

A Longing in the Soul: Healing Sexual Trauma Thru the Presence of a Horse



"THERE EXISTS COUNTLESS STORIES AND VARYING CONFESSIONS OF THE UNRESOLVED FEARS AND PERSONAL TRIUMPHS WOMEN HAVE DISCOVERED UNDER THE FORGIVING AND NONJUDGMENTAL TUTELAGE OF THE HORSE. HORSES HAVE GAINED A NEW PROMINENCE AS CO-FACILITATORS IN PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL TREATMENT CENTERS ACROSS THE NATION. LIKE ALL ANIMALS WITH WHICH WE FORM A CLOSE BOND, EITHER IN OUR DREAMS OR FROM A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP, HORSES APPEAR TO BE CATALYST FOR GROWTH AND SELF-DISCOVERY... THAT RE-ENFORCE MY BELIEF THE HORSE IS ORACLE AND BELLWETHER FOR OUR SOULS." (MELISSA SOVEY-NELSON, 2004)

Hello and Welcome!
From Jackie and Nadine



Wild at Heart Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy – Support in Healing Gender-Based Sexual Violence



- This group is designed for individuals who identify as female in gender.
- This group is for women who have experienced sexual abuse, sexual assault, and have experienced sexual trauma in their lifetime.
- These women have a history of sexual abuse from childhood experiences, either from a trusted family member, relative or known adult in a position of authority or familiarity.
- Or... She is a woman who has been sexually assaulted, abused, and traumatized as an adult in a private setting; intimate partner violence, or a social setting, (i.e. date rape, drug induced, alcohol influenced, gang rape.)

So What is Sexual Trauma and Why is This Work Important?

1. There is very little documented research on EFP and Sexually Traumatized Women.
2. The numbers keep growing. One in five women will be raped at some point in her life, and one in three women will experience some form of contact sexual violence in her lifetime (NSVR, 2019).
3. There are too many cases falling through the Cracks... multiple reasons mostly due to shame, fear, and confusion about the event.
4. This often results in debilitating conditions such as anxiety, depression, relational challenges, substance abuse and many others.



SEXUAL ASSAULT MAY BE CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST SEVERE AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY DAMAGING TYPES OF TRAUMA. IF LEFT UNRESOLVED, THE TRAUMA CAN SEVERELY DEGRADE AN INDIVIDUAL'S ABILITY TO SELF-PROTECT, LEAVING THE VICTIM MORE VULNERABLE TO FURTHER ABUSE.
(RUDOLPH, 2016)

So Why Horses For Healing?



"REMARKABLE HUMAN PSYCHIC BREAKTHROUGHS ORIGINATED AND ARE MANIFESTED WITH HORSES WHEN A PERSON CREATES THAT RELATIONSHIP - NOT ONLY ARE THE RESULTS BOTH TRANSFORMATIONAL AND LASTING, BUT THEY OCCUR WITH AMAZING SPEED."
RIDING HOME:
THE POWER OF HORSES TO HEAL (HAYES, T., 2015)

The Three Big Whys...

For Horses - Women

Sexual Trauma

Big Why # 1

Women and horses have a long, long history together and here are five important points why women prefer to work with horses.

- Relationship with a horse is a powerful, non-verbal relationship. Understanding body language is the key to understanding the messages the horses send out. This awareness helps women to begin to recognize their personal body movements; reactions and reasoning; as they may mirror the person's behavior.

- Horses help women feel 'heard'. Horses are curious by nature, intelligent, social animals which are acutely sensitive to ever-changing energy in the environment and those humans around them.
- Horses can help women feel like strong leaders in a non-predatory manner. Although usually very large animals, their general disposition is gentle, sensitive, and non-threatening.
- Working with a horse takes on a collaborative effort of harmony and teamwork.
- Being with a horse, as well as the idea of horses historically is magical for many women as they can become engaged in the moment; the trusting environment. The newly acquired relationship with the horse feels safe, thus deepening the connection to nature and spirit.

Why # 2 Group Therapy?

As history has shown us, many times when there is a traumatic experience, the person tends to withdraw and/or pull inside in an effort to control the emotions and physiological responses happening in his or her body. Research has shown us that women in general, process trauma differently than men and that the act of 'opening up' inside the group can be very helpful in the healing process.



Disclosure about traumatic events within the trusted and sacred circle of women creates a bond and the women provide support for each other.

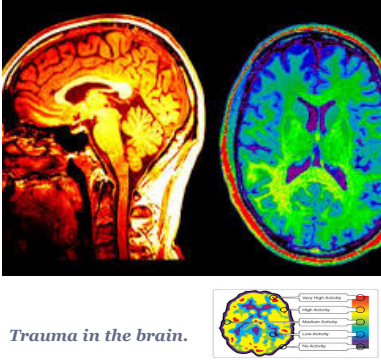
Women feel safe within the group due to the commonality of why they are there... Acceptance in the herd is very empowering.



Big Why #3
Neurobiological Factors of Sexual Trauma


Where conventional psychotherapy focuses largely on verbal cognitive process, trauma work must be addressed on a cellular level.

Trauma deeply rooted in the brain and brain stem areas presents itself as having the inability to judge and/or reason; intensely reactive; unable to regulate emotions; and in general creates the misfiring of neurons.



Trauma in the brain.

Somatic Psychology: Bio-Nero-Psycho-Social-Spiritual



“Somatic psychotherapy operates on the premise that sensations, breath, and movement are the body’s form of speech, and that if we listen to this speech we can complete and release stored trauma, relearn how to feel excitement and pleasure, and engage in activities that nourish.”

Christine Caldwell , Getting Our Bodies Back: Recovery, Healing and Transformation through Body-Centered Psychotherapy

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING
BASIC CONCEPTS, by Peter Levine
(2010)

- THE BODY IS HARD WIRED TO HEAL AND TO SURVIVE.
- SUPPORT INITIAL EXPLORATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF SENSATIONS.
- PENDULATION, TITRATION, CONTAINMENT IN THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE.
- RESTORING ACTIVE AND HEALTHY RESPONSES.
- UNCOUPLING FEAR FROM IMMOBILITY.
- RESOLVE AROUSAL STATES BY PROMOTING DISCHARGE OF SURVIVAL ENERGY AND LIFE PRESERVING ACTION.
- RESTORE SELF-REGULATION



Symptoms are a result of **BOUND ACTIVATION** (The inability in the Moment to resolve the event. For example, **FREEZE STATE**. Prey and Predator behavior in mammal: Rest & Digest.

The human tendency is to think through a traumatic event in an effort to Make sense of it, (Neo-Cortex) and often what happens for humans is Self-blame, shame, denial, and repression of the traumatic event.

If the trauma happens before the brain is fully developed or pre-verbal *Embodiment is body-sensing, felt sensing, and confusion; all contained in Relational capacities/attunement/attachment.*

Early Childhood Sexual Trauma


(ECST) occurs before brain is fully developed, this deeply impacts body sensing, relational capacities/attunement/attachment

TRAUMA IS AN INTERNAL STRAIT JACKET CREATED WHEN A DEVASTATING MOMENT(S) IS FROZEN IN TIME. IT STIFLES THE UNFOLDING OF BEING AND STRANGLES OUR ATTEMPTS TO MOVE FORWARD IN OUR LIVES. IT DISCONNECTS US FROM OURSELVES, OTHERS, NATURE, AND SPIRIT.
PETER LEVINE








Expressive arts therapies are defined as the use of art, music, drama, dance Movement, poetry/creative writing, bibliotherapy, play, and sand-play within the context of psychotherapy, counseling, rehabilitation, or medicine. Additionally, expressive therapies are sometimes referred to as "integrative" When various arts are purposively used in combination in treatment.




Mindfulness means
Maintaining a moment-
By-moment awareness
Of our thoughts, feelings,
Bodily sensations, and
Surrounding environment
Through a gentle,
Nurturing lens.
Mindfulness also involves
Acceptance, meaning that
We pay attention to our
Thoughts and feelings
Without judging them ...
(Jon Kabat-Zinn)




“What has been
Wounded in relationship,
Must after all, be healed
In relationship.”
Karl Rogers



This requires a trusting relationship so
that feelings can be sensed through the body,
touch, closeness, and the shared space of
others.



THIS ASPECT OF HEALING IS ONE OF THE
MOST CHALLENGING FOR A PERSON WHO HAS
EXPERIENCED TRAUMA AND ONE OF THE
MOST NECESSARY.



The Key Components to the **SUCCESS** of Our Equine Facilitated Group Therapy Sessions:

- Sense of Safety
- Having a choice
- Belonging
- Being Seen
- Trust and Acceptance Without Judgment
- Connection
- Regulation/ Presence
- Hope - *Spiritual*



Bessel A. van der Kolk (2014) described Regulation as, "The whole issue of self-Regulation, calming your brain down, and Helping your brain to be focused in the Present is central. The key brain area that Is necessary to be online to get over your Trauma is your capacity to observe yourself and to notice yourself."



This is a vital function of neuroplasticity (the natural function of the brain and body to heal and repair damage.



Healing ...



"It is possible and has been successful with the help of a horse. A practical bond Of energy and attention between a horse and person, enabling coherent, visceral Emotional restructuring and astonishing leaps of healing."
-Leigh Shambo



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Bibliography - provided upon request.

Please contact us! We would be happy to Help set up a program to serve women. Nadine is finalizing her dissertation and Preparing for defense. She is located in Colorado Springs. Jackie does ongoing Groups for women with sexual trauma in The Boulder/Longmont area. The next Eight week session beings June 8, 2019. Contact Jackie for more information.

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