

The Equine Facilitated Therapy basic course

The Czech Equine Facilitated Therapy Association (CEFTA)

Content

1	Course information	1
2	Lecturers	2
	Practical part.....	2
	Theoretical part	3
3	CEFTA - educational experience and focus	3
	Course description and content	4
4	Training, choice and use of the therapy horse	6
5	Contact	7

1 Course information

Course **Equine Facilitated Therapy basic** (*formerly Hippotherapy course basic*) has been running for 26 years. Equine Facilitated Therapy (EFT) as a treatment method is very advanced in the Czech Republic; physiotherapists and occupational therapist know how to apply it with great benefit to their clients in a wide range of diagnoses within comprehensive rehabilitation approach.

Who can attend: Physical, occupational and speech-language pathologists, physicians specialise in paediatrics, neurology, orthopaedic or rehabilitation. Horse-persons and other professions may attend the course as well, but they will not get a certificate.

Horsemanship skills: Participants have to be active horse riders; they submit a video of their riding skills. During the practical part, they will demonstrate their horsemanship skills.

Course content and duration: 120 hours of theory via e-learning and 40 hours of practice in an EFT training centre in Prague, Czech Republic. The participant will submit a case study (within 60 days from completing the practical part) and take an online test (within 14 days from providing the case study). The Czech Equine Facilitated Therapy Association (CEFTA) will credit the certificate with the accreditation from a professional body on inclusion in the national credit system.

2 Lecturers

Practical part

Vera Latelme-Faisan, MSc., PT

Vera practices physical therapy at her private health care centre, where she incorporates hippotherapy through a partnership with several hippotherapy centres since 1999. She focuses on hippotherapy services for children from 3 months of age with a wide range of diagnoses. Vera has 21-years experience in paediatric rehabilitation and completed several courses – Hippotherapy (CEFTA and AHA), Vojta method, CranioSacral Therapy, etc. She has served on CEFTA board as president since 2013. Since 2004, she has been teaching basic and advanced hippotherapy courses both in the Czech Republic and abroad. She co-published the book Hippotherapy in 2018. In the period 2004-2009, she assisted in founding a hippotherapy centre and conducted certified hippotherapy courses in the rehabilitation hospital in Saudi Arabia. She is a coordinator of the European Equine Facilitated Therapy Network governed by HETI. Vera is a licenced physiotherapist in the Czech Republic and Great Britain and she is a listed therapist under the American Hippotherapy Association (AHA). She is an active horse rider.

Tereza Honcu, MSc, PT

Tereza studied physiotherapy at the Second Faculty of Medicine Charles University in Prague. In her thesis, she demonstrated the effect of intensive hippotherapy for children with

central nervous system disorders. She has 18-years experience in hippotherapy in early intervention for children with various health problems. Since 2008, she has been working as a head physiotherapist in EFT centre Caballinus. Tereza completed several courses - Hippotherapy, Vojta method, Active segmental centration, Visceral therapy and Trigger points therapy. She has extensive experience in paediatrics. Tereza is often providing lectures to professionals. She leads practical training for college students of the Second Faculty of Medicine Charles University, future specialists in animal-assisted therapies at the Czech University of Life Sciences and the Faculty of Health Studies at The University of J. E. Purkyně. She is also a lecturer of the hippotherapy course in the CEFTA. Tereza is an excellent horse rider.

Theoretical part

The theory is taught via e-learning, allowing the study of the subject in a broader context at a lower cost for students. The lectures are submitted by skilled and experienced CEFTA lecturers, see their profiles - <https://kurzy-hiporehabilitace.com/kurzy/lektori/>.

3 CEFTA - educational experience and focus

Česká hiporehabilitační společnost, z.s. (in English – The Czech Equine Facilitated Therapy Association - CEFTA) is a voluntary, non-for-profit, apolitical, open and independent association. It was founded in 1991. The mission of CEFTA is to develop, promote and provide safe and best practice in Equine Facilitated Therapy. The association is member of the Federation of Horses in Education and Therapy International AISBL (HETI).

CEFTA currently unites 58 centres providing Equine Facilitated Activities and Therapies (EFAT) from the Czech Republic giving their services to more than 6000 clients per year. CEFTA organises events leading to fulfilling its mission but also conduct the education of professionals in all EFAT areas. For foreign participants, it runs courses in English. The association cooperates with different institutions, universities, statutory and professional bodies, associations and companies. Furthermore, the association organises workshops and conferences at an international level. CEFTA lecturers and tutors have been invited to several EFAT centres in Europe and the USA.

CEFTA has been involved in the training of EFT specialists since 1994, initially in collaboration with the National Center of Nursing and Non-Medical Healthcare (NCO NZO) in Brno. Since 2008 it has been an independent educational organisation. Based on legislation, the education system allows acquiring post-gradual specialisation in Equine Facilitated Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy (EFPO). The courses had obtained accreditation from a professional body on inclusion in the national credit system. So far, 326 experts had been trained as Equine Facilitated Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy specialists.

In the beginning, we followed the German hippotherapy model, including the education system. The first chairman of CEFTA was oriented to the "German school", thanks to his connections we had the opportunity to attend the Hippotherapy course, led by experienced German lecturers. The course was built primarily on the riding practice of physiotherapists and working with horses. Another inspiration was a meeting with an "English school" and then a comparison with a "French school". These were mainly differently modified riding lessons, often in saddles, intending to provide clients with a joyous experience. Besides, each model was based on a different riding culture of the country and a level of health and social care for people with specific needs. We also studied US methodologies.

The Czech education model is founded on clinical experience, and up-to-date research with the focus on the therapist specialisation and the course contents have changed over the 26 years in line with new findings and studies. In our experience, insisting on excellent riding and breeding skills discourages high-quality therapists from enrolling and practising EFT. A combination of a quality rider with an excellent therapist is rare. The lecturers are experienced physiotherapists and occupational therapists with at least 10 years of EFT experience; many of them have attended professional courses and internships abroad. We cooperate with many experts - specialists from other disciplines as well.

Course description and content

The range of the course is 160 hours - 120 theory and 40 hours of the practical part. Students have to submit three comprehensive homework, a project of EFT virtual center, a case study and pass the final exam. The aim of the course is that the therapist must be able to evaluate the client, select a suitable horse, see the movement of the horse's back and know how to use a maximum of this movement for the benefit of the client, how to apply therapy positions and

their correction, to understand the indications and contraindications and be able to manage the EFT team members and centre. Theoretical education, both in Czech and English courses, is realised via e-learning, which enables the study of the subject in a broader context at lower costs for students. The significant part is dedicated to the evaluation of the patient, setting plan of care, treatment goals, documentation, management and marketing and safety. We put great emphasis on gaining practical skills. Students get experience in working hands-on with clients, assisting an experienced therapist from the other side of the horse and learning to observe and react to the client's responses, positioning and correcting of the therapy positions.

As an example, working with young children with neurological disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, requires above all knowledge of the physiological and pathophysiological development of the child. EFT is one of the techniques used in comprehensive therapy. Children do not ride horses, but the specialists – therapists use the balance area provided by the horse's back to influence the central nervous system with the subsequent movement response of the child. The techniques are very close to those used in the therapy of neurological disabilities in the Czech Republic - for example, the Bobath concept or the Vojta method. The physiotherapist must be able to assess the client and determine the rehabilitation plan and goals, know the possible positions of the horse and be able to correct them. She/he needs to be able to see the movement of the horse's back and its benefits for the client. From our point of view, an experience of working with a horse in canter and jumping is not necessary.

Horse-science is taken seriously (1/3 of the total course content). Topics as anatomy and biomechanics of horse, biomechanics of movement of the rider and horse and ethology. Certainly, the therapist needs to have riding experience. Part of the final exam is equestrian dressage exercise in the walk and trot, which the foreign participant submit filmed on video. It is up to the participant and his/her initiative to gain this experience. During the practical week, the participant is involved in working with the horse - preparing and handling it from the ground. She/he will also experience the movement of the horse's back and the therapy positions.

The therapist's work in EFT is particular and qualified. The physiotherapist or occupational therapist does not have to work directly with the horse and participate in its preparation. It is

done by other specialists - riding instructors and trainers, who prepare therapy horses in a way to be always in proper physical and mental condition.

4 Training, choice and use of the therapy horse

In the Czech Republic, great attention is paid to the choice and training of therapy horses. The safe engagement of the horse requires a specific selection and training for this activity. Many factors influence the choice of a horse; the requirements for the horse are based on clinical practice. The choice of the horse affects the client's age (from infants to adults), height, weight, type and level of disability, movement ability and coordination, mental abilities and self-sufficiency, overall emotional temper. In the Czech EFT, a wide range of horses are included, from the Welsh pony section A to the big cold-blooded horses for adult clientele. Horses are undergoing special training, including both mental and physical exercise. Since 2011, therapy horses pass a specialised testing system for an equine in the EFT assessing its preparation, character and acquired skills appropriate to the requirements of its therapy assignment. A successful horse gets a license and a label on its stall from the CEFTA.

Initially, the horse training prevailed according to the classical equestrian doctrine, and the procedures for preparing and working with the horses followed the principles applied in traditional equestrian training (from the top). Nowadays, the methods of the natural partnership (working with a horse from the ground) are increasingly used in the therapy horses training. We respond to the fact that during therapy, the horse is led on the hand, responds to leaders from the ground; on the contrary, it should not react to the movement on its back. Horse training applying natural partnership methods from the ground is directed to a safely manoeuvrable horse that is willing to do whatever work we need. Such an approach is therefore applicable to all categories of horses and various use. Methods based on the ethological principle represent a language of communication that the horse understands.

We are aware of the fact that the most endangered part of the horse's body is its back. EFT is performed in at walk, and in this gait, the horse has little opportunity to stabilise the spine and protect it from the weight of the rider. Therefore, activities leading to the creation and maintenance of high-quality dorsal musculature belong to the fundamentals of horses training. But this is the horse trainer's domain, not the therapist's.

EFT treatment session can be performed on many surfaces. It depends on what stimuli the therapist needs for the client, and by changing the surface, the muscle tone can be easier effected. The therapist can choose a harder surface (such as asphalt or paved road) that allows regular and rhythmic movement of the horseback. Or, if necessary, the therapist selects a deep, soft riding surface that affects higher horseback variability/swing. Both options have risks. An excessively hard surface can contribute to the development of bone and joint problems (arthritis, arthrosis). On the other hand, a very soft surface (deep sand) absorbs the hoof and the horse must exert much more muscle force to lift the limb again. It is strenuous work (the horse's heart rate increases by up to 50%) and can lead to early fatigue. It is one of the causes of stretched tendons, ligaments, muscles. The soft surface slows down the horse, shortens his steps and forces him to lift his feet higher.

The client's weight on horseback also plays a role. A 20-minute therapy with a child weighing 10-20 kg does not overload the horse's back or legs. Certainly, it will play a significant role in the adult client. Therapy session usually lasts about 15-25 minutes, then the surface/terrain, as well as the client, is changed. The horse always has enough time to relax its back or stretch the limbs.

5 Contact

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