

HealingQuest's Brief Family Integration Program, featuring Ski Therapy™, Goes Year-Round

New Perspectives

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Brief Family Integration experiences are now available year round through HealingQuest, including Ski Therapy for the winter months and multiple-day, resort-based family trips in the summer with activities such as hiking, biking, and white water rafting.

HealingQuest's Brief Family Integration program fills an important, underserved niche in the continuum of care, allowing program professionals and educational consultants an option for families transitioning from a residential program. Families with treatment history may also benefit from a "tune-up".

Families with a child or other family member proceeding through residential or wilderness treatment often ask "can't we do something normal?" Siblings want attention too. The long haul of treatment offers little respite for coming together as a family and working together on the family system.

Experiences that bring families together need supervision and professional facilitation when families have been disrupted by placement of a family member in a residential setting. Families benefit from the supportive environments that resorts offer and can focus on family communication and reunification.

The Brief Family Integration Program

Brief Family Integration combines physical activity, individual and family therapy, mindfulness practices, creative expression, and nutrition to holistically treat the family system. By setting the program in supportive resort environments, the stresses on family members are managed and focused on the family work. Programs are custom in location, accommodations, activities, and length, ranging from 4 to 7 days.

Brief Family Integration incorporates an activity based EMDR-like protocol for diminishing reactivity to "triggers" present in family dynamics. This is accomplished through facilitating and observing family interactions in order to establish targets for somatic

therapy. Through elements common to EMDR such as client-centered subjective assessments of disturbance, bilateral activation present through physical activity, and attention to internal sensations, clients reduce their activation within the family dynamic.

Family interactions are facilitated and processed, whether formally in a group therapy format or informally during transport, meal times, and transition times. Initiatives for families range from psych-education to experiential, process-oriented groups. Psych-education covers dynamics of family systems, nonviolent communication skills, and concepts of emotional regulation. Families in transition from a program to home may have important negotiations and agreements to accomplish

Families work with emotional regulation using the HeartMath™ handheld heart rate variability (HRV) monitor which indicates subtle levels of activation. Through feedback, family members learn techniques to restore their nervous systems to “coherence” which allows for listening and creativity. Building awareness of how word choice, tone, body language, and expressions trigger other family members helps develop a sense of a “family system” and efficiently brings authenticity to family work.

Mindfulness elements support all aspects of the process and are taught through simple exercises. Appropriate creative expression through collective art, music, photography, or motion allows families opportunities to create meaning and ritual for marking significant moments or having fun together. Nutrition, meal planning, and cooking are opportunities for conflict as well as co-creation. Food is integral to the therapeutic plan.

Ski Therapy™

After an intake process that affirms the work the family members have already done, families are picked up at Denver International Airport and transported to Colorado resorts including: Beaver Creek, Vail, Keystone, Copper Mountain, and Keystone. A typical day includes mindfulness practice, breakfast, family therapy, skiing and ski therapy, down time, dinner, and a second therapy session.

During the program the family learns about emotional regulation, nonviolent communication, and dynamics of family systems. The family also practices 'family time'. Alternatives to skiing are available, including: hiking, snowshoeing and indoor swimming. HealingQuest staff stay with the family to capitalize on 'teachable moments' and to support boundaries. Sobriety is required for all family members during the trip.

HealingQuest's Leadership Team

The team is lead by expert therapists experienced in integrating the wilderness into therapeutic work for individuals and families. Katie Asmus, MA, LPC, Clinical Supervisor, is a faculty member of the Wilderness Therapy program at Naropa University. Jody Radtke, MA, LPC, Clinical Director, has directed the programs of the Women's Wilderness Institute in Boulder, Colorado for five years. Amy Winchester, MA, LPC- I, Grief and Loss Specialist, is a counselor with HospiceCare of Boulder & Broomfield Counties. Andrew Rose, MA, LPC- I, Program Director, Trauma Specialist, is a certificated EMDR practitioner with a private practice in Boulder, and leads Ski and Wilderness EMDR intensives.

Educational consultants and programmers can contact Andy Rose, Program Director, at NATSAP this January, through email at andy@skitherapy.com, or by calling 303 532 6780. Program brochures are available for printing on the home page at <http://www.skitherapy.com>. Information on Wilderness EMDR intensives and other custom trips for individuals and families can be found at <http://www.healingquest.info>