



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Volunteer Handbook

Dear Strides of Strength Volunteer,

When you decided to volunteer at Strides of Strength, you became a very important part of a team. Our programs here at Strides of Strength could not operate without the assistance of dedicated volunteers. Taking that into consideration, please remember that we and the participants are relying on YOU. If a volunteer doesn't show up occasionally, or if they agree to help and then suddenly change their mind, it makes a huge difference. We cannot provide these wonderful opportunities to people who need them, if we don't have help from people like you.

There are many volunteer opportunities at Strides of Strength: as a horse leader or sidewalker during lessons, Minis on the Move outings, helping with fundraisers, assisting with special events, helping with horse care, etc. There are always opportunities to help around the farm.

As part of the Strides of Strength team, you help provide our participants with the many benefits of therapeutic equine assisted activities. Our philosophy is to teach horsemanship skills both on and off the horse that develops the independence of each participant as well as improving physical, mental, and emotional well-being. You make a difference in the lives of persons with disabilities and special needs, and you are giving back to your community.

All volunteers are required to complete their paperwork and attend an introductory training session before helping in an equine activity. Assisting participants in a lesson requires maturity and responsibility by the volunteer. Volunteers may be asked to help in other areas if they, or the instructor, feel they would be better suited to assisting outside of lessons. Additional training is available for volunteers who want to learn more or take more responsibility. This handbook outlines what is expected of volunteers as well as general information concerning the program. In order to help you perform your job better, please read and study the information in the handbook.

WELCOME!!! and thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,
Beth Gaston, Founder and CEO



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Policies and Guidelines

Volunteer Training

Typically, lesson volunteers should be at least 14 years old to assist participants, but occasionally exceptions for younger individuals can be made. Please have respect for these younger volunteers as they are well trained and possibly have more experience with horses than some adults. All volunteers who work with the riders, as leaders or sidewalkers, must be mature enough to handle the responsibility of assisting and protecting the participant, and physically fit to walk up to two hours and jog occasionally. Youth mature enough to assist with feeding and horse care may begin volunteering with barn chores at the age of 12. Strides of Strength (SOS) reserves the right to determine if a volunteer is not yet ready to take on the responsibility of assisting in lessons or working independently with the horses. Horses are large animals and it is a big responsibility to assist with these animals and the participants with disabilities and/or special needs. Volunteers are required to attend the orientation training session and one safety training every quarter. It is recommended that volunteers attempt to attend most other trainings to stay current on new techniques and safety procedures. It is imperative that we offer our participants the safest environment possible. By training our volunteers to know how to handle certain situations and practicing on a regular basis, we are able to react to emergencies in a safer and more orderly fashion.

Volunteer Paperwork

Volunteer paperwork must be complete prior to volunteering at SOS. If you plan to volunteer with us for a while, please understand that paperwork will need to be updated annually.

Volunteer Sign-In

It is important for you to sign in when you come to SOS. Maintaining records of volunteer hours is a requirement of accreditation, helps with fundraising, and provides an accurate record for those who need verification of hours. Remember to sign in **every time** you volunteer. Please ask where to sign in at your training.

Arrival and Departure Times

Please plan to arrive at least 30 minutes prior to lesson time and plan to stay 15 minutes after the conclusion of the lesson. We may need help bringing horses in, tacking them up, etc.

Volunteer Information

We want to keep you informed of everything that happens at SOS. To do so, we post information on our Facebook and Instagram pages as well as on the office windows and bulletin board. We also send emails so please let us know if your information changes.

Absences

For the program to be consistent and successful, volunteers are suggested to commit for a specific lesson time (such as every Tuesday from 10-11:30am for the entire 8-week session). We realize that emergencies and illness can occur but please try to let us know well in advance so that we can find someone to fill in.

Cancellations

At times it may be necessary to cancel a lesson due to severe weather. If you have any questions, please call Bethany, Program Director, at 704-699-1882 or the instructor for the class.

Water

During lessons we recommend bringing your own water with you to the barn as we do not typically have drinking water readily available and we want you to stay hydrated, especially on hot days. There is a refrigerator in the barn if you would like to keep your beverage cold. If you forget to bring a drink, the water from the garden hose is safe to drink.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Restrooms

There is a bathroom in the Gaston Farm main barn. Eventually, we plan to have an additional restroom in the SOS office.

Feedback

As a Strides of Strength (SOS) volunteer, your feedback is a valuable resource. Your ideas, comments, suggestions, etc. help us to constantly improve the programs. However, we request that you speak to the instructor or director before or after a lesson in private.

Ending your volunteer position

We understand that at some point your time as a SOS volunteer may need to come to an end. Please let us know as soon as possible of your plans to leave your volunteer position. If possible, find a replacement that is as dependable, enthusiastic, and dedicated as you.

General Emergency Procedure

Please inform the instructor or director of any accident, both animal and person related, no matter how minor it may seem to you. Equine and Human First Aid supplies are in the cabinets located in the bathroom of the Gaston Farm barn. For person related emergencies, if you are asked to call for assistance, dial 911. The address of the farm is:

2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706

For animal related emergencies, the Veterinarian's number is located on the bulletin board in the bathroom.

Dress Code

- Footwear: closed toed, comfortable shoes, no sandals. Hard soled shoes or boots with a low heel are preferred for riding.
- Long pants: No shorts, skorts, culottes, capri pants or dresses/skirts. Riding breeches, form fitting jeans or tights are acceptable.
- Shirts: tank tops with thick straps are acceptable on hot days, if unsure, please ask the program director. No low cut or midriff showing tops.
- Please dress appropriately for winter weather.
- Jewelry: no jewelry that can get caught in manes or tails ('dangling' earrings, necklaces, rings/bracelets, etc.)
- Perfume can attract insects and some participants may be allergic, so we advise only neutral perfumes and lotions.
- Electronic equipment: Cell phones should either not be carried, silenced or turned off, during lessons. Please do not answer a call while Sidewalking or Leading. It is important to keep your attention on the participant or horse for which you are responsible.

Procedures and Safety Rules

The following rules apply to all SOS program participants, staff members, volunteers, and anyone visiting SOS at Gaston Farms Equestrian Center. These rules are designed to insure safety, a primary concern here at SOS. Please help us to enforce these rules.

- All volunteers must have an annually updated and fully completed application to participate.
- No abusive, threatening, or violent behavior towards people or animals will be tolerated on Gaston Farm premises.
- No running, screaming or boisterous behavior is permitted on the property.
- Alcohol, illegal drug use, smoking, open flames, or weapons of any kind are prohibited on Gaston Farm premises or at any SOS hosted events.
- Please do not handle program horses, feed, or pet horses, unless trained by a staff member.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

- No one may ride a program horse unless supervised by a staff member.
- No non-program horse is allowed on Gaston Farm premises without prior permission from the SOS Program Director.
- Barn aisles and cross tie bays must be kept clean and free of obstructions.
- Volunteers who arrive at SOS under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or who bring weapons to SOS will be asked to leave immediately, and their association with SOS may be terminated.
- Please make sure gates are securely latched. Do not hit the horses entering or exiting a gate.
- Horses may be tied only as directed by the instructor. Never tie a horse by his bridle or to fencing.
- Horses cannot see directly behind them, so talk to them as you approach. Try never to approach from behind, always from the side or front. It's best to walk up to the shoulder/neck.
- When walking around a tied or held horse, do not walk under or over the lead rope or directly under the horse's neck.
- Do not kneel or squat around a horse.
- When petting a horse, stroke or pat gently, do not poke them.
- When turning a horse loose in a paddock, lead him in and turn him completely around so his head faces the door or gate before letting him loose so that you can easily exit without walking behind him.
- Do not let horses sniff each other's noses, they are apt to squeal or misbehave.
- Helmets are always worn with safety straps snapped by anyone who rides on Strides of Strength leased horses.
- Remember the horse is held, not led. The rider is taught to ride, not taken for a ride. If possible, the rider grooms and completes the various tasks associated with the horse. The rider learns a skill and begins to participate in a sport. The benefits are many and great.
- When working with a participant, make sure directions and explanations are clear and broken down into several steps. Use demonstration when possible. Be consistent. Directions may need to be repeated several times and possibly in several different ways. Be positive and praise success with specific examples.
- Do not feed horses treats by hand. All treats must be put in a treat bowl. Horses learn too quickly to bite if they are given treats by hand.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

If you have never had the opportunity to meet people with disabilities, this aspect of volunteering can be intimidating and a little frightening at first. You may be feeling insecure about how to act or react to people who may look, sound, move, and behave differently from what you usually expect.

- Have fun! Talk about the same things you would with any other person. A disability does not limit or dampen a person's sense of humor.
- A person with a disability is an individual first and is entitled to the same dignity, respect, and considerations expected by anyone.
- Be yourself! Don't be sickly sweet. Do not offer pity or charity. Be honest and genuine at all times. Never talk down to a participant, they are not babies.
- Treat adults as adults. Only help a person with a disability if they ask for assistance. You may offer assistance, but if it is declined, do not be offended.
- When assisting an individual with a disability always ask "how" you can help. Do not take over.
- Self-satisfaction is important for the participant. Use the help sparingly because it is important that the individual experience the satisfaction of accomplishing the task himself.
- Always address a person with a disability directly. Do not speak about them as if they are not present.
- Avoid asking embarrassing questions. If a participant wants to tell you about his disability, he will bring up the subject himself.
- Do not shout. Hearing aids make noises louder, not clearer. Blindness does not affect hearing.
- When speaking to someone with a hearing impairment speak slowly, clearly and face them directly while speaking.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

- If a person has difficulty speaking, allow them to finish their sentence. If you do not understand what they are saying, tell them so. Do not pretend you understood if you didn't.
- When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and tell them you are leaving before you walk away.
- Do not push a person's wheelchair, grab their arm or try to help without asking first. Never move someone's crutches, walkers, canes, service animal or other mobility aid without permission.
- When speaking to a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair, find yourself a chair or crouch down at a comfortable distance so that you can converse on the same level.
- Respect the confidentiality rights, dignity, and privacy of the participant.
- Be optimistic about life in general and the participant's outlooks in particular, however, don't encourage unrealistic goals or attitudes. For example, our riders won't be galloping, but we can work towards trotting.

"People First" Language

- The individual is always placed before the disability. It is a "person with a disability" – not a "disabled person."
- Never refer to a person by their disability, for example a "paraplegic" or a "blind" person. The accepted terminology is a "person who has paraplegia" or a "person who is blind."
- People are not "confined" or "bound" to wheelchairs. They "use" these devices for mobility and to enhance their freedom. It is more appropriate to say, "an individual who uses a wheelchair."
- Completely avoid emotionally laden terms such as "suffering with a disease", "afflicted with" or "burdened by". A person with a disability may "have" an illness or may be "challenged" by a condition, but one should never assume that a person is suffering, burdened or afflicted.
- When writing or speaking about individuals with disabilities always focus on ability, accomplishment and quality of life.
- Avoid using "us" and "them" language when speaking of people with disabilities versus people who are able bodied.

Lesson Volunteer Positions

Many participants need assistance with equine activities. There may be as many as three volunteers with each participant. During mounted instruction there are several volunteer positions: leader, sidewalker, and spotter.

Horse Leader Instructions

1. Grooming and tacking is your time to get to know your horse and see what their behavior is like that day. Please check in with the instructor about any behaviors that you notice.
2. Maintain your "bubble." This means that if your horse tries to get into your space, you gently push him back out again. This shows him that you are the leader and keeps him from trying to take advantage of you.
3. You should not talk to the rider during the lesson. However, you do need to be tuned in to the rider's cues. An **active** lead means that you are the one primarily responsible for controlling the horse and a **passive** lead means that the horse is on a loose lead and you are just a safety net. For most of the lesson, you will hold the lead approximately a foot away from the snap.
4. You need to pay close attention to your horse and concentrate on the lesson without getting distracted. Your cell phone should be turned off or left outside the arena.

The role of the leader is to control the horse from the time it leaves the stall or pasture area, throughout the lesson, and upon return to the stall or pasture area. The horse leader plays a major role in the learning process and safety of the rider.

Prior to the Lesson

Horse Leaders should arrive 30-45 minutes prior to the start of the assigned lesson. It may be the leader's responsibility to well groom and tack properly. Find a staff member if you are unsure of your assignment or the resources needed.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Groundwork

The groundwork is designed to teach the horse to respect its leader. Here are the steps that we ask our leaders to follow when working with their horses for lessons. It is very important to reward the slightest try and release pressure by rubbing the horse's forehead and resting for a few seconds.

Horse Leader GROUNDWORK (To be done in yard, round pen or arena prior to lesson):

1. YIELD Poll (Teaching horse to lower head while haltering/bridling). 1st method: gently pull down the head with lead rope, 2nd method: lower head with pressure on lead rope and with hand pushing down on top of poll
2. FLEX head and neck 3 times both sides. Using a treat (i.e. peppermints or carrots), have the horse stand still and stretch head around to his shoulder/belly/hip. Each horse has different flexibility, don't push the horse further than he can go.
3. BACKING- practice in field, method-wiggle lead and walk towards them--at least 3-5 steps of backing before release
4. WALK forward in large circles to the right and to the left, ensuring the horse yields out of your space and follows you.
5. DISENGAGE/Yield hindquarters: stand at the horse's shoulder and turn his head to you, use the end of the lead rope or a crop towards his hip to get the horse to step away. The horse should step forward and under, not backwards. Do three to four circles in both directions.
6. WALK to trot/down to walk.
7. STOP and BACK -back with pressure straight under chin and release.
8. Obtain a read on your horse's attitude and responsiveness.

During the Lesson

During class, handle the horse according to the instructor's direction. The Horse Leader leads from the horse's left side unless the instructor directs otherwise. When leading, keep between the horse's head and shoulder. Hold the line about six inches from the snap. The lead line must be hanging between the rider's reins, not over them, to ensure that the rider has complete freedom to use the reins correctly.

Allow the horse to move his head freely up and down as it walks - DO NOT HANG ON THE LEAD ROPE. The rhythmical movement starts at the head and moves all the way down the horse's spine-this movement is what makes horseback riding beneficial. If a leader interferes with the horse's head, the body stiffens and there is limited benefit from the horse's movement. Also, if you continuously constrict the movement of the horse's head, he may become increasingly annoyed. Keep your attention focused ahead of you and square your shoulders in the direction you are going. Do not attempt to drag the horse – look forward in the direction you are going. Also use half halts as needed (half halts are gentle pulls and immediate release on the horse's head at the halter or bit).

Use of voice and praise are important tools when working with your horse. Be sure that it is not distracting to the rider or distracting the horse from his job. For example, a "good boy" is appropriate during a lesson, but a full on snuggle when halted is not.

Be sure you are a safe distance from other horses (at least two horses' length in between). Horses can kick if they feel pressured by a horse following too closely behind them. Some may also react negatively if a horse approaches too close from a side or passes too close going in the opposite direction. If your rider cannot maintain a safe distance, it is your job to assist.

Often instruction to the horse leader will be given through instruction to the rider. It is important to pay attention to the instructor's directions as well as the rider's response. Take care that you are providing time for the rider to attempt the skill they are working on. We always encourage our riders to be as independent as possible and the leader greatly helps to reinforce the skill being taught. **It is tempting to turn around to talk with or assist your rider but your responsibility as the leader is to pay attention to the horse and where you are going.**



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

At the Halt: For shorter halts, stay in the leader position looking in the direction of travel. For longer halts (more than 1 minute) pivot yourself from the side of the horse to slightly in front of the horse and facing shoulder to shoulder. Do not stand directly in front of the horse, but slightly off to the side. This will encourage the horse to not move forward but protect you in case the horse throws its head. During times a horse must stand still, remain relaxed and avoid clamping down on their head, this will cause tension and he may react by backing away from you.

At the Walk: Some riders will have sidewalkers on one or both sides of the horse. Be aware not to get too close to the side of the ring or other obstacles, or you will not have room to fit through safely. When making circles, slow down and remember the sidewalker on the outside of the circle has a longer distance to travel.

At the Trot: Before starting the trot, check to be sure that everyone is ready. Lengthen your stride to prepare the horse for the trot transition and utilize voice commands and begin a slow jog. Do not try to muscle the horse forward by pulling and do not run in front of the horse. Utilize your energy, whip or end of the lead line to assist with sending your horse forward. Upward and downward transitions should be smooth so as not to unseat the rider.

As A Spotter: To help facilitate more independence for the rider, the instructor may ask you to act as a spotter. You will detach your lead line and bit lead from the halter. In this position you are still responsible for ensuring the safety of the rider. You should walk alongside the neck within reach of the halter should you need to intervene. As always, try to let the rider be as independent as possible.

Mounts and Dismounts

To help save the horses' backs, all riders mount from a mounting block or ramp. Instructors will advise regarding dismounts. The Leader's primary role during mounts and dismounts is to prevent the horse from moving.

Mounts at the Ramp: When the Instructor and rider are ready, the instructor will ask you to enter the Mounting Area. The horse should be positioned as close as possible to the side of the ramp on which the rider will be mounting. Stand in front (but slightly to the side if able) and facing the horse with hands on the lead. You may utilize one hand on the horse's shoulder for more control if needed. Do not hold onto the side or pull as it may cause the horse to throw its head and back up. You may talk softly to reassure and reward the horse. When you ask your horse to halt, be sure they are standing square prior to the rider getting on. Horses should only be asked to take 1 small step forward or back in the ramp. If more adjusting is needed, come out of the ramp and try your approach again.

After your rider has mounted and the instructor has determined the team is ready, ask your horse to walk slowly. If a gate is being opened by a sidewalker, be sure to wait for instructions and not walk forward without the sidewalker.

Mounting at the Block/Steps: Utilize the same technique as used for the ramp. Listen to the instructor and be sure your horse is square. The horse's barrel and saddle should be as close to the block as possible and in the middle of the block.

Dismounting: You will receive specific instructions as to where the dismount will take place. Position yourself as previously described for longer halts. Make sure stirrups are run up before leading the horse out of the arena (hanging stirrups can get caught in doorways). When you and your horse have finished a lesson, if you or the horse are not in the next lesson, please bring the horse back to a bay and untack and groom/hose off/blanket as appropriate. Return the horse to the appropriate paddock/stall—a staff member will instruct you what to do. Please return all tack to its proper place.

Emergency Situations

In an emergency situation, you are responsible for the horse, not the rider. If a rider falls, move the horse out of the way. If the horse spooks forward, hold the end of the lead rope, but stay out of harms-way. In any emergency situation, the instructor should be notified immediately.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Falls: Though falls are very rare, they can and do happen. If your rider falls, your only concern is the horse; the instructor will take care of the participant. If another rider falls, stop your horse immediately. Do not panic if there is a fall, stay calm and keep the horse standing still and away from the rider until the instructor gives you instructions.

Spooks: If a horse spooks, remain calm, be firm, and remember you are the leader. Utilize half halts and a calming voice to regain control. Try to halt your horse as soon as possible. If the horse's behavior becomes dangerous, the instructor may call for an emergency dismount. If a horse gets loose do not chase him – if he feels he is being chased, he may run faster. Horses are prey animals and they use flight as a defense. All other horses should be halted. When horses are scared they will seek comfort and may go to another horse.

Sidewalker Instructions

Before the Lesson

- Arrive 30 minutes prior to the start of class.
- While waiting for your rider, help the instructor set up the arena or check if you can assist in the barn.
- Inquire about the rider and what assistance you should give prior to the start of the lesson.
- When your rider arrives, greet him and if necessary, help him find his helmet.
- Wait with the rider at the bottom of the mounting ramp until it is time to mount; this is a good time to get to know the rider.
- Do not enter the mounting area until you are instructed to do so.

The role of the sidewalker is to be an extension of the instructor in order to encourage the rider to grow and develop to his or her fullest potential.

Sidewalking is the most hands-on position in a therapeutic riding lesson and will have a significant influence on the success of the lesson. Sidewalkers are directly responsible for the rider and provide supervision for the rider from the time they arrive until they leave. Teams must work harmoniously and smoothly for the benefit of the rider. The role of the sidewalker varies greatly between riders. It is important to have an understanding of the rider's needs and knowledge of their goals. Please ask the instructor if you have any questions.

There may be many opportunities to talk socially with your rider and you are encouraged to do so. However, please do not disrupt the lesson. Many participants have trouble concentrating so please take care not to interrupt the direct line of focus between rider and instructor.

Riding Skills: It is not necessary for sidewalkers to have any horse experience, however, working knowledge of basic riding skills will help ensure the effective instruction and safety of the rider.

Position of foot in stirrup – safety stirrup S facing outside, ball of foot rests on stirrup bar, heel down/toe up

Holding reins – fingers closed around reins and held up like ice cream cones

Posture and alignment of rider - ear, shoulder, hip, heel in alignment

Walking – say “walk on” and squeeze legs

Trotting – say “trot” and squeeze legs

Halting – say “whoa” and pull back on reins

Backing – say “back” and pull back on reins while squeezing legs

Turning – pull respective rein out to the right or left hip to turn horse's nose in the direction of turn

Two point position – “jumping position” rider leans forward, with hands slightly in front of the saddle and with bottom out of saddle

Physical Support

- Providing physical support to a rider can be tiring. Inform the instructor if you begin to fatigue so you can switch sides. Sidewalkers should decide who goes first and change sides one at a time, walking around the front of the horse and resuming the hold on the opposite side so the rider is never without a physical hold.
- Never apply a physical hold over a joint.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Thigh Hold – Sidewalker places a forearm gently over the thigh and holds the front of the saddle, pad or surcingle. Do not apply excessive pressure with your forearm. Pressure on the thigh can increase or cause spasticity, especially for people with Cerebral Palsy.

Ankle hold - Hold back of ankle/cup back of heel

Calf hold - Rest hand on top of rider's calf

Spotter position – Sidewalker walks beside the rider, prepared to give hands-on physical support if needed

Mounting

- When the instructor says it is time to mount, escort your rider to the designated mounting area.
- Follow the instructor's directions during the mount. You may be used as an offside person or you may be assisting with opening/closing of arena gates if there are 2 sidewalkers.
- As an offside person: Put weight in the right stirrup to keep the saddle from sliding as the rider mounts. Depending on the ability of the rider, you may also be asked to guide their leg over the rump.
- If a hold is not needed for the rider, hold the rider's ankle until the feet have been put in the stirrups.

During the Lesson

- Instructors will inform the sidewalkers about the kind of assistance the rider needs.
- If a rider has one sidewalker, the leader and sidewalker should walk on opposite sides of the horse.
- Sidewalkers should keep talking to a minimum but communicate with the team when needed.
- If you fall behind during a lesson (for example, at the trot) do not run up behind the horse. Wait for the horse leader to halt the horse before resuming your position.
- Never place your hand or fingers in any of the saddle's rings or buckles while sidewalking.
- If a rider or horse behaves inappropriately or in an unsafe manner, notify the instructor immediately.
- Never leave your position next to the rider. Never leave your rider to pick up a dropped item. Inform the instructor. If you need to stop for any reason the whole team stops with you.
- DO NOT interfere with the horse by petting, poking, leaning or bumping. Allow the leader to do the job of moving the horse forward.
- Inform the instructor if you cannot continue your role of sidewalker for any reason.

When there are 2 Sidewalkers:

- One or two sidewalkers may be assigned to each rider depending on the rider's needs.
- If physical supports are being used, ensure you are applying the same support and to the same degree so the rider is receiving even input on each side. Communicate with the other sidewalker if you are changing to a different type of physical support.
- If there are two sidewalkers, work together with the other sidewalker so you are not competing for the rider's attention.
- Take turns giving instruction to the rider at appropriate times. Only the sidewalker on the side the rider is being directed to should talk. For instance, if the rider is asked to pick up a ball from the right side, then only the right sidewalker should verbally reinforce the instructions, while the left sidewalker stays quiet.
- Don't be offended if the rider prefers to interact with one sidewalker over the other. Use this to your advantage and have the rider only communicate with the preferred sidewalker if it will help them succeed.

Instructional Support:

- Some riders do not require any "hands on" assistance, just someone to walk beside them to keep them focused on the tasks.
- Sidewalkers should help the rider focus his attention on the instructor.
- Avoid unnecessary talking with the rider or other volunteers.
- Allow enough time for the rider to process directions. Too much input can be overwhelming to riders who have perceptual problems.
- Avoid being so competitive during games that the rider doesn't get to use his or her own skills because you do it for them in an all-out effort to win.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Physical Prompt – If the instructor says, “turn right” gently tap the right hand.

Hand-Over-Hand - If the instructor says, “turn right”, place your hand over the rider’s right hand and pull the rein to turn the horse right.

Gestured Prompt –If the instructor says, “turn right”, motion with your right hand as if you are pulling the rein to turn right.

Verbal Prompt –If the instructor says, “turn right”, restate the instruction in simple terms.

Dismounting & Conclusion of the Lesson

- Follow the instructor’s directions during the dismount.
- The sidewalker may remove the rider’s foot from the stirrup and help guide the leg over at the instructor’s request.
- When appropriate, encourage the rider to thank the volunteers and give their horse a pat.
- If necessary, the sidewalker can assist the rider in putting his or her helmet away properly.
- Stay with your rider until he or she is returned to a parent or guardian or you are no longer needed.

Emergency Situations

If an emergency dismount is required:

Emergency dismounts should be conducted quickly, efficiently, and safely. The purpose of an emergency dismount is to get the rider off and away from the horse and away from any other danger that may exist.

The rider will be dismounted by the sidewalker or spotter; if one spotter, the dismount occurs from either side, if two sidewalkers then on the sidewalker on the left, or if near fence, the inside sidewalker dismounts. The sidewalker/spotter will firmly grip the rider around the hips and pull the rider off the horse towards the sidewalker. The sidewalker then turns the rider away from the horse and places himself between the horse and rider. The rider is then escorted or carried to a safe place. If there are two sidewalkers, the sidewalker on the right side will ensure the rider’s foot is out of the stirrup and help the rider off to the left.

Spooks

If a horse spooks, remain calm and stay with the rider as best as you can. Immediately assume a thigh hold to help keep the rider in the saddle. As the horse moves, sidewalkers need to continue their support to the rider, staying close to the horse’s side as it moves. If the horse’s behavior becomes dangerous, the instructor may call for an emergency dismount. When an instructor calls for an emergency dismount, horse leaders halt and turn to face their horse. The sidewalker informs the rider of the emergency dismount. Make sure the rider’s feet have been removed from the stirrups before placing your arms around his or her waist and gently guiding him or her off and safely away from the horse. When possible, the sidewalker on the inside of the arena should perform the emergency dismount.

Falls

Though falls are very rare, they can and do happen. If your rider falls, stay with the rider and follow the directions of the instructor. Do not panic if there is a fall, stay calm so you are able to assist the rider and instructor. Sidewalkers may be asked to assist by retrieving a first aid kit, calling for emergency medical assistance (911), and locating the rider’s emergency medical form (located in the rider file drawer in the main office). An Incident Report must be completed by staff and involved individuals for every incident.

Strides of Strength Risk Management Plan

Hazards Specific to the use of equines.

Mounted Emergency/Fall plan:

If there is an emergency while the lesson is in session...

1. all horses should be halted
2. all leaders should position themselves in front of the horse’s head
3. all sidewalkers will stabilize their riders and be prepared for emergency dismount
4. volunteers are to stay with their horse and rider unless otherwise directed by the instructor



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

5. if the riders need to dismount, the instructor advises the volunteers and gives directions on how to proceed
6. if circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated, the riders will be escorted out first and the horses will then be removed by their leaders
7. volunteers keep alert for directions from the instructor

If an emergency dismount is required:

See directions under Sidewalker Instructions

If the rider is injured:

1. The instructor will assess the need for first aid or emergency medical treatment.
2. If the EMS is required, the instructor will designate someone to call 911.
3. The instructor will complete the Incident Report and provide follow up with rider and or parents

Bodily fluids:

Follow precautions concerned with blood borne pathogens. Never handle blood or other body fluids from any source without gloves. Gloves are in the first aid kit.

IN AN EMERGENCY

1. The instructor will give the command to halt all horses, "Emergency Halt!"
2. Volunteers and participants respond immediately by halting.
3. Horse leader to assume halt position in front of horse's head, on hearing "Emergency Halt" command.
4. Sidewalkers/spotters are to stand beside their participant with hands in place for an emergency dismount.
5. If situation warrants emergency dismount, instructor will give the command "Emergency Dismount!"
6. Volunteers are not to leave their assigned participant and horse for any reason, except under instructor's direction.
7. All volunteers keep one eye on the participant and horse, and the other on the emergency situation.
8. All volunteers keep ears open for any instructor directives.
9. Volunteers try to involve participant in some attention-getting activity. Ex: name parts of horse, stretching, etc.
10. Return to normal riding activities when the instructor gives directive "Ride Resume"
11. Try to assess any effect the emergency situation may have had on the participant and/or horse.

***Inform the instructor if the effect is significant!

An emergency dismount must be done quickly and efficiently. The purpose of the emergency dismount is to get the participant off the horse and away from the horse and any other danger that may exist at that moment.

Procedure when there is only one spotter: The spotter will disengage the participant's left foot from the stirrup and get a firm grip on the participant (not the participant's clothes) and pull the participant off the mount toward the spotter. Walk or carry the participant a safe distance away from the horse and/or the danger. This dismount will be toward the spotter regardless of the side the helper is on at that moment.

Procedure when there are two sidewalkers: The sidewalker on the near (left) side of the horse will catch the participant in an embrace and pull or lift the rider from the horse. The sidewalker on the off (right) side of the horse will assist by disengaging the participant's foot from the stirrup and moving the participant (in mid-body area) into the near sidewalker's embrace. The sidewalker with the participant should turn away from the horse, so that he/she is between the participant and horse. Then, walk or carry the participant a safe distance from the horse and/or danger. If the horse is next to the fence, dismount the participant to the inside of the arena (away from the fence), even if that is the right side of the horse. Try not to dismount toward objects or obstacles in the arena.

Bottom line: The emergency dismount cannot be defined in a simple format. This process depends on the ability of the rider, and the severity of the situation. The process outlined above may also be reversed, dismounting to the far side, should the rider's disability warrant that solution.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Note: The emergency dismount should be practiced on a regular basis with volunteers in training sessions until, like a fire drill, it is automatic and smooth.

Loose Horse

- If a horse gets loose, please do not panic. Our horses are not likely to leave their herd. Ask a staff member to help you retrieve the animal. If no staff member is around, simply get a bucket with a small amount of feed in it and a halter with lead rope attached. Approach the horse slowly from the FRONT enticing it with the feed and as the horse tries to eat the feed slip the lead rope around its neck so the horse cannot easily evade you. Then slip the halter on its head and lead it slowly back to where it should be.
- If the horse gets loose in a lesson, due to a fall or any other reason, stop the lesson and have everyone remain standing until the horse is caught. If the situation becomes dangerous for any participants or volunteers consult the instructor for further direction.

Kicking/Biting/Aggressive Behavior

- If a horse is acting aggressively in any way please note the surroundings and your own personal body language first to see if you can find a cause for the problem. Our horses are not prone to aggression unless provoked or afraid. Horses mirror emotions and if you are angry or aggressive you may be causing the horse's behavior. If you are unsure of the cause, please discontinue your interaction with the equine and find a staff member to help you.
- If the aggressive behavior occurs during a lesson the equine may need to be removed from the lesson. Please ask the instructor what you should do in that specific situation at that time. If you feel that the situation calls for immediate response, move the equine away from the others in the arena and have someone perform an emergency dismount with the participant, then take the animal back to the barn or paddock and untack the animal. Aggressive behavior should be reported to the Program Director.
- If an animal bites or attempts to bite during a lesson, grab the side of the halter and hold the horse's head an arm's length away from you. Inform the instructor that the horse has bitten you. The animal may need to be excused from the lesson.

Horse Health Emergencies

- If a horse is injured, limping, or not acting normally, please notify a staff member immediately. If you cannot find a staff person, then call Beth Gaston at 803-374-6255 and leave a message. If you feel it is an emergency or you are unsure and you cannot reach any of the above contacts, you may call the Veterinarian, their number is (803) 628-1665. Calmly describe the problem and seek the vet's advice as to whether it is an emergency situation or not. If it is an emergency, please have him/her come to the farm.
- Anything that is beyond your realm of knowledge needs to be dealt with by a professional. So, if you are unsure what to do or don't have horse experience, please contact a staff member on the premises or at one of the numbers above or call the veterinarian.
- If you have the necessary skill, below is advice for certain circumstances. Call for help and then:
 - If a horse is in a paddock or pasture in discomfort, the horse may be colicing. Halter and lead the horse quietly until help arrives. You may allow the horse to lie down if it wants, however, try to keep it from rolling by standing it back up if it attempts to roll.
 - If the horse has sustained serious injury and cannot move, try to keep him quiet and covered to help prevent shock. Horse blankets can be found in the black tack trunk in the barn.
 - If the horse is bleeding constantly and seriously, have someone hold him while you apply pressure to the wound with a clean dressing or towel. You may try to stop the bleeding by applying a pressure wrap if you have the necessary skill.

Unauthorized Entrance into stalls/pastures/paddocks



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

- Volunteers, participants, teachers, and parents are all made aware during orientation that they and the participants are not to enter stalls, paddocks, or pastures unless authorized by a staff member.
- Horses can be unpredictable like any other animal and in order to ensure safety, only authorized personnel should enter areas where horses are kept. Authorized personnel include staff, volunteers with staff permission, and participants with staff permission. NO ONE ELSE is allowed in the above stated areas.

Natural Hazards to the site

- The following stinging insects and poisonous snakes are identified as possible hazards to the persons on the premises of Gaston Farms Road Equestrian Center (GFREC): fire ants, yellow jackets, hornets, wasps, bees, Copperhead snakes, Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnakes, and Water Moccasins, also known as "Cottonmouths".

Fire Ant Information: Fire ants are small ants found only in the SE states. They can usually be located by small ant mounds. They are often found around fence posts. They can sting several times and the sting will eventually welt and start to itch. In a matter of a few hours a pustule will develop and if it breaks it can become infected. The reaction can be more serious if the person is allergic to the sting. Horses can be stung by fire ants as well.

Yellow Jackets, Hornets, Wasps, and Bee Information: Bee type stinging insects can be found at barns. Bees that are aggravated are more likely to attack and sting. Aggravation can occur when a person passes too close to a nest, or the person panics and flails at the bee when it comes near. Yellow jackets, wasps and hornets can sting repeatedly, and stings are very painful.

Stinging Insect Mitigation: If stinging insects are located on the premises, insecticide is applied to kill the insects. Mounting areas and blocks are inspected for nests. People are instructed not to wear perfumes or hair sprays as this will attract bees. People should be aware of the possibility of fire ants, yellow jackets, bees, wasps, and hornets. If ants are on a person quick action must be taken to remove them. Clothes and shoes may need to be removed to ensure all ants are found. An anti-itching cream (for ant stings) or bee sting gel can be applied to ease the sting. If a person is stung by a bee or ant, determine immediately if they are allergic to bee or ant stings. An allergic reaction requires immediate medical attention. A person who is allergic to bees often carries a bee allergy kit. If so, check the emergency information and respond accordingly. If the person stung is a participant, the appropriate caretaker is advised of the sting so that the person can be monitored. An incident report is completed. If a horse is stung, Azium may be given orally.

Copperheads, Rattlesnakes, and Cottonmouth Information: Copperheads are a copper or orange colored snake with a triangular head and a patterned skin. Rattlesnakes are gray/brown and black and typically have a triangular head with a diamond pattern on their skin. Cottonmouths are a brown colored snake usually found around water. Most snakes are usually found under rocks or in heavy foliage. They are typically found on trails in the woods or near ponds. They can be under hay or hiding in a stall under shavings.

Poisonous Snake Mitigation: Care is taken to ensure that grasses and underbrush do not get too tall around the arenas, barn, and trails as this would attract more snakes. Also, since a high rodent population would attract snakes, GFREC has barn cats that help to control the rodent issue, thus attracting fewer snakes. If anyone comes into contact and is bitten by a snake they would be immediately taken to the hospital to treat the bite. If a horse is bitten the veterinarian should be called immediately.

Disasters

Incident Weather: Severe winds, hurricanes, ice/snow storms, tornado and thunderstorms

- If a storm is approaching and there are high winds and/or thunder and lightning, or it is sleeting/snowing/freezing rain and there is a possibility of slick roads, dismount all participants immediately and return horses to the pastures.
- Personnel will untack all horses in case of hurricane, high winds or thunderstorm and turn them out in the pastures. Participants, volunteers, and staff are not to be in barn aisle or stalls during a thunderstorm.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

- If severe weather includes high winds and possibility of tornado, everyone should go into the house, staying away from windows and sitting Indian style on the floor. If they cannot get into the house they should go to a neighboring house for shelter.
- In the case of ice/snow, lessons should be canceled and rescheduled.
- If the participants are on the premises when it begins to sleet/snow/freezing rain they should return to school or home.

Hurricanes:

- Monitor the track of a hurricane.
- If the hurricane is headed for GFREC, the following preparations will occur:
 - Fill all available water buckets, troughs, muck buckets in anticipation of an extended power outage.
 - Secure anything that could possibly fly around such as garbage cans, rakes, shovels, wheelbarrows, poles, standards, etc.
 - The horses may be left outside in the pastures, as the pastures may be the safest place for them. Write the farm's contact info on the horses with the emergency markers in the first aid kit.
- Following the storm, survey the area. Look for:
 - Possible injuries to the horses
 - Possible downed power lines
 - Damage to the building and potential unsafe situations

Fire:

- Remove all riders, volunteers, and staff from danger. Report the Fire! Release the horses if they are in the barn.
- If a class is in session, the instructor will be responsible for dismounting the riders and directing everyone to a safe area.
- Designate someone to call the fire department at 911. Stay on the line and give directions as outlined on the list above the phone on the wall. If you delay this step, the fire may consume the whole stable before the fire department arrives.
- If a horse does not want to leave its paddock, talk quietly to reassure the horse. It may be necessary to cover the horse's eyes with a shirt/cloth/jacket. If possible release the horse into the adjacent paddock through the paddock gate rather than opening the gate to freedom.
- If the horse is unmanageable and you are unable to get the horse out of the paddock, leave the pasture gate open and move to the next horse.
- Be aware that once the horse is outside of the paddock, he may want to run back in for security. Shut gates to the barn paddock once horses are out if safely possible.
- Loose horses can pose a safety hazard for arriving emergency equipment so try to contain them if possible.
- If by chance we are involved with a forest fire the safest place to put the horses is into a dirt paddock or arena as there will be nothing for the fire to burn there. The arena would likely be the best place. Or consider writing our contact on them and turning them loose. Markers are with the Equine first aid kit.

Aid the Fire Department's Arrival

- Clear roads for easy access
- Make sure parked cars are not in the way of the fire trucks.

Control the Fire

- Use fire extinguisher located in the lounge or isle of the barn. Water buckets can also be used.

Simple guidelines for the use of fire extinguishers:

1. Pull the ring pin to free the release handle
2. Stand at least 5 feet from the fire
3. Squeeze the release handle, aiming the discharge at the base of the flame



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

4. If the burning material splatters, back away from the fire and sweep the stream of the extinguisher from side to side
- Wet blankets and sand can be used to try to smother a fire.
 - DO NOT use water on an electrical fire!!

Expect where the Fire Department will come:

- Have someone meet the fire department at the end of the road, and driveway, and direct them to the fire.
- **Remember: NO ONE should endanger themselves in order to attempt to put out the fire or to remove horses from a burning barn.

Fire Mitigation:

To help prevent the possibility of fire, the following preventive measures should be taken:

- Remove cobwebs
- Check wiring for indication of wear or rodent damage
- Rodent control program-cats
- Check lighting fixtures
- Leadropes and halters kept in easily accessible, organized area
- Training and practice for personnel and volunteers
- Maintenance of fire extinguishers
- No smoking signs posted
- Interact with fire department
- Turn off all lights and heating/cooling units when not in use
- Operation of Facilities and/or Equipment

Power Outage:

- If the power fails, the participants should be escorted out of the classroom/barn area. Flashlights should not be necessary as we do not hold lessons at night.
- When the power fails, the well goes out and the barn is without water. The pastures have large water troughs that can be a source of water for the horses until the power is restored.

Collapse:

- In the case of a barn or covered arena collapse everyone should be cleared of the area and moved to a safe location. If animals are trapped inside then rescue teams should be called to get the animals out, not center staff or volunteers. Getting involved too soon or before assessing the situation for safety will just cause more injuries.
- Typically, before a collapse loud creaking noises are heard. These noises give warning that the building may be coming apart. If these sounds are heard in either building, the building should be evacuated of people immediately. If the covered arena is collapsing the best thing to do would be to leave the gate open for animals to escape. However, if the barn is collapsing, there will not be time to go in and get each horse out of a stall.
- DO NOT try to reenter a collapsed building until professional rescue teams arrive and tell you what to do.

Equipment:

- Power equipment (such as the tractor, lawn mower, Dingo, four-wheeler, etc.) must only be used by trained personnel. Volunteers, participants, and staff may not climb, play, ride, or engage in the use of these items unless authorized by center staff to do so.



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

Injuries to participants, volunteers, visitors

- If anyone is injured while on the premises of GFREC, appropriate medical action will be carried out (see emergency info section concerned with rider falls). Incident reports are filled out for any injury or near injury.

Dangerous Items:

Potentially dangerous items include medicine, poisons, needles and syringes, cleaners, gas, etc. Only authorized personnel have access to most of these items. In order to insure safety, all of these items are kept in the following areas.

- Medicines and syringes are kept in the first aid kits, in the cabinet in the bathroom.
- Poisons, paints, gas, cleaners, etc. are kept in the trailer storage area behind the barn or in the barn out of reach of most participants.
- All areas of the hay storage, barn loft, tractor storage and office are off-limits to the participants of the Strides of Strength programs unless otherwise determined by staff.

Man-made Hazards

Barn Loft, Hay Storage, Tractor Storage, Farm Equipment

The Barn Loft, Hay Storage, Tractor Storage, Farm Equipment are all areas that contain either hazardous materials, or hazardous equipment. Children playing in the loft, hay area, or tractor storage areas could be injured by falling or moving objects or by falling from objects. The tractor storage area also contains supplies such as gas, paint, cleaners, etc. which are considered poisonous and dangerous.

Teachers, parents, volunteers, and staff are all made aware of these locations and are asked to make sure participants are not allowed in these areas. These areas are not secured so close attention should be paid to participants near those areas. The tractor shed area is far away from riding lessons and most other center activities. Participants of the program should not be left unattended in the barn area.

Conduct of Personnel and Participants

- Each individual involved with Strides of Strength is expected to show respect for the rights and person of all participants both human and equine. If you witness an act of abuse either physically or verbally, please report the incident and the circumstances to the Instructor/Director.
- The possession or use of drugs or unauthorized alcohol on the premises of Gaston Farm Road Equestrian Center is strictly prohibited. Anyone found on the premises in possession of or using any illegal substance will be asked to leave the premises immediately and may be barred from center activities pending a hearing with the Board of Directors. (Alcohol may be served during fundraisers or events, per staff approval.)
- All personnel and participants are expected to follow Strides of Strength safety procedures. Failure to do so can result in the loss of riding privileges for participants. Any volunteer or paid personnel not in compliance with safety procedures will meet with the Board of Directors before being allowed to continue with the program. If you observe an instance of unsafe practice, please inform the Director.
- All volunteers will sign a confidentiality agreement concerning divulging any information pertaining to a participant. Personnel shall keep participant information contained and confidential and will only provide relevant information to the volunteers.

Strides of Strength staff retain the right to dismiss any individual or group from center activities and/or the premises at any time due to distracting behavior or behavior that could result in unsafe conditions for participants, staff, guests, or volunteers.

Confidentiality Policy

All medical and personal information concerning participants and personnel is confidential and kept in a locked area. It is expected that all persons affiliated with Strides of Strength will respect the confidentiality rights of participants and personnel. All volunteers will sign a confidentiality statement.

Volunteers are made aware of confidentiality issues in the following manner:



STRIDES OF STRENGTH
THERAPEUTIC RIDING
2717 Gaston Farm Rd.
Chester, SC 29706
803-374-6255

- Confidentiality issues are reviewed with volunteers during volunteer training.
- The volunteer training manual states: "Respect the rights, dignity, and privacy of the participant."
- All Volunteers are required to sign a confidentiality statement. The requirement of signing a confidentiality statement illustrates the seriousness of the issue to the volunteers.
- Volunteers do not have access to participants files and only pertinent information is shared with volunteers (information that is necessary for volunteers to perform their duties effectively.)
- Participants and guardians are made aware that information about their disability may be provided to volunteers.