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Solution Focused Brief Therapy & Horse-guided Therapy

The purpose of this article is to explore how Horse-guided Therapy and Solutions Focused Brief Therapy works separately and together as a Co-Construction with the client.

Through interviews with the target group, research with horses, and requirements from clients, I was able to collect knowledge and investigate how bringing horses into the practise is helpful for the client and the therapist.

By setting a spotlight on the common denominator for the two forms of Therapy, I found that there was a similarity, where we can have a focus on the Interactive Circle and the pace of the conversation. The intention is to open up for the conversation about humans and animals, the horse's effect on humans, and how we can learn from them. In a therapy session what does speed do to the conversation? By being in the present time we can learn about life balance from the horses, even though they live in an inertly different environment than humans.

Introduction

We find ourselves in a time, where we have focus on life balance, how to combine things and at all times to do things fast. All over the world people are busy. People work faster, wants to make a career fast, have a family, and have to get things done faster.

As a horse -guide therapist I have learned that horses take their oven pace, are in the "now" during sessions I have often seen is that my clients become aware of resources whit in themselves that they not recognise before -

"Can going slow", make you "go fast"? Why is that interesting, and especially with horses?

Solution Focused Therapy is also called BRIF therapy.

Working from a Solutions focused approach, we talk about what is happening in the dialog between the client and therapist, we assume that change happens within dialog, it happens in the present. We work from a social constructivist way of thinking. Co-construction is a collaborative process in communication where speaker and listener collaborate to produce information together. Working with horses is all about being in the present time. By bringing horses into the practise and assuming that this makes a difference, might be radical, but can the combinations create a more effective present and help the client to create a preferred future? My investigation might tell us, if we can achieve life balance by being in the present time with the horses.

Why I ended up having the passion for working with animals and Therapy.

Horses and dogs have been present in my life since I was 6 years old. As a child I used horses to comfort myself. They gave me the feeling of safety, compassion, and a non-judgemental companionship. As a young girl a dog was my most valuable companion through a very tough time. I lost a very close relative and the dog, and our relationship helped me through this though time of illness and death.

The animals were the ones that taught me a lesson in non-judgmental relationships before it even occurred to me to put words on the feelings.

They taught me the value of not being alone and being a part of a group.

The Solution Focused thinking:

Solutions Focused Brief Therapy is about exploring the path that leads to what is working.

(According to Ratner 2012., *et all*)

"The aim here is to bring the client to their own description of things that might happen or has already happened, by getting others perspective in the conversation" (page 99)

In Solutions Focused Brief Therapy we focus on exploring what is working for the client. How did it work? And how they will be able to do more of what is working.

We ask questions that will enhance the clients preferred future and ability to follow the path that they want. "As a solution focused therapist, we are interested in our client's abilities". Shenan Guy, Context, 2011, p.7).

During the conversation, we focus on descriptions, how it will look and who will notice. In that we assume, that the client has a best hope. We ask about all the wishes of the client. When it happens and have it happened? What would they do different? How will they notice? What will they notice? What difference will this make?

The aim is to create what is called "the interactive circle" explained by Korman, Harry, 2004, SIKT, the common project. P13, "This is where we strive for making the client aware of what they do different, when they feel okay or have their wanted changes, who will see it, and what difference does that make for them?"

Horse-guided Therapy

When horses are integrated into Solution Focused Brief Therapy, we change the environment from a clinical setting to a nonclinical setting by the fact that we are outside, with the horses in their environment.

Horse-guided Therapy is a way of working with the horse as an equal partner, the horse brings into the conversation, what the horse sense is needed, and the therapist trust the horse to do so.

Horses do not judge. They are sensitive to whom you are, in the sense and emotions, and can adjust the intention with the right pressure. When we work with a client, they tap into the emotion and "goes with the flow". They sense the client and how the client feels angry, scared, anxiety ect.

Horses are prey, which means that they are alert all the time, they count on their herd for protection, and therefor are at all times working on having balance in the herd. This allows them to relax, sleep on different times – they take shifts, balance in the herd enlarges the survival.

Horses are non-tactile, which means that they do not survive on physical touch but are together and communicate by a nonverbal communication. They communicate by body movements, expression sound, pulse and energy. To be able to react instantly they have a well-developed body to sense their environment. An example, horses have 16 different muscles per ear – their ears are large and very movable. When we, therapist and client, are working with the horses, we get to be a part of that communication and a part of the herd. This means that if we copy the horse's movement, we allow ourselves to be a part of the balance the horses create– the horses can feel the energy we bring in and they answer by body movements, expressions and energy.

It is notable that there is a difference between Horse-guided Therapy and Horse- assisted Therapy. Horse-assisted Therapy is a way of working with the horse as a trained animal, like a dog, the horse does things that it is trained to do, because you as a human command it.

Horse- guided Therapy is a partnership, where the horse works with the humans, we use the information that the horses gives us during the session. Often the horses are loose and without a

halter. If they do wear a halter, then we do not pull or command them to do things but work with them as equal partners.

According to Ilka, "Horses do not interpret and do not create an overall picture; they react instinctively to images and moments in their environment. (Parent Ilka B.2016. Fundamentals of equine Assisted Trauma Therapy.p37).

An example of Horse Guided Therapy:

We are in the round pen, a client, therapist and horse. The horse nods a bit, turns the head to the left and nods again. The therapist asks the client to copy the horse. Often there is a connection between what the horse suggests, and where the client feels pain. We try to copy the horse in movement, in a sense that we get the whole body into the conversation and loosen up tensions in the client's body.

According to Flormann and Christiansen at the education on Horse and Humanship, where I trained as a horse-guided therapist, Flormann, Marianne & Christiansen, Dorte often said:

"By bringing the pace down you give the horse and the client time to create a place for them to contact the parasympathetic nervous system – this is where the horse is extremely authentic and are able to work best".

In Horse-guided Therapy we have a holistic view, of "the whole human being" and believe, that a human being can only function, if it takes into account all human needs. We consider both the mental and physical needs. Further on in the article I will refer to this as the whole body.

We use the horses to help the client to get "the whole body" into the conversation.

The horses have survived for thousands of years by balancing the herd, so when someone in the herd have the slightest tension, they try to balance it, by making small movement, breathing adjusting the body alignment in a slow pace.

Solutions Focused Brief Therapy with Horses

Here are some of of my learned benefits for Horse-guided Therapy and Solution Focused Brief Therapy

- Respect for others view of the world.
- Respect the wisdom of those with whom we are working.
- A belief that the interaction should always be purposeful.
- Equal partnership is the most effective strategy.
- Realising bodytension brings balance.
- Staying with yourself, gives the partner (client) space to do the work.
- Focus on the present time.
- Taking the pace that the client needs.
- Partnership without invading you partner.
- Being "a part of the herd" next to each other, interaction circle.

By asking the client, what the animal might see or notice, we bring forth a new and third perspective. A perspective that is not tied to a person, but to the animal instead.

It gives the client a possibility to see the perspective differently and from a more neutral angle, hereby meaning that the client does not have a past negative interaction with the animal, and therefore it might give the client an opportunity to see their preferred future more clearly.

Teri Pichot states that, “the potential and the impact of this approach are endless and... (the) understanding and Solutions Focused Therapy would be best viewed as a journey rather than a destination. ” Animal-assisted Brief Therapy p.5).2003 And it is notable that she is so far the only one, who has written anything about the combination of Animal Assisted Therapy and Solutions Focused Brief Therapy.

The inclusion of horses in therapy will change the therapists work, and it brings out the question are horses solution focused, and how do they help us go from thoughts and emotions to actions?

In Horse-guided Therapy we believe, that it is crucial to take the speed out of the conversation and give the horse the possibility to work in the tempo, that they sense is necessary. This is similar to Solutions Focused Brief Therapy, where we say; “wherever you go fast, go slow” This way the therapist will get the opportunity to widen the clients preferred future in the client’s pace. And working with horses we will always be on a path and not a destination, because they are in the present and not yesterday or tomorrow.

Client story

A client comes to my place, Små & STORE for Therapy.

The client arrives at the farm and on the way out to the field.....

Therapist: So, what are your best hopes from this conversation today?

Client: that I can feel a bit stronger, not being scared all the time, breath - trust myself.

We walk to the field, - stands still, feeling the wind, listening to the birds, becoming integrated with the surroundings, focusing on the view.

After a few minutes we walk towards the horses.

Therapist: maybe you can feel if there is any particular horse, that you would like to work with today?

As a solution focused therapist, I assume, that she does want to work with a special one.

Horse/Baldur the old and wise, tunes in on the client and walks very slowly towards her - stands still - then breathes gently on the client’s stomach after a minute.

The Horse Baldur actually makes a point – he thinks, that he is the one by choosing the Client.

When I say “choosing”, he walks towards her and stands still in front of her.

Client: this one!

Therapist: I am going to give Baldur a halter on, would it be ok for you to take a little walk with him and your best hopes?

Client: Yes.

We walk down the paddock all the other horses follows, on the playground Baldur stops - we stand still.

Therapist: Which difference does it make, to walk with your best hopes and Baldur?

Here I assume, that it did make a difference that they walked together.

Client: it is good.

Therapist: What else?

Client: Peace, silence in my head, he helps me.

Baldur is calm and stands quietly and takes a deep breath

At this point the horse tries to calm the client down by showing slow bodymovement, breathing and in that sense slow down the client's blood pressure.

Therapist: so – if you look around all the others (horses) are here with us – what difference does that make?

Baldur turns his head towards the client.

Again, I assume that the horses do make a difference. I point out that we are not alone and that the whole herd participate freely.

Client: Community.

Therapist: What else?

Client: ...don't know.

Therapist: What do they see?

At this point as a therapist, the horses are a helping hand – because assuming that they do see the difference, it makes the client be present in the moment. And a whole herd who is non-judgmental.

Client: that we are together, Baldur and me.

Baldur nods, open and closed his eyes looks gently. He is standing completely still.

In the sense of standing still the horse enlarge and present a “here and now-moment” for the client.

As a therapist it helps – to take the speed out of the conversation now, and the horse will do the work, by slowly breathing, moving and being in the present.

Therapist: what else?

Client: That I can breathe- take in air- tears are running.

Therapist: what else?

Client: When I am able to breath, then I can find peace.

Therapist: what else?

The groupe of horses turns quietly around so everybody has their heads towards the client

This moment is extremely powerful – we are together, as a herd.

Client: And strength.

Therapist: What difference does it make, that the others (Horses) see you walk together?

With my focus on the circle I can enlarge and almost make the moment physical, widen the Interaction Circle.

Client: then I am not alone.

Baldur nods again - more heavy breathing.

Therapist: So, when that happens – what does Baldur see you do?

By bringing Baldur into the conversation again, I can hold the client in the present – not losing the feeling, Baldur taps into the client's energy, so he is also working on holding the powerful moment.

Client: maybe that I can feel me? – find me.

Baldur turns his head towards the client's stomach.

Baldur makes the client aware of her breathing – staying in the present, and how powerful the present can be.

Therapist: what difference does that do?

Client: when I can feel that, and he can see that – then it is like it is real.

Therapist: so, what does the others see?

Client: I do not know.

Therapist waits-

All the horses exhale deeply.

A herd in balance means that they tune in to each other's energy. The same level of calm energy or action. So, by making these blowing sounds the horses try to take the speed out of the moment, telling each other that they are all calm.

Therapist: So, if I ask Baldur – what do you think that he sees?

Client: maybe he can see what the others sees.

Therapist: so- what do you think that they see?

We are in a place where the client could choose to believe in old habits or go with what the whole herd sees – me assuming that they do see it- makes it real.

Everybody is quiet.

Client: That when I stop and look, listen ...

Therapist: what else?

Baldur breath heavily.

Client: and breath.

The fact that the horse is a part of the conversation brings in a helping hand for the client.

Therapist: what else?

Client: I am able to find peace.

All the horses exhale deeply.

Again, a “helping hand” from the whole herd.

Therapist: what else?

Client: and feel calm and find strength.

Therapist: what else?

Client: And not feeling alone.

So, by asking again and making the client aware of the fact that the herd do see what is happening We enlarge and widen the abilities of the client.

Therapist: so, would it be ok to walk a bit with Baldur on the playground and not being alone, breathing, listening, feeling calm and at peace?

Clint: Yes.

Baldur walks simultaneously with the client. The herd leaves us and walks in the opposite direction. By letting the herd take part in the session, the horses can hold the space for us, in Horse-guided Therapy we call it, that the horses “holds the space for us” –when they participate in the session by being present. They can choose when and where, which makes it all extremely authentic - they leave when they want - and they do so, when they have done their job.

Further down the playground the client and Baldur stop.

I give them some minutes to integrate with each other and the place, where they stand.

Therapist: So, how would it be to take a walk around and go with feeling calm, not being alone and at peace together with Baldur on to the platform?

The platform is at box that is 15 cm high, there is only space for one horse and one human and the horses normally avoid it, horses chooses to put their hove's on the ground, and do only follow a true lead – a true lead is a horse or a person who trust themselves and what they are doing, to lead.

Client: I can try.

They walk – at first round Baldur avoids avoid walking on to the platform.

Therapist: so, what did Baldur see?

I assume again that the horse saw something, and that the client knows it.

Client: he could see, that I did not trust myself.

Therapist: so, if you trusted yourself, what would it look like?

Baldur makes a heavy breathing, turns his head and push the client gently on her stomach.

Client: I would breath, feel calm listen and look up – look where I wanted to go.

Therapist. What would Baldur see?

Client: that I can, - can take control.

Therapist: are you up for another go?

Client: standing still for a little while – yes.

Baldur and the client walk again, around and on to the platform.

Baldur exhales.

Clients breathe out.

Smile – tears.

The focus is on the interactive circle

As I see it, the horse helps the client to be in the moment, to feel, then see, and then in the end, put it into actions. By having the horses present, it brings out the opportunity to make the interactive circle on “fast forward”. It gives the therapist the opportunity to ask questions about, what the horse will see, here and now? a third part, who is non-judgmental, a third part, who is trying to co construct, bringing the client into the herd and create balance.

According to Kormann, Harry; “we know, that if we can get the client to go from feelings to actions and back again several times and making the perspective from other part of the conversation, it thickens and widens the “best hope” for the client, and then it makes it even more possible for the client to take the possibility with them from the conversation. (2004) sikt, The common project

The horses create a momentary space for the client to see, what they see as a non-judgmental third. A third that do not invade their space but just taps into the client’s energy – follow their pulls and try to create balance. As a therapist, I ask questions to what the horse or horses might see? And what the horses have noticed? Assuming that of course they do see it – whatever it is!

Is it helpful to bring horses into therapy?

When I first discovered Solutions Focused Brief Therapy, it seemed naturally for me to combine Horse-guided Therapy and Solutions Focus Brief Therapy.

I believe that the horses are solution focused in the way that they live and act among each other and in contact and interaction with humans. The question has been, is it helpful to bring horses into therapy, what is it that they do, and can that make a difference?

The investigation showed us moments of the client being able to “go fast forward” by being in the present. We saw, that the horses did make a difference for the client to become aware of the present moment, take the thoughts and put them into actions, when they had a non-judgmental third, (the horse).

That it makes it possible to “mirror” themselves, in body movement and in perspective.

In my investigation it shows that the horses and the environment make it quite easy to thicken and widen the client’s feelings to actions. The horse “leads the way” for the client to build a common project with the therapist and themselves, from the client’s “best hopes” in the present time.

That it is helpful to take the speed out of the conversation,” to go slow” and to be in the present time.

As a solution focused therapist, it is crucial to make the clients “best hopes” as visible as possible by having focus on what works already for the client. The interactive circle puts it into perspective

from the horse, it makes the therapist work slow and put the client on “fast forward”, helping the client to find their own “path” in life and to create life balance.

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Links:

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<https://soelvstein.dk/se/>

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