



2nd National PRECI Conference
1-3 May 2024 | Surfers Paradise, QLD

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Field of Dreams- Early Intervention and Support

www.fieldofdreams.com.au

Developing sensory regulation through explicit teaching of the senses and using Equine Assisted Learning in autistic children under 9 years of age.

Objectives- To develop in children a knowledge of their 8 senses, through explicit teaching and hands on activities, so they are able to really use personalised sensory regulation skills in more situations with greater confidence.

- I found as a parent my daughter could recall her strategies while calm and in a safe place but could rarely access them when she was in melt-down mode, or when she needed to ask for help because she didn't fully understand which strategy was needed in that moment. I developed this program while studying Equine Assisted Learning with Leif Halberg, when I had one of those "Ah ha!" moments.



What is Equine Assisted Learning?

- Definition courtesy of Leif Hallberg(2019)
- Terminology is important. I am not a therapist, so I provide Equine Assisted Learning (EAL). EAL is a non-therapy skills-based service that focuses on teaching life skills, social skills, communication skills or leadership skills while facilitating personal growth and increased self awareness through both mounted and non-mounted interactions with horses.



Our approach to developing sensory regulation.

- The program that I use with the children I work with, ages 3-16 years, where we learn about our senses, how they work, how our body reacts to good and bad sensory input, and how we can control our reactions.
- We introduce the Zones of regulation from the beginning to assist making the connections between the senses and sensory regulation
- At Field of Dreams (F.O.D.) we work on the skills at the children's pace, and within their capability and knowledge base.
- Through examining our 5 senses, finding out what we like and don't like through "Science experiments" the children were able to develop a personalised sensory menu. We used horses and therapy animals to test out our understandings and explore how the animals use their senses to regulate and communicate.

THE FIVE SENSES



Brene Brown

Atlas of The Heart (2023)

- “Without understanding how our feelings, thoughts and behaviors work together, its almost impossible to find our way back to ourselves and each other. We don’t understand how our emotions shape our thoughts and decisions, we become disembodied from our own experiences and disconnected from each other.”
- Autistic children need to be explicitly taught how these connect in order for them to develop understandings of themselves and to connect with others.



To test our skills in a real-world situation, we took 2 of our horses and 10 autistic children to a horse show. The children were entered in a disability class but were competing at a regular show with all the noise and action associated with such an event. The children completed their own individual sensory profile- listing their needs when they are in each “Zone”. We provided support through a quiet tent, sensory fidgets, and agreed safe places and people.



We found that the children were able to self-regulate and access appropriate strategies though out the day. Parents and carers were able to appreciate the depth of the skills at this event compared to normal family or school activities. All children received ribbons for placing in their events. At the end of their event children were able to leave the show with their carers if they needed to or could stay and cheer on their friends.



Through explicit teaching of the senses, and developing a personalised sensory regulation plan, the children achieved greater success after skill development and completing in the show event, at school and in stressful situations. They do still need to continue to develop and expand their repertoire as they grow and change and meet new situations.

- “Anne has a wonderful intuition and a calm presence that allows such a beautiful connection to grow with our daughter. Since working with Anne we’ve tackled different challenges, and her support has helped immensely in the realms of emotional regulation, social interaction and cognitive development. We always look forward to spending time at Field Of Dreams and highly recommend this magical space and Anne’s support to anyone wanting to help their child flourish.” (Mum)
- Melina participated at last year's Baroque show at Burpengary. Before starting your program , Melina was shy introverted and didn't show a great deal of confidence. The program in which she participated in, we saw growth in many areas , including confidence , ability to express herself, regulation skills ,we saw major growth and ability to express her emotions better. I highly recommend Anne's Equine Therapy, Melina enjoyed the program and had a great time also. Angela (Foster Mum)



Phoenix was getting more and more confident through her weekly sessions in preparation to attending the show. Phoenix was showing great confidence in being able to control and guide the horse when she was leading.

Phoenix showed natural nerves prior to show day but was supported by her team to remember everything she had learned. (And absolutely nailed it)

Phoenix was extremely proud of her achievements and showed everyone for weeks her ribbons that she won. Confidence and anxiety levels had reduced for Phoenix as part of this process was teaching her patience and understanding for others. Phoenix also presented in a much calmer way of being able to regulate her emotions better. (Case Manager- Safe Places)

- Before Charlie started Field Of Dreams, he showed areas of concerns with his ability to self-regulate, issues with personal boundaries as well as difficulty with his learning and comprehension. Since starting and continuing sessions with Field Of Dreams, Charlie is able to read his body and what it needs in the moments when he struggles, his school-work has improved immensely and he enjoys joining in with his peers during class time, which he struggled before. Field Of Dreams really has helped Charlie develop and apply the skills he learns during his sessions with his everyday life. (Mum)



References

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