

ARTICLE SEVEN

The Fear Factor: An Important Issue for Safe Equine Assisted Activities & Therapy (EAA/T)

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ABSTRACT

This is an educational article about the fundamental response to fear, the “flight or fight” mechanism that is inherent in most animal species, and its relevance to therapeutic activities involving horses. By critically examining the hypothesis that the human amygdala’s response to fear blocks a person’s ability to think, focus, and learn, it is then possible to consider how to prevent it from becoming a powerful detractor in an EAA/T session. Using literature to support this argument, suggestions are made as to how to improve the structure of the EAA/T session so that the challenged rider can feel safe both externally and internally. Challenged riders with various disabilities, including traumatic brain injury (TBI), post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and neuro-developmental dysfunctions, phobias and anxiety, are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Fear; Response; Amygdala; Flight or Fight; Amygdala Response.