

Somatic, Nature-Based & Equine-Assisted Therapy

Presented by _____

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Alexandria Place Therapy
Cloverleaf Equine Center

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Recording for Today's Session

Please note that we are recording the didactic portion of today's session. While we will not record any group discussions, the recording from today's presentation may be considered for posting on the CMHIS Learning Lab for public use and/or be made available to attendees.



Hela Baer, LCSW, RYT



Credentials:

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher
- Certified Nature Informed Therapist
- Equine Specialist (PATH & MM)
- EMDR Therapist

Clinical Focus:

- LGBTQIA+ and Neurodivergent Youth & Adults
- Complex Trauma, Grief, and Traumatic Loss
- Therapy incorporating Yoga, Nature, and Equines

Populations and Partnerships



Populations:

- Youth and Adults
- Neurodivergence (Autism, ADHD, AuDHD)
- IDD
- Active duty military and veterans
- Contact with the justice system
- Substance use and recovery
- PTSD and CPTSD

Partnerships:

- County Dept. of Family Services
- Military medical centers
- Community-based programs (teens, transitional living, family support)
- Substance use recovery programs
- Reentry programs

Mind-Body-Nature Therapy



**Yoga &
Mindfulness**



**Nature-Based
Therapies**



**Horse-Human
Connection**



**Relational
EMDR**

Healing through connection with mind, body, animals, nature, and community

Guiding Frameworks



Trauma-Informed

Neuro-Affirming

Inter -Connected

In Context



- Fitting into the mental health landscape
- Individuals seeking care
- Multi-layered approach
- Integration with other modalities
- Emerging scholarship
- Therapy vs. therapeutic

Yoga & Mindfulness

Yoga & Mindfulness



In Practice

- Mind-body practices for wellbeing
- Includes movement, breathwork, and mindfulness
- Framework for values and interconnectedness
- Integrative or adjunctive to therapy

Outcomes

- Strengthens mindbody connection
- Supports awareness, attunement, slowing down, and regulation
- Examples

Yoga & Mindfulness



Provider Qualifications

- Clinician or nonclinician with yoga teacher training*
- Specialized training: traumainformed and accessible/adaptive yoga
- Clinical or recreational settings

Services and Settings

- For all abilities, bodies, and neurotypes
- Integrated into therapy- individual or group
- Recreational practice at a studio/recenter/gym
- Easily delivered virtually or at home

Yoga & Mindfulness

Resources

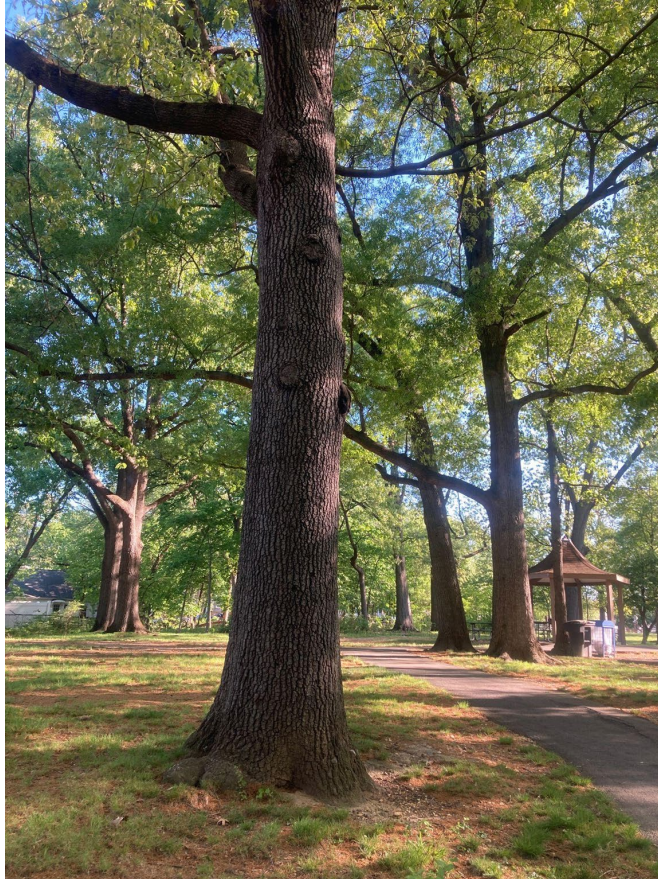
- Yoga Alliance
- International Association of Yoga Therapists
- Trauma Sensitive Yoga, Center for Trauma and Embodiment

Research

- Allene et al. (2025) Yoga as a pre-treatment of EMDR to treat childhood abuse-related PTSD: feasibility and pilot study
- Zaccari et al. (2022) Findings from a pilot study of Trauma Center Trauma Sensitive Yoga versus cognitive processing therapy for PTSD related to military sexual trauma among women Veterans
- Owen-Smith et al. (2021) A Pilot Study to Adapt a Trauma-Informed, Mindfulness-Based Yoga Intervention for Justice-Involved Youth

Nature-Based Therapies

Nature-Based Therapies



Practice

- Ecotherapy, forest bathing, wilderness adventure, horticulture therapy
- Bringing nature indoors
- Nature's rhythms, seasons, and landscapes as guides for understanding and accessing inner world

Outcomes

- Connection and relationship with nature
- Passive nervous system regulation via sensory input
- Enhanced curiosity, empathy, and responsibility
- Examples

Nature-Based Therapies



Provider Qualifications

- Licensed therapist with specialized training
- Outdoor educator*
- Direct care providers for daily nature connection*

Services and Settings

- Outdoors, indoors, and online
- Therapy groups and workshops, community gardens, daily walks, guided walks and nature programming
- Collaboration with local Parks & Recreation Dept.

Nature-Based Therapies



Resources

- Center for NatureInformed Therapy
- The Earthbody Institute
- Local and State Parks and Recreation Departments

Research

- Horne et al. (2025) Ecotherapy and ~~out~~-classroom learning for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people: an evaluation of a project in England
- Wang et al. (2024) Ecotherapy for Adolescents Experiencing Mental Health Challenges: Qualitative Exploration of Perspectives of Adolescents and Parents

Horse-Human Connection

Horse-Human Connection



In Practice

- Conventional therapy with horse-human interactions
- Partnering with horses as equals
- Similar nervous systems, social emotional needs, and constructed systems
- Horse-human relationships require a way of being

Outcomes

- Deeper awareness of self and others
- Increased embodiment, attunement, and regulation
- Increased empathy, positive affect, and efficacy
- Examples

Horse-Human Connection



Provider Qualifications

- Licensed therapist with specialized training for therapy with horses
- Certified instructor for recreational activities*

Services and Settings

- Equine assisted services center
- Private barn with qualified providers
- Therapy groups and workshops, individual therapy, adaptive riding/horsemanship
- Existing infrastructure for community partnerships

Horse-Human Connection

Resources

- PATH Intl Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International
- Eagala
- Natural Lifemanship

Research & Populations Studied

- McDuffee, Montelpare & LeBlanc (2024) Psychophysiological effects of equine-assisted psychotherapy on Veterans with PTSD and their horse partners
- McCrea et al. (2025) At-risk youth receive similar benefits from equine-assisted psychotherapy and traditional psychotherapy; an applied analysis
- Merchand et al. (2023) Evaluation of a mindfulness and-self-compassion-based psychotherapy incorporating horses for Veterans who have experienced trauma



Questions?

Hela Baer, LCSW, RYT 2026



Invitation to Connect:

hbaerlcsw@gmail.com

State Break Out Discussions



- Considering the three sets of treatment and support strategies that have been covered:
 - What are the barriers/facilitators to implementing them?

State Break Out Discussions



- Reflections from breakout discussions
- 3 teams willing to share something that stood out from their discussions or share something that might resonate with other state teams

Upcoming Sessions



How to fund services and provider capacity development:

Aug. 7, 2026

- Learn how various federal funding streams can support providing a “Place that is Safe, Treatments to Heal and Opportunities to Grow.”
- State successes and challenges: An opportunity for participating states to present their efforts and challenges and to exchange strategies.

State implementation successes and challenges:

Aug. 21, 2026

- An opportunity for participating states to present their efforts and challenges, to bring questions and to exchange strategies.
- Facilitator: Gabriella Imbriano, CMHIS