IAHAIO international guidelines on education and training requirements in equine-assisted services

Development of the guidelines

These guidelines provide best practice guidance for education and training requirements in equine-assisted services. Examples include services that incorporate horses in therapy practice, in education and learning, and adaptive/therapeutic riding and horsemanship. The guidelines were developed by an international task force of IAHAIO members and individual experts and relevant organizations working between 2018 and 2020. They are based on a review of evidence of current best practices and published guidance internationally.

Use of the guidelines

The recommendation is that these guidelines are adopted and implemented in practice by everyone that incorporates horses in services that benefit people. It is acknowledged that knowledge can change over time as research and practice expands and it is intended that this document be reviewed every two years and adjusted, if required. National guidelines or profession-specific competencies for animals as part of human services that exist in your country must be followed.

1. General

1.1 The service (therapy, learning, or instruction of riding) guides the appropriate education and training needed for the provider.

1.2 Appropriate credentialing (country or state) is needed within specific recognized healthcare (medical) professions such as physical therapy, mental health/psychotherapy, speech pathology, occupational therapy, etc.

1.3 Appropriate credentialing is needed (country or state) for specific professions such
as special education, teaching, etc.

1.4 All service providers must operate within their scope of practice relative to profession when including interactions with horses in these services.

1.5 All service providers must have education and training specific to the population served and the service offered.

1.6 All service providers must engage in ongoing, continuing education.

1.7 All service providers must have equine knowledge in areas such as behavior and ethology, welfare assessment, care, first aid, training and handling, selection and assessment procedures, and risk management.

1.8 All service providers must consider their responsibility to the horses involved in services, including understanding how and why equine welfare and advocacy directly affect participant safety and are central to the ethical provision of services.

1.9 All service providers must recognize the potential for unintended equine exploitation and equine suffering within services, and must monitor potential ethical issues and risk at all times.

2. Specific services

2.1 For instructors of riding, driving, vaulting, and general horsemanship, education and training regarding people with disabilities and the adaptations required as well as training and knowledge of teaching horseback riding or applicable activity, is required. Areas include: adaptive instruction (coaching) skills, adaptive equipment, knowledge of various disabilities, selecting, maintaining and training horses, first aid, risk management, volunteer management, safety including the environment, mounting and dismounting, emergency procedures, equine anatomy, physiology, behavior, understand the gaits, equine training methodologies, focus of equine welfare, equine first aid, and knowledge of herd behavior.

2.2 For therapy professionals such as physical therapists, occupational (ergo) therapists, speech-language therapists and mental health providers, in addition to the qualifications necessary to operate within their profession, specific education, training, and supervision/consultation is needed. Areas include: ability to integrate equine interactions, equine movement and the equine environment into existing
practice framework and theories, and tailored to each client’s therapeutic goals. Formal education and training relative to profession is needed (e.g. a physical therapist manipulating the movement of the horse in accordance with the client’s treatment goals, or a psychotherapist making interactions with the horse therapeutically relevant and intentional). All therapy professionals must have equine knowledge such as: behavior and ethology, welfare assessment, care, first aid, training and handling, selection and assessment procedures, and risk management, in addition to specific knowledge and skills relative to the service provided (e.g. a physical therapist must have in-depth knowledge of equine biomechanics, gaits, muscle conditioning, etc.)

2.3 For education and learning professionals, such as school-related education (including special education), wellness services, self-improvement and growth, supportive services, social-emotional skill building, in addition to the qualifications necessary to operate within their profession (if applicable), specific education and training is needed. Areas include: ability to integrate equine interactions and the equine environment into existing professional theories and frameworks, and tailored to the goals of the participant. All learning professionals must have equine knowledge such as: behavior and ethology, welfare assessment, care, first aid, training and handling, selection and assessment procedures, and risk management.

2.4 For life and business coaches, in addition to the qualifications necessary to operate within their profession, specific education and training is needed. Areas include: ability to integrate equine interactions and the equine environment into existing professional theories and frameworks, and tailored to the goals of the participant. All life and business coaches must have equine knowledge such as: behavior and ethology, welfare assessment, care, first aid, training and handling, selection and assessment procedures, and risk management.

2.5 For anybody helping with services (such as horse handlers, therapy or learning assistants, interns, and volunteers), knowledge in the following areas is needed: basic understanding of the service provided, basic understanding of the populations served, understanding of and adherence to confidentiality, following the direction of the service provider, following all facility management and maintenance rules, understanding facility emergency procedures, basic understanding of equine behavior, needs, and communication, ability to work safely around horses and people, safe techniques for approaching, haltering, leading, and tying up horses, safe techniques for managing horses in herds, including releasing horses into a group of
other horses, safe and appropriate techniques for grooming and use of tack associated with services.

3. **Credentialing**

3.1 Service providers should seek education, training, and when indicated, supervision and consultation, relative to guidelines set by national, professional associations (such as treatment competencies for those who include animals in services), and/or within a specific model or method within which they have received training (if applicable).

3.2 Independent credentialing separates education from certification, involves independent assessment, accreditation through a recognized professional body, and a requirement for professional development.

3.3 If independent credentialing is not available, other certification or certificates are recommended in order to show that the provider has been formally evaluated.

**Resources reviewed**

American Certification Hippotherapy Board certifications (ACHB)

American Counseling Association, Animal Interest Network.

American Hippotherapy Association (AHA)


American Hippotherapy Association (AHA)

Cantra

CBEIP Certification, Certificate, Accreditation

Certification, Certificate, Accreditation - Certification Board for Equine Interaction Professionals

EAGALA certifications, EAGALA

E3A
HETI certifications, HETI

Horse Boy Method/ ATHENA Certification - New Trails Learning Systems/Horseboy Foundation

PATH Intl. certifications, PATH Intl.

RDA certifications, RDA

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