

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT NCEFT'S VETERANS AND FIRST RESPONDERS PROGRAMS

NCEFT's Veterans and First Responders Programs offer active-duty and retired military personnel and First Responders the opportunity to participate in any of our services at no cost: equine-assisted therapy (physical, occupational and speech therapy conducted on horseback), adaptive riding, and equine-assisted mental health programs. The programs encourage physical and cognitive rehabilitation, providing a safe environment in which Veterans and First Responders can redevelop independence, confidence and strength. NCEFT receives no governmental funding (including from the VA), nor does it charge any Veterans or First Responders fees for services. Instead, we rely on the generosity of our supporters to fund the entirety of the programs via donations. Veterans and First Responders may self-refer to any of our programs. Veterans may also work with the VA to arrange participation.



Veterans and First Responders may choose from among any of the following treatment programs:

Equine-Assisted Therapy: Equine-assisted therapy utilizes equine movement as part of a coordinated intervention program to reach functional goals in the areas of physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy (a treatment strategy called hippotherapy). Individuals are accepted into our therapy program with a doctor's prescription and an evaluation from one of our therapists. [Learn more about NCEFT's equine-assisted therapy program.](#)

Adaptive Riding (AR): AR emphasizes the acquisition of riding and horsemanship skills both on and off the horse in an effort to achieve physical, emotional, and cognitive goals. Certified instructors are able to modify lesson plans to accommodate the needs of each individual, tailoring lessons towards specific short- and long-term goals. Individuals are accepted into our adaptive riding program following an evaluation by one of our therapists. [Learn more about NCEFT's adaptive riding program.](#)

Adaptive Horsemanship: Adaptive horsemanship clients are organized into small-group lessons consisting of other Veterans and/or First Responders. Incorporating aspects of adaptive riding, each lesson includes on and off-horse activities designed to increase independence. This program provides clients with the horsemanship skills required to participate in horseback riding as a recreational activity. Contact NCEFT (info@nceft.org or 650-851-2271) for more information about adaptive horsemanship group opportunities.

Lava Lake Ranch (for military Veterans only): A particularly special example of adaptive horsemanship for Veterans is an eight-week program that culminates in a horse camping trip to beautiful Lava Lake Ranch in Hailey, Idaho near the Sawtooth National Forest. Veterans are placed in small groups with their peers where they learn the basics of horsemanship and riding. From grooming and saddling, to staying balanced and in control of their horses,



participants gain confidence under the careful supervision of NCEFT staff and volunteers. Mastering new skills—both physical and mental—while bonding with our horses, all in the beautiful environment of NCEFT is, by itself, beneficial therapy. For many participants, the therapy goes even further—a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Lava Lake Ranch. The trip requires collaboration between both non-profits and private individuals. NCEFT, the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System, and Lava Lake Ranch each play a vital role in this comprehensive process.

Equine-Assisted Mental Health: Like traditional talk therapy, equine-assisted mental health programs address a variety of mental, emotional, and behavioral needs. Sessions occur at the barn with a licensed mental health professional, a horse or horses and, typically, an appropriately credentialed horse handler. Activities with horses are specifically designed to expand awareness, improve communication, ease distress, and build self-esteem. Horses offer a physical experience that moves the therapy process beyond self-reporting and allows for direct and real-time observation of behaviors, emotional responses, and patterns. NCEFT’s current group program focuses on PTSD among Veterans and First Responders and depression and suicide support. Contact NCEFT (info@nceft.org or 650-851-2271) for more information about equine-assisted mental health opportunities.

What is the procedure to receive treatment at NCEFT?

Required screening forms for all NCEFT programs and services are available online. Please visit nceft.org/our-services/apply-for-a-program to fill out a screening form securely online. After submitting the screening form and/or participating in a phone interview, our therapists will determine if you are a candidate for an in-person evaluation. If so, we will send an intake packet for you to complete and return to NCEFT. Once we receive your completed intake packet, we will schedule an evaluation. Client scheduling is then based upon coordination of client, horse, and instructor availability.

Are there any limitations for participants?

There is a list of precautions and contraindications that guide whether riding is an appropriate activity for an individual. NCEFT does not treat adults who cannot sit unassisted or who cannot safely work with the therapy team, including the horses. NCEFT is equipped with an overhead lift for those who are unable to mount from a standing position. NCEFT can accommodate most riders, provided they are:

- Not a danger to themselves or others (no hitting, biting, hair pulling, etc.)
- Comfortable wearing a helmet
- Able to maintain an upright head and neck position
- Able to follow single step instructions
- An appropriate weight for the horses that are available



How often do riders ride or meet? How long are the lessons or sessions?

- Equine-assisted therapy patients typically participate in treatment once a week, Monday through Friday, for 30 minutes in a private session.
- Adaptive riding clients typically ride once a week, Monday through Friday, for 30 minutes (private) or 45 minutes (semi-private). Adaptive riding lessons include mounting and dismounting (NCEFT is equipped with a lift for those unable to mount from a standing position). Many adaptive riding lessons also incorporate horsemanship activities such as grooming and tacking.
- Adaptive horsemanship groups, such as Lava Lakes, typically meet once a week for eight weeks in two-hour sessions outside of normal business hours (either evenings or weekends). Lava Lakes lessons begin with horsemanship activities and progress to independent riding in the NCEFT arena.
- Equine-assisted mental health patients typically meet once a week as part of a group session lasting an hour to an hour and a half. Sessions include time for group work with the facilitating therapist as well as time interacting with horses.

What is the cost for Veteran and First Responder programs?

NCEFT treats military Veterans and First Responders at no charge.

Do the Veteran and First Responder programs operate year-round?

NCEFT operates year-round, weather permitting for approximately 45 weeks of the year. Sessions are held Monday through Friday from roughly 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except for Lava Lakes, which is usually scheduled for evenings or weekends. We are closed periodically throughout the year (about every 10 weeks) to give the horses time off. Weather conditions that might prevent us from holding sessions include high wind and extreme heat (rain alone does not typically prevent activities).

