

# Hippotherapy FAQs

## **What is hippotherapy?**

The term hippotherapy refers to how occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology professionals use equine movement to elicit functional change.

At Horse SenseAbility, hippotherapy is utilized by physical therapists; occupational and speech-language services are currently not provided. A child who comes to Horse SenseAbility for physical therapy works one on one with a therapist to increase gross motor function. They might work towards goals like head control, sitting balance, crawling, standing, walking, going up and downstairs, jumping, running, or accessing the playground. The horse's movement naturally challenges the rider's balance and coordination. The therapist will use different positions on the horses back to challenge different muscle groups and provide varied neurological input. Our physical therapist spends time working off of the horse as well as on the horse with the client for maximized results.

## **Why involve a horse?**

The movement of a horse is multidimensional, rhythmic, repetitive and provides simulation of what a normal walking pattern should feel like. A client receives repeated opportunities to practice appropriate balance responses and experience "typical" movement weight shifts to help improve postural control. A clinician can continually modulate the horse's gait and movement, client position or varied activities to create an altered input or challenge for a client.

## **Is hippotherapy the same as adaptive or therapeutic riding?**

No. Therapeutic (adaptive) riding is recreational riding lessons for individuals with special needs, taught by a certified adaptive riding instructor. It is focused on developing riding skills. Hippotherapy is a medically-based treatment strategy used by licensed PTs, OTs, or SLPs to improve land-based functional outcomes.

## **How do I know which program is best for my child?**

Horse SenseAbility can help you determine the appropriate program based on you and your child's goals, age, medical background and initial evaluation by either a certified adaptive riding instructor or physical therapist.

## **Who else is involved in the session? What methods are in place to maintain safety during a session?**

During a PT session using hippotherapy, the horse is led by a trained horse leader. Two additional individuals will be on either side of the client as needed throughout the session. Horse SenseAbility will provide gait belts and ASTM-SEI approved helmets for all hippotherapy clients to be worn during mounted activities.

**Is hippotherapy only for children? At what age can they start? Can adults participate?**

Horse SenseAbility offers the option of using hippotherapy for clients as young as age 2. Adults can be considered for participation in hippotherapy on an individual basis if safety can be ensured.

**Can any child with disabilities receive hippotherapy as treatment strategy?**

Hippotherapy is not suitable for everyone. It is not appropriate for anyone with horse allergies or intolerance to an outdoor environment, individuals with uncontrolled grand mal seizures, unstable spinal or joint conditions, or any condition in which movement will cause an aggravation of a medical condition, an increase in pain or decrease the client's function. Not all precautions or contraindications are clear cut, so the therapist, in conjunction with your child's physician if necessary, will determine if hippotherapy is appropriate for your child.

**Does insurance cover hippotherapy?**

Some insurance companies will partially or fully reimburse for physical therapy utilizing hippotherapy. Horse SenseAbility does not bill insurance directly but will provide families with documentation necessary to submit for reimbursement directly to their insurance company.

**Do I need a doctors referral?**

Horse SenseAbility requires that each participant's physician fill out a Medical Provider Form annually.

**What is involved in an evaluation?**

During a 60-minute evaluation, a physical therapist will assess your child's functional and gross motor abilities off the horse followed by a short mounted assessment. Following assessment, the PT and parent can discuss client suitability for hippotherapy as well as determine an appropriate plan of care and goals.

**How often and how long are the sessions?**

Horse SenseAbility provides hippotherapy in the fall, spring and summer. Hippotherapy is not offered for the winter session due to prohibitive cold weather temperatures that are not conducive with a therapeutic environment. Each weekly session is 30 or 45 minutes as determined by the physical therapist after the initial evaluation. Increased session duration or frequency is sometimes an option based on PT recommendation after an evaluation and availability for time spots.