would most likely be made up of past research in the areas of education, equine-assisted learning, possibly horsemanship, not likely therapy, so that the past research is from similar paradigms.



Optimal Terminology		Outdated Terminology	
Current/Optimal Terminology	Examples of Proper Usage	Discontinued/Outdated Terminology	Rationale
<p><b>Equine-assisted services (EAS) is a term used when referring to multiple diverse areas of services, therefore is always used in the plural. Three broad categories of EAS are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Therapy</li> <li>▪ Learning</li> <li>▪ Horsemanship</li> </ul> <p><b>These 3 broad areas contain multiple types of delivery.</b></p>	<p><i>Many equine-assisted services rely on donations to fund programming.</i></p> <p><i>A facility offering 3 distinct services (physical therapy, counseling and adaptive/therapeutic riding) could be described as offering equine-assisted services when speaking about the entire program.</i></p> <p><i>Or, if specificity is preferred, discussion could be about just one of these distinct services.</i></p>	<p><b>Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT)</b></p>	<p>Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies was previously used as an over-arching term but was misleading. It indicates no separation between therapy and non-therapy services and was mis-interpreted as a service unto itself. This created confusion for the end-users, funders and other stakeholders regarding the type of service they were engaged with.</p>
<p><b>Use of therapy first language indicates a recognized, licensed therapy service which incorporates equines as part of their interventions.</b></p> <p><b>For example: Physical therapy utilizing equine movement.</b></p>	<p><i>The occupational therapist uses equine movement to promote core stability for function.</i></p> <p><i>The clinic provides psychotherapy services incorporating horses.</i></p>	<p><b>Equine Therapy</b></p> <p><b>Equine-assisted Therapy (EAT)</b></p> <p><b>Horseback Riding Therapy</b></p> <p><b>Equestrian Therapy</b></p> <p><b>Horse Therapy</b></p> <p><b>Equi-Therapy</b></p> <p><b>Therapy Riding</b></p>	<p>None of these terms are clear about the type of service being offered or who might be served.</p> <p>None of these are licensed or recognized therapies in the US (in some states use of the word 'therapy' in a title for a non-licensed entity is considered fraudulent)</p>
<p><b>Equine-assisted learning (EAL) is a non-therapy service that includes three areas:</b></p> <p><b>EAL in education</b></p> <p><b>EAL in personal development</b></p> <p><b>EAL in organizations</b></p>	<p>Leaders increase their effectiveness by participating in EAL in organizations.</p> <p>The service provider has specific training and credentialing to provide EAL in education.</p>	<p><b>Equine facilitated learning</b></p> <p><b>Equine guided learning</b></p>	<p>Equine-assisted learning is a more common search term, yielding greater results.</p> <p>Based on a national survey of providers, the authors of the optimal terminology paper determined that Equine-assisted learning is a preferred term.</p>
<p><b>Hippotherapy/ equine movement is a treatment tool provided within occupational therapy, physical therapy or speech-language pathology by a licensed therapy professional.</b></p>	<p><i>A physical therapist who incorporates hippotherapy in treatment.</i></p> <p><i>A therapist with certification in hippotherapy applications.</i></p>	<p><b>Hippotherapist</b></p>	<p>Hippotherapy is not a licensed treatment in the US, and hippotherapy is not a profession.</p> <p>Hippotherapy is not a service, it does not stand alone.</p>

**Keywords to find relevant research on EAS (these include terms that have been recommended for discontinuation in order to find international and older research):** adaptive carriage driving, adaptive riding, adaptive vaulting, equine-oriented, equine therapy, equine-accompanied, equine-assisted, equine-assisted activities and therapies, equine-assisted counseling, equine-assisted learning, equine-assisted psychotherapy, equine-assisted services, equine-assisted therapy, equine-based, equine-facilitated, equine-facilitated therapy, equine-guided, equine-related, hippotherapy, horse therapy, horse-accompanied, horse-assisted, horseback riding therapy, horse-based, horse-facilitated, horse-oriented, horse-related, therapeutic carriage driving, therapeutic donkey, therapeutic driving, therapeutic equid, therapeutic equine, therapeutic horse, therapeutic interactive vaulting, therapeutic mule, therapeutic riding.

