

# The Educational Benefits of Therapeutic Riding

Resource: STRIDES  
Therapeutic Riding,  
Northridge, CA

**Remedial Reading.** Before one can read, it is necessary to recognize the difference in shapes, sizes, and even colors. These can be taught more easily on horseback, as part of games and activities. There is less resistance to learning when it is part of a riding lesson. Through the use of signs placed around the arena, letters can be taught, and reading of individual words by word recognition can also be learned. Games involving signs for "exit", "danger", "stop" etc., help to teach important life skills involving reading.

**Remedial Math.** Counting is learned by counting the horse's footsteps, objects around the arena, or even the horse's ears and legs. Number concepts are gained as the rider compares the number of legs on a horse to the number of his own legs. Addition and subtraction are taught through games involving throwing numbered foam dice and adding or subtracting the numbers. Because the concepts are taught through games, resistance to learning is decreased.

**Sequencing, patterning and motor planning.** Something as simple as holding and using a pencil requires a great deal of motor planning. Knowing which comes first in a sequence of events is an important part of most activities. These and other similar skills are taught on horseback through the use of obstacle courses, pole bending, drill team, and many other games and activities.

**Improved eye-hand coordination.** Eye hand coordination is necessary for such skills as writing. These skills are taught in tacking the horse, as well as various activities and exercises.



**Visual/spatial perception.** This includes our awareness of form and space, and our understanding relationships between forms in our environment. Included in this area are directionality (knowing right from left); space perception, which allows us to differentiate between items close in shape but spatially different (i.e. "h" versus "b"); form perception (i.e. differentiating "h" and "m"); figure ground (picking out an object from the background); and visual sequential memory (such as remembering symbols in a particular sequence or pattern). Both reading and math concepts involve visual spatial perception. Visual spatial perception improves as a natural result of control of the horse. Additional exercises are done on the horse to increase ability in this area.

**Differentiation.** The rider learns to differentiate significant from less significant stimuli in the environment. An improvement in this area occurs as the rider learns to attend to his horse and those things that may influence the horse as opposed to attending the environment in general.

