



Welcome

The volunteer helper is one of the most important members of the RDA team. Without people like you, the RDA would not exist.

Throughout the country more than 23,000 riders and carriage drivers look forward to their riding sessions and in order to do this they are relying on people like you to make it happen. Did you know that each year RDA volunteers contribute to more than three and a half million hours of their time to make a real and lasting difference to lives of riders and carriage drivers?

You are joining something amazing – thank you!

This guide has been designed to help you get the most out of RDA and to help you make sure that the riders get the most out of it too. It is not an exhaustive guide, but will reinforce what you learn first hand at the group. There is lots to get to grips with so please don't be afraid to ask your Group Instructor, Group Organiser or other volunteers for their help.

This section also outlines some of the qualities of the ideal RDA Volunteer. Again, this is far from exhaustive, but we hope that it will help you become a confident member of the team and that you will enjoy coming to RDA as much as the riders and that you will share their excitement and achievements.

What makes a good helper?

Someone who is :

- over 16 with an interest in people and horses
- has patience, enthusiasm, sympathy without sentimentality
- is reliable, sociable and has a sense of humour
- is a good team worker
- gives riders as much independence as possible but being aware of safety issues
- supports and encourages achievement
- is ready to give a hand wherever needed

What should helpers wear?

- Stout practical footwear
- Trousers or Jodhpurs
- Gloves
- Warm clothing especially in winter
- Jackets, which must be done up and are not flapping
- Avoid long dangly jewellery and tie back long hair for safety reasons

Hints for Helping

Arrive at least 10 minutes before a session. If you cannot attend, please notify an instructor as soon as you can. Turn off mobile phones and avoid sudden loud noises, shouting, clapping loudly. Horses can get scared very easily

Preparing for the session

Setting up the school : this will involve helping move mounting blocks and arranging equipment around the school for the lesson

Preparing horses : always make sure horses are securely tied up or held at all times. Check tack e.g. a nonslip numner if required, pommel strap, toe stoppers (daps), change bridles (a lot of the horses used have their own named RDA bridles) , check saddle and stirrups straps are fastened.

The Riders

At Godstone Group we have a mixture of riders of all ages and abilities from Young Epilepsy and from the community. Some will come with helpers.

The Lesson

Be focused and listen for instructions. You will either be asked to lead a pony or be a side walker, leaders look after your pony and side walkers look after your rider.

You may be told of specific aims or needs of a particular rider by their personal helper

Leading The Leading pony

Hold your pony still in the mounting block whilst the rider mounts by standing in front of the horse's head and holding the reins about six inches from the bit on either side.

To lead the pony correctly, face forwards and lead from the pony's shoulder, one hand holding the lead rope as close to the head collar as necessary, the other hand taking up the looped rope. Do not wrap the rope around your hand.

Listen for instructions and make sure your rider and side walker are ready for any change of pace or direction.

Keep the pony's movements smooth and at a good pace for maximum effect. Avoid sudden turns or stops

Keep a safe distance from the back of the horse in front.

Always lead on the inside when moving alongside the outside fence of the school to avoid being caught between the pony and the fence.

Be prepared to stop if your rider has a problem and keep the pony still and calm.

Side Helpers

Listen for instructions at all times both from the instructor and from the rider's accompanying helper.

If there is one helper, plus leader, it is easier to walk on opposite sides unless you are walking along the outside fence when you need to walk on the inside. If changing sides always move slowly and well away from the back of the pony.

You are there to prevent your rider falling off. Don't hang on although you may be asked to help them maintain balance by either holding their heel or placing a hand on their thigh particularly when trotting.

Help your rider obey the Instructor and make sure commands are understood.

You are there also to give confidence and prevent accidents. Allow as much independence as possible, intervening only when necessary so that they gain the maximum benefit from each session.

In the event of an emergency stay with your own rider, unless your instructor tells you otherwise.

At the end of the lesson

Dismounting: never let a rider dismount until instructors are present to help.

Leaders hold your pony still in the same way as for mounting.

Side walkers check your rider has both feet out of the stirrups before dismounting.

Wait until all riders have dismounted and are out of the school before moving the horse.

Run up stirrups, and loosen girth strap.

Remove any extra tack you may have put on e.g. pommel straps, daps, RDA bridles, Numners and put back on any tack you have taken off. If replacing bridle twist up reins into chin strap.

When taking back to stables check with stable staff where to take the pony, if it is to be untacked, and fill up the water bucket.

Make sure to bring back the lead rope and other RDA tack left on the pony.

Hopefully you go home feeling you have had an enjoyable and rewarding experience!

