

---

# Volunteer Handbook

---



# **BENEFITS OF THERAPEUTIC RIDING**

Therapeutic riding is an alternative form of therapy using horses to help people with various disabilities. Activities involving the horse can be used to assist people with disabilities in achieving physical and mental health, and cognitive, behavioral, social and communication goals. In this context, a team approach involving therapeutic riding - Instructors, health professionals and riders who have disabilities, are used in designing and implementing the riding sessions.

## **Some benefits include:**

- Improvement of balance
- Development of coordination
- Mobilization of trunk and pelvis
- Strengthening of muscles
- Normalization of muscle tone
- Prevention of contractures
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Improvement of attention span
- Promotion of independence
- Improvement of social integration
- Access to recreation, sport and/or competition
- Increased concentration, motivation and patience

*Riders experience a sense of control they might not otherwise feel in their everyday life.*

## **WHO BENEFITS:**

People with the following conditions may benefit from therapeutic riding. Please note this is not a comprehensive list.

### **Orthopedic Conditions**

Amputations  
Arthritis  
Congenital dislocation of the hip

### **Neurological Conditions/ Brain**

Strokes –C.V.A.  
Cerebral Palsy  
Epilepsy and seizures  
Traumatic brain injury

### **Neurological Conditions/ Spinal Cord**

Spina bifida  
Spinal cord injury

## FITTING HELMETS AND BELTS



- Each rider **MUST** wear an ASTM approved helmet.
- **The helmet must be fitted properly**, fitting snugly but without creating pressure or being uncomfortable.
- Various brands of helmets fit differently, and each helmet's harness can be adjusted for a proper fit.
- The front part of the helmet should rest one inch above the eyebrows and the chinstrap should be tight enough not to be pulled up over the chin. **It is important that the helmet fit well in order to provide adequate protection.**
- Lightweight helmets are used for riders with poor head control and shunt position.
- Riders with hydrocephalus (water on the brain) may have a shunt on one or both sides running down behind the ear. In this case, care must be taken to ensure that the helmet is not too tight as head size can vary from week to week.
- Riders wear a wide web belt as an assist for the Instructor during mounting and dismounting. It must **never** be used for side walkers to hold onto or put hand through the loop as a back support. This belt can also be used for emergency dismount. **Belts must be worn on the outside of clothing.**

## THE SIDE WALKER

A side walker's primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the rider. The degree of assistance from the side walker will depend on the balance and the ability of the rider. Side walkers can also help the Instructor in many other ways: i.e. keeping the rider's attention during the lesson, assisting in left/right directionality, spatial orientation, helping the rider understand the Instructor's directions and helping to keep the horse walking on.

## **SIDE WALKER'S DUTIES**

- Introduce yourself and accompany the rider into the ring.
- Assist the Instructor with checking that the rider is wearing a correctly fitted riding helmet before entering the ring and (a belt, if required).
- The Instructor will check the tack and tighten the girth before the rider mounts, but may ask you to check it during the ride. The Instructor or Assistant Instructor will make any adjustments.
- Assist the rider to mount or dismount only if asked by the Instructor.
- The Instructor or Assistant Instructor will help with adjusting the stirrup lengths [ideally before mounting]. Some riders cannot relax quickly so leathers may need to be adjusted during the lesson.
- **Stay with the rider while mounted or in the arena area at all times.**
- The Instructor will tell you which hold is appropriate for each student.
- Walk beside the rider level with the rider's knee. Keep hands free, not in your pockets.
- If the rider starts to lose his/her balance, gently push him/her back into position. Give just enough support to help him/her regain the proper position in the saddle.
- Do not lean on the horses or hang on to the saddle or saddle pad.
- Side walkers who accompany poorly balanced riders need to change sides occasionally to relieve stress on their arms.

- To change sides, ask the horse handler to go off the track and halt. Once stopped, switch sides (one at a time) if two side walkers are present, and always going in front of the horse and handler.
- Reminding the rider to maintain correct posture (i.e. straight line between the shoulder, hip and ankle) where possible.
- Help the rider to carry out instructions, giving the rider time to process the information. To give assistance, use hand over hand, but warn them that you are about to help and touch them.
- During the exercises, pay attention to your rider and assist **only** if necessary.
- In an emergency, follow Instructor's directions.
- At the end of the lesson stay with the rider and help him/her exit the ring and remove helmets and belts before returning to the supervision of their caregiver/parent.

## **RIGHT SIDE WALKER**

- When the rider is mounting, hold onto the stirrup leather and provide enough weight so that the saddle stays straight on the horse (counter weight!).
- Stay level with the rider on the off (right) side of the horse.
- Assist with exercises and movements involving the right side.
- Ensure that the rider's right foot is out of the stirrup before he/she dismounts.

## **SUPPORTING THE RIDER**

It is important the side walkers apply support as directed by the Instructor. Different levels of support may be required depending on the activity or ability of the rider.

### **Minimum Hold:**

The minimum hold is used for riders with good balance needing a little support to steady their position or encourage the leg to stay long and heel down. The side walker will cup the rider's ankle with the hand closest to the rider.

### **Medium Hold:**

The medium hold is used when the rider needs more support and is often used coming out of the mounting block or when trotting. The side walker holds the front of the saddle flap with the hand nearest the rider. The forearm rests just above the rider's knee. **Be careful to keep the thumb lined up with the fingers to prevent injury to the thumb if the horse should stop or turn suddenly.**

### **Maximum Hold:**

The maximum hold is used for riders who need a lot of support. It is basically the same as the medium hold except the side walker's forearm supports the rider at the hip joint. When applied by both side walkers this hold provides a lot of support physically and gives confidence to timid riders.

### **Full Hold:**

This hold is occasionally used to give an unbalanced rider extra security when needed, for example, when riding up and down hills on the trail or when learning to trot. This side walker supports at the knee or ankle with the outside hand and uses the inside hand to support the rider's back.

## EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

The Instructor is responsible for riders and horses in the arena and on the trail. Volunteers and caregivers must answer to the Instructor. Please follow all directions and instructions as quickly and safely as possible, especially in an emergency situation.

**IF A RIDER FALLS** - The Horse Handler should remove the horse immediately.

The Side Walkers stay with the rider. **DO NOT** attempt to move the rider without direction from the Instructor. If the rider is unconscious or if back and neck injuries are suspected, the rider **IS NOT TO BE MOVED**. The ambulance must be called.

The Instructor will ask the rest of the group to circle away from the incident. If the fall is not serious, the Instructor may decide to mount the rider again or may wait until a later date. In any case the Instructor concerned must complete an INCIDENT REPORT. All incidents must be reported to the Program Director as soon as possible, and the input from the volunteers is important.

**FIRST-AID SUPPLIES** in the white cabinet with red cross in arena next to small door, in the bathroom in stable and in the office.

**HORSE FIRST-AID SUPPLIES** are in the tool room- for Instructor's and stable managers use only!

## **Assistant's Information Sheet**

As an assistant you play a vital role in the student's riding program and with your help we can make the riding lessons a success.

**What to Expect:** You will be participating in class which means you will be in the arena with the horses and volunteers assisting your rider in getting their horse ready (is part of their program). The volunteers are trained to deal with the horses and how we get the students to tack up. However you know your rider and will be asked to help reinforce what the volunteer or instructor has asked.

**When you Arrive:** Safety is our number one concern so please keep your rider out of the arena until the instructor says it is okay. Each rider must wear an equestrian approved helmet, safety belt and boots. If you expect problems with your rider you are welcome to come out and get a head start.