

# Wellness and Wild Horses

*"Wild horses run unbridled or the spirit dies." – Anonymous*

*Welcome to the first issue of my e-zine (electronic newsletter). Each month I shall endeavour to present to you, dear readers, a key thought to ponder and reflect upon. I am hoping that you will look forward to each issue of the e-zine and find it enjoyable, fun, and healthful!*

*"I'm kind of sorry now so many were caught, 'cause I have a lot of respect and admiration for the mustang. The fact that he'd give us back the same medicine we'd hand him, with sometimes a little overdose, only made me feel that in him, I had an opponent worthy of the game. Even though I'd get sore at them when they'd put it over on us and rub it in a little too hard, the satisfaction I'd get at catching some wise bunch didn't last very long when I'd remember they'd be shipped, put to work and maybe starved into being good by some hombre who was afraid of them and didn't savvy at all. For they really belong, not to man, but to that country of junipers and sage, of deep arroyos, mesas---- and freedom." - Will James, Cowboy Author and Wild Horse Hunter*

I love watching wild horses. If there is a documentary or film on wild horses, then I make sure that I watch it! Wild horses and domestic horses are not the same in how they live and how they act and how they stay mentally alert and healthy. Their needs are not the same. **And yet they are all horses.** They look similar, have similar dietary and exercise needs, yet live very different lives! And I pondered the question, "What is wellness for a client who experienced rejection, isolation, trauma, and loss as a child?" Who is, in many ways, like a wild horse; having learned hypervigilance, survival, and running alone. And how do we as therapists treat them? Do we expect our "little wild horses" to willingly and gladly accept OUR boundaries and conventions as the norm? Do we insist on our cultural norm as a sign of wellness?

When one throws a rope on a domesticated horse, the horse does not fear it or find it threatening. Rather the horse knows the lasso and rope are to lead it safely where the horse needs to go and what it needs to do: to work, to eat, to sleep, to bath, to be groomed and all such things. A rope also helps create a boundary in which the horse operates. A domesticated horse does not see the rope necessarily as punitive or threatening.

A wild horse finds no such solace with a lasso. The rope is a threat. The distance wild horses keep from other animals, including humans, is greater.

More space is required for safety. And ropes are not seen as safe, but rather as a danger to the well-being of the wild horse! A cowboy/trainer is not viewed as a friend or a benign authority figure. It is a battle of wills and a battle for survival, as far as the wild horse is concerned. The ability of the trainer to understand the wellness issues of a wild horse often does not enter into consideration. Rather, as cultural norms would dictate, the wild horse MUST become domesticated in order for all to be well and function within the society of domestication. And so, the wild horse MUST accept ropes or find itself severely injured in the process.

A captured wild horse must accept boundaries imposed upon it by others who have embraced the cultural norms of domestication as the sign of mental wellness. And if the wild horse does not accept the rope, then more ropes are thrown on the horse until the horse is no longer able to move on its own. It is all tied down by the trainer's ropes – the trainer's boundaries. The more severe boundaries of domestication are applied even more intensely to the wild horse as it fights and strains and injures itself in fear for its life! The wellness of the wild horse has not even entered into the equation; only the requirements of the cultural norms for the domesticated society are used as a reflection of mental wellness. It is certainly not the wild horse's mental wellness that is being considered!

Therapists must take great care with regards to mental wellness and the individuality of our clients. Not all clients, especially those who were abandoned or unwanted or traumatized as children, are domesticated and can trust others with leading them to safety or providing safe and supportive boundaries. That trust and leadership must be earned. It must be demonstrated to the wild horse that she is safe. **Sometimes the best way to lasso a wild horse, (to set a boundary,) and show it a safe and nurturing environment is to simply drop the rope and allow the little wild horse to come near to you all on its own.** And sometimes the clinician needs to trust their "little wild horses" on the path to wellness. The danger is to fall into the trap of cultural norms as a measure of mental wellness for our "little wild horses."

*- Helen Hill*

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Resources / Help in Time of Need

**Suicide/Crisis Intervention**  
213-381-5111

**Teen Suicide Crisis**  
800-852-8336  
310-855-4673 (6pm-10pm)

**Domestic Violence Hotline**  
800-799-7233

**Battering / Rape Hotline**  
310-392-8381 (24 hour)

**Elder / Dependent Abuse Hotline**  
800-992-1660

**Child Abuse Hotline**  
800-540-4000

**Daniel Freeman PET Team**  
310-742-8650 or 310-823-7928

**Psychiatric Emergency-PET Team**  
310-618-9687  
800-854-7771 (after hours)

**LA Free Clinic (Ages 12-24)**  
6043 Hollywood Blvd  
Los Angeles, CA 90028  
323-462-4158

**LA Free Clinic**  
8405 Beverly Blvd  
Los Angeles, CA 90048  
323-653-0950

**Alcoholics Anonymous**  
310-474-7339

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**Helen's Speaking Schedule**

- Jan 26<sup>th</sup> – Homeless Health Care
- Feb 1<sup>st</sup> – UCLA Dept of Nursing
- Feb 7<sup>th</sup> – Project New Hope
- Feb 13<sup>th</sup> – Homeless Health Care
- Feb 14<sup>th</sup> – Project New Hope
- Feb 21<sup>st</sup> – Cal State – Long Beach

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