

# Two types of MHW Tools – an overview for new instructors

The Medicine Horse Way Apprenticeship will teach you to use a variety of introductory and advanced tools to impart life skills to your clients. The tools include didactic material, skill building experiential activities with horses, and reflective activities with the horses.

We distinguish 2 types of activities in Equine Facilitated Experiential Learning: Skillbuilding activities and Reflective activities.

There is a **different protocol** for facilitating and processing each.

## Skill Building Activities

These are activities that aim to teach the clients skills for accomplishing a specific task or overcoming a specific challenge. The more skilled a client becomes in these, the further they can advance into their process of emotional healing, and the sooner they can grow out of their current life challenges.

Some skills, such as physical boundary setting with horses, are essential for clients to master in order to ensure their safe Equine Facilitated Learning experience.

In guiding the client through these activities, therefore it is essential that **you as facilitator maintain a focus on guiding the learning process**. Specific guidance for how to facilitate specific exercises is provided in the scripts of these exercises.

Emotions can, and do, come up during these activities and may require some processing, but the role of the facilitator is to as much as possible bring the focus back to learning the skill. This is easily done by making it clear from the beginning that it is a skill building activity and that you will be coaching them in the various steps. If you want to check in with the client during the experience, focus on specifics: “What are you aiming to do? What are you trying to achieve? What is your goal right now?” rather than on “What is happening for you?” (The latter question invites the client to go into more reflective processing – see further – which makes it more difficult to get back to the learning).

To help the client process after the experience, we ask these questions:

1. What went well for you? What was successful?
2. What was the challenge you overcame?
3. What would you like to experiment with? Or. What would you refine? (Additional question might be: What is your idea for doing that?)
4. What did you learn about ... [the subject of the exercise, for example Boundaries and Energy fields, or the power word associated with the exercise]

As question 3, you might also ask “What would you do differently?/Is there something you would do differently?” but you have to be careful with this: it may give the client the impression that YOU think they should do something differently. This order and focus is important because our brain is wired by nature to **more acutely focus on negative experiences**. After all, in nature we need to learn to prevent them to survive. Therefore the survival instinct tends to jump in and make your client talk about all the mistakes they felt they made. Then the person will very quickly go into their False Self and forget what they actually did well. As facilitator, you may have to direct the client back to what went well several times.

All skill building activities require an introduction and theory, a human to human demonstration and client practice, and demonstration with a horse and then client body scan and practice with a horse. (The Energy Fields Exploration exercise only requires an abbreviated body check in.)

## Reflective Activities

These are designed to allow clients the time and interactive space with the horse, to explore their potential, or specific hearts desires. During and after the experience they can reflect on and process emotional blocks and limiting beliefs to do with these, thereby expanding awareness of their authentic selves.

**Your focus as facilitator is on providing a safe unfolding emotional process.** During these activities as a facilitator you keep your input to a minimum. The general rule is to not offer any comment unless the participant asks you a question or you really notice they are stuck. Even then it is most valuable to ask questions rather than offering input. The best way to prevent you making any assumptions about their process, is to ask them: “What is going on?/What is happening?”

You may direct them back to their body scan information or to seeking the information behind an emotion. Do not give them information they are not asking for and do not interpret the actions of the horse for them. If they ask you what does it mean when the horse sniffs their toes, you can ask them how it felt, what does it mean to them, or does it connect with anything that came up in their body scan?

To help the client process after the experience, we ask:

1. Would you like to share something now? Or would you prefer to take some time to reflect and journal about your experience?

Participant may share anything they want to share about the entire experience. Or they may choose to take some time to journal, or hear some observations from you.

Whether or not to share your observations, depends on using the “Three times rule!” Before you share your observations, please ask first if the client would like to hear them.

When you do comment on a client’s experience you may only share your own emotions and/or experiences (“When the horse walked away I felt sad / I had an association with being abandoned”). As a coach, you must be very careful to not interpret or evaluate the experience of the participant! (“I thought it was sad when the horse walked away abandoning you”).

Some exercises require more specific guidance on how to facilitate them which will be listed in the specific script. Please also refer to the Medicine Horse Way Instructor Leadership Role document (Tab 25) on the art of facilitation.

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