



# Sidewalker Volunteer Manual

## *Mission:*

To provide children, youth, and adults the opportunity to grow and develop through therapeutic, educational, and recreational activities with horses.

## **Role Overview**

Sidewalkers oversee the rider's safety before, during and after lessons. They provide physical and motivational support to riders during equine-assisted activities or therapy sessions. Sidewalkers walk alongside the horse and rider to ensure the rider's safety and assist them with their lesson.

## **Minimum Age:** 14

**Requirements:** Complete all paperwork (application, waivers, background check, compliance agreements); attend all orientation and sidewalker trainings and pass all skills checklist(s); follow verbal and visual instructions and communicate effectively with staff and fellow volunteers.

## **Required Knowledge & Skills**

- Safety
  - Approaching a Tied Horse
  - Moving around a Tied Horse
  - Transitioning Roles During Lessons
  - Moving the Horse
  - Support Holds
  - Aggressive Participant Behavior
- Horse Behavior
  - Body Language
- Emergency Procedures
  - Loose Horse
  - Emergency Dismount
  - Fallen Rider
  - Injury
  - Releasing Quick Release Knot
  - Fire
  - Weather Conditions
- Grooming
  - Identify grooming tools
  - Understand purpose
  - Demonstrate correct use of tools
- Mounting & Dismounting
- Equitation
- Helmet Fitting



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## ***Benefits of being a Sidewalker***

- **Form strong bonds** with riders, becoming a source of emotional support and encouragement.
- The role involves walking alongside the horse, offering **physical exercise** for the volunteer, while also providing the joy of interacting with horses.
- **Gain** a sense of purpose, increased patience, and **joy** from witnessing the progress of riders.
- **Learn** about equine behavior, therapeutic techniques, and gain experience in working with individuals with diverse needs.

- Communication with Instructor
- Maintain High Awareness

### **Time Commitment**

- Arrive 20 minutes prior to scheduled lesson.
- Commit to a minimum of one (1) lesson and maximum of four (4) lessons per day.
- Commit to a consistent schedule (minimum of one day a week for 1 session [4 weeks]; maximum of 4 days a week for 6 sessions [24 weeks])
- Schedule with Director of Equine Wellness and Volunteer Operations

### **Physical Requirements**

- Walk for extended periods on uneven surfaces for up to 45 minutes and jog up to 30 second intervals
- Must be able to walk and jog with your arms extended up against the leg of the rider for up to 30 minutes.
- Ability to react quickly

### **Training & Supervision**

- Complete all orientation and sidewalker training
- Report to Directors and/or Instructors

## **Table of Contents**

Requirements.....	Pg 1
Guidelines.....	Pg 4
Before Lessons.....	Pg 4
Mounting Riders.....	Pg 5
Support Holds.....	Pg 6
During Lessons.....	Pg 9
Communication.....	Pg 9
Rider Posture and Movement... ..	Pg 10
Behaviors.....	Pg 12
Roles in an Emergency .....	Pg 15
Benefits.....	Pg 16
Program Contact Information.....	Pg 17

## Sidewalking

The responsibilities of a sidewalker range from providing physical support to keeping the rider focused on the instructor's directions. Depending on the rider's needs, sidewalkers may help with maintaining balance, offering emotional support, helping with understanding directions and ensuring overall safety during the session.

Riders look forward to seeing "their" sidewalkers each session, knowing that they are there to support them. This trust is fundamental to the success of equine therapeutic riding, as it allows riders to feel safe, supported, and confident. Whenever possible, sidewalkers work with the same rider each lesson. This saves time explaining what help is needed for that participant, builds relationships, and continuity, which allows the rider to progress more rapidly. Parents and caregivers are often willing to share insights as well. Time before and after class can be spent getting to know the families.

Sidewalkers have many hands-on duties during lessons.

### Sidewalker Guidelines:

- **Safety First:** Prioritize safety at all times.
- **Vigilance:** Maintain constant awareness of the rider, horse, and environment. There is always a possibility of an abrupt, quick movement that could cause the rider to lose their balance and potentially fall. Your job is to be able to react quickly enough to prevent the rider from losing their balance while also maintaining your own sidewalking position. Put your phone on "silent" or leave it in the tack room locker or your vehicle.
- **Physical Support:** Provide stability through various holds (e.g., thigh hold, cuff hold).
- **Emotional Support:** Offer a calm presence and encouragement to the rider.
- **Communication:** Work effectively with the instructor, other sidewalkers and horse leader to assist the rider in understanding and following instructions. Remember, you are assisting the rider, so it is important to not actually perform the task for them. Allow the rider ample time for thought processing before physically prompting to aid in the task.

### Before Lessons:

Sidewalkers help with staging grooming buckets, saddles, pads, sidepulls, etc. in the arena before lessons. Tie-rings are located along two sides of the arena where lesson horses are tied for grooming and tacking. There are also hooks and removable wooden-block saddle racks at each tie-ring. A chart for each lesson's horse, rider, volunteers and equipment is located in the tack room by the volunteer sign in station. Assemble the correct equipment for your assigned horse using the chart (refer to Orientation Manual for instructions on reading the chart). Once assembled take the tack and grooming bucket to the arena and set it up at the correct station.

Before the lesson, the instructor will go over the pattern and any games that might be used to reinforce the lesson. Familiarize yourself with any props or games that will be played. Keep in mind that sometimes things shift or change in a lesson.

- Sidewalkers greet the rider & the rider's family/caregiver before the lessons and assist the rider with their helmet if needed. Do a safety check on helmet fit.
- Wait in the viewing area with your rider. You will be invited into the arena by the instructor when it is time to groom or mount.
- You will take your rider to their horse and leader, introduce them and let the rider greet the horse. Important! Stay within arms-reach of your rider once in the arena. With younger riders or riders

who are unstable or distracted, offer to take their hand. Students often need reminders to watch proper distances while walking around horses or even physical guidance for safety.

### **Grooming and Tacking**

The horse leader will teach/oversee the rider in grooming and tacking. Sidewalkers assure that the rider is safe in his/her movements around the horse and help support the leader's instructions verbally and physically. For example, the student may need help holding a curry comb and moving it in a gentle circle on the horse. The sidewalker may need to help the rider hold the curry and physically make the correct circular motions on the horse. In certain situations, the sidewalker may hold the rider while grooming or on their lap so they can reach the horse.

During tacking the sidewalker may assist the leader by standing on the horse's offside and supporting and placing the saddle pad and saddle. The leader will let the sidewalker know what assistance they need.

Once the horse is tacked, the horse leader will show the student how to lead the horse in the arena. Depending on the rider and the amount of support he/she needs, sidewalker(s) may walk beside the rider and the horse (be careful to stay clear of the horse's direction of travel and assist only when necessary). After a few laps, the leaders form a line on the wall to get ready for mounting and the instructor will check tack. Offside sidewalker (if there is one) stays with the team and the onside sidewalker takes the rider to the mounting area and hands off the student to the instructor.

### **Mounting Riders:** Keep this in mind:

- 70% of therapeutic riding accidents happen in the mounting block, so minimize the time you spend in it!
- Never get between the ramp and the horse.
- Mounting/dismounting can be difficult for the horse, rider, and staff.
- It should be completed as quickly as possible.
- Horses may become impatient with standing still, thrown off balance by the weight of the mounting rider, or experience back strain. Try to make it the best experience possible for them.
- Mounting blocks/ramps/lifts should always have an offside barrier to ensure the horse is the correct distance from it. This can be another mounting block or the rider's sidewalker, but never an actual wall, fence, or rail.

Only instructors mount riders. Sidewalkers **assist** with mounting. Most riders mount using a typical **croup mount**. The croup refers to the area on a horse's back, specifically the region between the top of the hindquarters and the base of the tail. The rider places their left foot into the stirrup and swings the right leg over the horse's croup, and gently lowers themselves into the saddle.

### **Offside Sidewalkers**

When the horse is approaching the mounting area, walk alongside the horse in position, stepping around the barrel on the outside. Wait there until the rider is ready to mount. If the horse is not close enough to the ramp, please do not attempt to push them over. Remember, the horse and its positioning is managed by the horse leader. Your leader can simply take another lap to come in straight. If your rider is putting their foot in the stirrup to mount, put weight in the stirrup on your side to equalize pressure on the horse's back. If your rider is simply swinging their leg over without putting their foot in the stirrup, you do not need to weight the stirrup. Help to guide/accept the rider's leg gently onto the far side of the horse making sure the rider's leg

doesn't bump the horse as they swing it over the horse's back. In some cases a rider may need assistance in bringing their leg over the back of the horse.

Sidewalkers on the inside will stand at letter K. This decreases the number of people crowding the ramp and minimizes stress for our riders and horses. The instructor will sidewalk with the rider to letter K.

For a **crest mount** at the ramp, the rider will be guided to sit sideways in the saddle and swing their right leg over the horse's mane. Crest refers to the ridge along the top of the neck where the horse's mane grows. In this case the offside sidewalker will help guide the hips into the saddle and bring the leg over the horse's neck.

Remember to do a thigh hold on your rider while exiting the mounting area.

Once mounted, it is preferred to wait until halted away from the mounting area (usually at letter K) for the rider to put their feet in the stirrups, in order to minimize time in the mounting area. If they automatically have their feet in the stirrups, leave them there.

Riders with physical disabilities may require physical support to maintain their balance. This is where specific holds come into play, such as the thigh hold and ankle hold. Each of these techniques offers varying levels of physical support tailored to the rider's specific need. The sidewalker should be positioned at the rider's knee for optimal support and safety (away from horse's legs and flank area). All support should be firm but gentle. Don't lean heavily into the rider to prevent injury to them (some have very fragile skin or are sensitive to touch). The instructor will tell you what hold(s) to use on riders.

**Sidewalker location and positioning:** Sidewalkers are positioned at the rider's knee. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security to the rider if needed. It is also a safe place to be positioned as far as your safety around the horse.

### Support Holds

- Thigh Hold:
  - **How:** Grip the front of the saddle or bareback pad and lay your forearm over the rider's thigh, without resting the elbow on the horse or saddle – it naturally acts as a clamp, especially if the horse suddenly goes forward quickly. Make sure your grip is not too tight or interfering with the rider's posture and that it's even on both sides. If two sidewalkers are assisting – the volunteers' arms lie across the thigh in the same place on both sides – uneven location or pressure can cause a rider to lean. Also, remember, too much pressure can unbalance or cue the horse to move sideways.
  - **When Used:** a rider has poor balance and/or restricted use of their legs; rider feels insecure; always use in an emergency; in the mounting area; when adjusting stirrups; when you don't know the rider (always assume the most support then remove as needed). Note: don't use when thigh pressure increases the rider's spasticity.
- Ankle Hold:
  - **How:** hold behind the ankle with the hand closest to the rider or with the opposite hand on top of the ankle to add some downward weight; hold or cup the ankle, not the shoe (or the rider's heel/foot could come out of the shoe.)
  - **When Used:** the rider's lower leg needs help staying in place or is bumping the horse's side; the rider needs only a little balance support (enough that some downward pressure on the ankle will keep them in place); the rider's feet tend to slide in the stirrups; a thigh hold would increase the

rider's spasticity. It also helps the rider with correct leg position or if they are high toned (muscles stiff or tight).

- Cuff Hold (or heel hold):
  - **How:** Sidewalker holds cuff of pant leg by the heel.
  - **When Used:** For riders who don't need physical support but may need the emotional support and assurance of a sidewalker.
- Hip Hold:
  - **How:** Sidewalker supports rider's hips to help them maintain an upright and stable posture on the horse. (\*may be used in addition to an ankle or thigh hold). Helps the rider engage their core muscles. Similar to a thigh hold but sidewalker raises their upper forearm and elbow to the rider's hip or upper thigh to provide core support, stability for trunk control, and help correct leaning. Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider's waist. It is tempting, especially when walking beside a pony with a young or small rider, but it can offer too much and uneven support. At times, it can even pull the rider off balance and make riding more difficult. Encourage your students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.
  - **When Used:** For riders with poor trunk stability or balance who may lean right or left to the side.
- Back Support:
  - **How:** Sidewalker provides thigh support with hand and arm furthest from the rider and uses the other hand and arm on the back of the rider straight up and down (you are now facing the horse with your body turned sideways). Use pressure and release on the back. You don't want to support the rider's weight as much as encourage them to sit up and gain core strength. Make sure you don't rest your elbow on the horse's back.
  - **When Used:** For riders with poor core stability and balance who may lean backwards.
- Combined Support:
  - **When Used:** Holds can be used in combination according to the rider's needs. For example, one hand on the thigh and the other on the ankle, creates a stable base for the rider's hips and pelvis.
- Spotter Support:
  - **How:** stay near the rider's leg without using any holds. Keep pace with the horse and rider (this is a difficult skill to master). Your hands can be by your sides ready to provide support in emergency. Do not touch the horse or saddle because that can be distracting and put the horse and rider off balance.
  - **When Used:** the rider is progressing to independent riding; needs someone there just in case (slight balance issues, if horse makes unexpected movement, certain seizures); needs the moral support or additional focus/verbal prompts; needs a spot for mounting (then the sidewalker can step aside and return for the dismount).
- Independent:
  - no volunteer needed, or stands in center of arena
- Gait Belt Assist:
  - **How:** hold it lightly; don't pull or push – you don't want to give unnecessary support or pull them off balance; or don't hold but use only in emergencies. If your arm tires, ask to switch sides (one sidewalker at a time)
  - **When Used:** the rider needs constant adjustment and the belt is better than always touching them or holding their clothing (perhaps they respond better to the belt than a hand, or have sensory processing disorder); use only when necessary.
- Holds for riding sideways and backwards:

- **How:** the sidewalker facing the rider sitting **sideways** on the horse uses a hip hold. If there is another sidewalker, they provide back support as needed. When a rider is facing **backwards**, depending on the balance and strength of the rider, sidewalkers may use a thigh hold, ankle hold or hip hold. In these cases the rider is usually riding bareback or using a bareback pad. Typically this is done with younger riders who may benefit from an exercise called “around the world.”
  - **Around the World:**
    - The rider starts facing forward on the horse sitting normally astride.
    - Sidewalker(s) help the rider take their right foot over the crest of the horse and turn to the left (onside) so that they are riding “sidesaddle,”
    - When directed, sidewalker(s) help the rider bring their left leg over the horse’s hindquarters (croup) and turn their body to face backwards.
    - Now the sidewalker(s) help bring the rider’s right leg over the hindquarters and pivot their body to the left (offside) so that they are again sitting “sidesaddle” facing the offside.
    - The last step to complete the exercise is to bring the rider’s left leg over the horse’s crest so that they are returned to sitting astride normally. The rider has performed a complete circle on the horse’s back.

### Remember:

- Stay with your rider at all times during the lesson. If you must stop, ask the instructor if your team can bring the horse into the center of the arena so that you can safely stop and get assistance.
- Keep your hands and arms free at all times and ready to assist. **Do not** walk with your hands in your pockets or arms crossed even if the rider appears completely independent and needing no assistance.
- Have a reason to interact with the horse. Never lean or rest on the horse or saddle. **Do not** lean/rest elbow on the horses back as that area is very sensitive.
- During downtime, remember you can rub the horse’s neck or shoulder (not their face). Bluff and Ridge horses are touched by multiple people every day. Some horses like this and some do not. Either way, it can cause sensory overload and become annoying to them.
- Ask riders, when appropriate, if it is okay for you to use holds or if they feel secure or need help.
- If equipment needs to be adjusted (saddle, stirrups, etc.), let the instructor and leader know. **If possible, go to the center of the arena and halt for any adjustments or problems.** This will depend on the lesson pattern flow.
- If the rider is showing signs of wanting to get off the horse and is determined to do so, let the instructor know. The instructor will guide you on what to do next. Be prepared to do an emergency dismount.
  - Sidewalker’s Role in an Emergency Dismount:
    - Ask horse leader to stop.
    - Make sure reins are released from rider.
    - If stirrups are being used, free the rider’s feet.
    - Away from the rail (arena wall) the sidewalker/instructor on the horse’s left side (onside) grasps the rider firmly around the waist and pulls the rider off and away from the horse. Offside sidewalker (if present) assists in moving the rider’s leg over the horse’s mane. If the horse is on the rail (wall), the sidewalker away from the wall will pull the rider off the horse.
    - The instructor will give directions to take rider to a safe, quiet area and check for any injuries or emotional instability. In the event of any problems, call for help.

- It is crucial that sidewalkers listen for directions from the instructor to be effective.
- You have the right to let the rider know when they are being inappropriate. (i.e. pulling hair, kicking, using incorrect language, etc.) Redirect the rider with appropriate task or action immediately. Call attention to the instructor if necessary.

### **During Mounted Lessons:**

In the arena, the sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and to riders who already have perceptual problems, it can be overwhelming. If two sidewalkers are working with one student, one should be the “designated talker” to avoid this situation.

When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process it. If the instructor says “Turn to the right toward me,” and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, “Right,” to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and learn when they need help and when they’re just not paying attention.

Volunteers will be given information concerning participants on a “need to know” basis and in keeping with the confidential nature of our clients’ records (refer to Bluff & Ridge’s Confidentiality Policy).

**Balance:** Sidewalkers also help maintain the balance of the rider when they cannot sustain it themselves. Some students may have difficulties maintaining their balance. Depending on the needs of the student, there will be either one or two sidewalkers assigned to each rider. The instructors will inform you as to the requirement of each participant before the lesson or during the mounting time.

**Changing positions or sides:** Since students with lower muscle tone may require sidewalkers to exert enormous physical energies, they may need to change sides throughout the lesson. To do so, notify the instructor and horse leader that you need to “switch” sides. The leader will come to the center of the ring and halt if lesson flow allows. Wait for the instructor or staff to step in to take your place. Always walk around the front of the horse to reposition yourself on the other side of the horse.

If there are two sidewalkers, change sides, one person at a time. **Do not both let go of the rider.** The rider must never be left alone during a change over since a fall could occur.

**Correct rider position:** Do not grab the student if he/she starts to slip, gently guide them back into the correct position. If a rider is slipping to the side and can’t shift by themselves, use the flat of your hand to gently push their hip to the center. Sidewalkers are very important, as they need to be constantly aware of the student’s position at all times. The safety of the rider depends on you!

Aside from these physical supports, sidewalkers also play a crucial role in helping the rider stay engaged and focused during the lesson. They help the rider pay attention to the instructor and participate actively in the class, which is essential for achieving the goals of equine-assisted activities.

**Communication:** Since the sidewalker is always close to the rider, you will find that they will want to talk to you a great deal. Do not ignore direct questions but try to get your rider to focus their attention on the instructor and what they are doing. If your student is not paying attention or does not hear the instructor, you can help reinforce the directions of the instructor by repeating instructions or prompting (**cueing**) the action requested by the instructor. One of the greatest distractions during lessons can be the excessive talking in the arena by volunteers. Please limit your conversations with the students during lesson time to what is

absolutely necessary.

**Assisting the rider with instructions:** When an instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process it. If the instructor says “turn to the right toward me”, and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand (this is a **prompt**) and say, “right” to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and learn when they need help and when they’re just not paying attention. The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and become as independent as possible. You are there to support and help challenge the rider to perform at their very best ability.

**Prompts You Can Use** (each prompt is followed by the example of turning right at a cone)

1. Visual Prompt (visual): the cone or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) showing rider pulling right rein
2. Gestural Prompt: point in the direction to go or model how to steer the horse with your own hands
3. Verbal Prompt (verbal hint or direction): “Which way?” “Turn right,” or “Bring your hand to your hip.”
4. Physical Prompt (physical contact): gently tap the student’s right hand or briefly push/pull student’s right hand toward their hip – release to let them finish the action on their own.
5. Hand-Over-Hand (HOH) (physical movement is completely modeled): bring the student’s hand towards the hip for the turn, and then back to normal.

As the student practices, remember to gradually fade (remove) prompts so the student doesn’t become dependent on them. Always start with the least intrusive prompt (visual) and work toward the more intrusive (gestural, then verbal, etc.) giving the rider a chance to succeed, before helping, then praising at the end. For example: The instructor may say “turn your horses to the right at the cone, please.” (Rider does nothing). Gestural prompt – Point to the right. (Rider still does nothing) “Turn right.” (Rider still does nothing). Physical – Touch rider’s right hand. (Rider brings hand back toward hip). “Yes! Back towards the hip! Very nice steering.”

Note: Sometimes prompts need to be combined. (e.g., gestural and verbal – model pulling your right hand toward your hip and say “turn right.” Our goal is to help the rider be as independent as possible.

**Attention:** The sidewalker will need to observe the rider at all times. Never become so relaxed that you are not aware of the rider, the horse and leader, the instructor or other activities around you. Be aware of your position near the horse. Always be alert to your surroundings.

**Anticipate:** Sidewalkers will learn from experience how to anticipate difficulties which might create accidents. Be as prepared as possible for the unexpected. Use your judgment as necessary. The horse does not always act in a predictable manner or “according to procedure.”

## **RIDER POSTURE AND MOVEMENT**

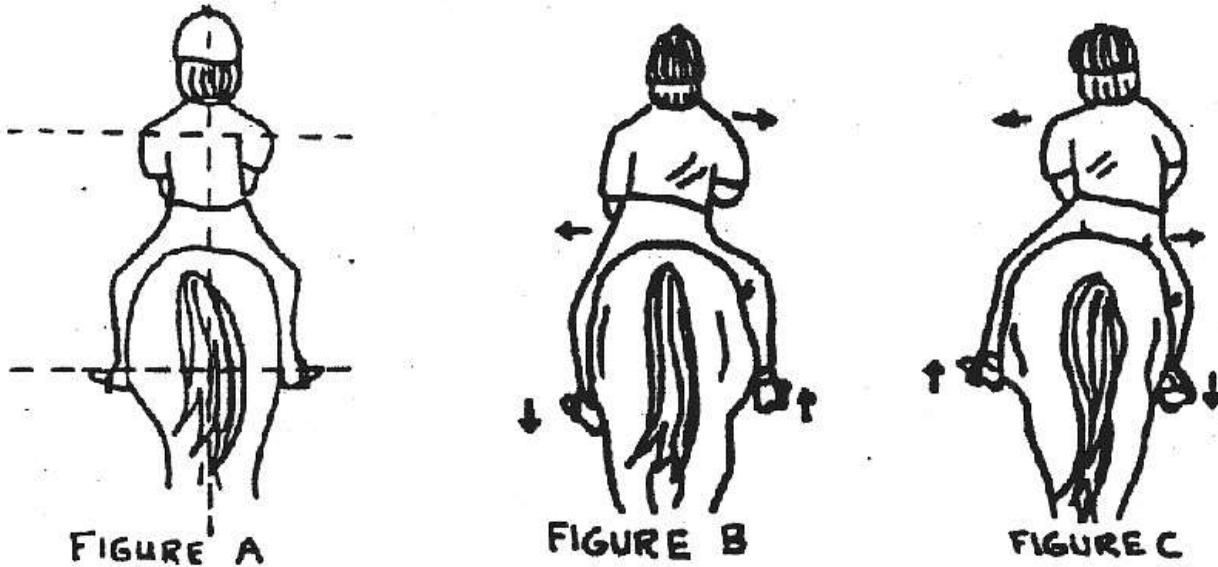
The rider’s position on the horse has everything to do with being balanced and moving in harmony with the horse. The better the body alignment, the greater the therapeutic benefits. The instructor will evaluate the rider’s position on the horse from behind. The instructor will do this at the beginning of the lesson right after mounting the rider. The rider may look great from the side but could be off center when viewed from behind.

Here are some common **problems an instructor looks for** and may ask a sidewalker to help correct:

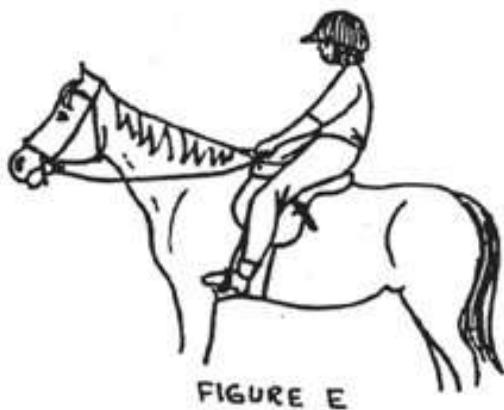
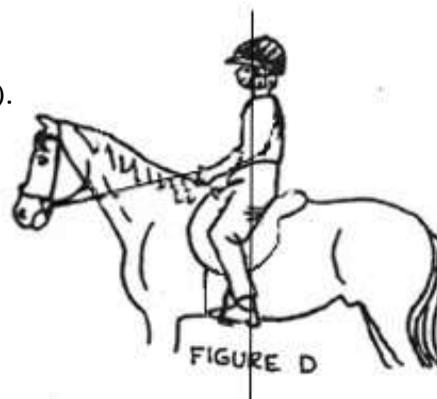
1. When viewed from behind, the rider should sit as straight as possible (Figure A). Many riders sit to one side, and then have to make corrections in the rest of the body to maintain balance. When this imbalance occurs, one foot will appear lower than the other.

Figure B shows a rider with the left foot lower, the pelvis leaning to the left and the upper body correcting to the right.

Figure C shows just the opposite – the right foot lower, the pelvis leaning to the right and the upper body correcting to the left. Neither of these positions helps the rider strengthen muscles evenly. Correcting this position usually requires aligning the rider’s base (get the butt square in the saddle).



2. When viewed from the side, the rider should sit as straight as possible. You should be able to draw a line from the ear, to shoulder, to hip, to heel (Figure D).



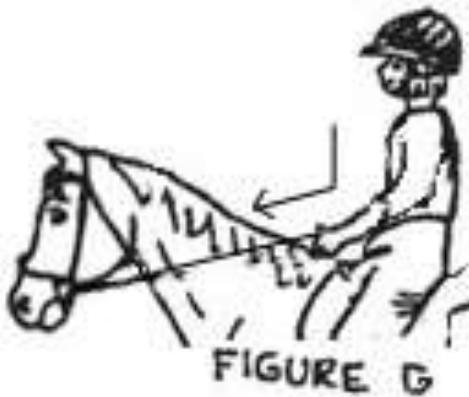
You will often see riders in the “sofa seat” or C curve (Figure E). Often the rider will sit up if asked. Sometimes the rider’s position will reflect their posture off the horse. Encouraging elongation of the leg usually improves the posture.

3. Figure F shows a rider with a “toe-down” and leg pinched up. This position could indicate a rider with tight adductor muscles, an extreme, forward-seat, or saddle or stirrups that are too short. The rider should be encouraged to lengthen his leg. This lengthening could be achieved by riding without stirrups or by trying a different type of saddle.

4. If the rider sits with a “toe-down” but is straight in the saddle, the stirrups may be too long and they are reaching for them. Often this will cause the rider to also lean slightly forward.



5. **Hand position:** there should be an imaginary straight line from the rider’s elbow through the wrist to the bit. Thumbs should be on top, knuckles vertical, and fingers closed softly (like holding an ice cream cone). Hands should be 4-6 inches apart just above the withers or slightly ahead of the saddle horn. Elbows should be bent and resting by the rider’s side (Figure G).



**During exercises**, pay attention to your student. Riders are to do the exercises and the sidewalkers are to reinforce and assist. When able, model the exercise for the rider.

The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow as much as possible. You are right at their side, so help the instructor to challenge them to be their best.

## Rider Behaviors

### Understand Why Behavior Issues and Meltdowns with Riders Happen

Behaviors serve a function: they are a way to communicate something:

- To get attention, escape, vent, play, avoid, express inability to cope, etc.

Your role is to figure out what the behaviors are telling you.

### Tantrums vs. Meltdowns

- Tantrums – are intentional and manipulative
- Meltdowns – are negative emotional reactions to a perceived threat resulting in a fight, flight or freeze response that escalates out of control. It often causes one to lose the ability to reason.

### First, Manage Your Own Behavior

Our brains are designed to attune to the emotional state of those around us. If another person is experiencing distress, chances are our own bodies will begin mirroring that distress. If a person is scowling at us, our mirror neurons will cause our face to scowl in response. If a child is appearing angry, it creates a sense of

anger in response. We need to be aware of this and take measures to maintain a calm equilibrium. Purposefully take a deep breath in through your nose. Exhale slowly through your mouth and relax your face and smile if you can manage it. This will trigger neurons in your brain to tell the rest of you that things are just fine.

- Have self-control
  - Don't take it personally – they are trying to communicate something or are unable to cope
  - Control your own temper – getting angry will only escalate the situation
  - Avoid power struggles – stay calm and disengage by not reacting emotionally.
  - Ask for a break if you need to walk away and calm yourself for a moment
- Have perspective
  - Remain non-judgmental
  - Remember that children often lack the ability to reason well
  - Create an encouraging environment
- Praise, don't criticize
  - Focus on their effort, which they can change (not their ability, which they can't)
  - Encourage hard work, which helps them get through challenges
- Set them up for success
  - Offer Choices: Provide limited, acceptable options to increase their sense of agency.

### **Dismounting: Croup and Crest Dismounts**

- The leader will park the horse in the center of the arena for dismounting.
- Always dismount to the ground if possible
- Always call an offside assistant when needed, so the instructor stays on the onside with the student

### **Croup Dismount:**

- The instructor will step in for the onside sidewalker.
- Rider places reins on the horse's neck.
- Rider takes right foot out of the stirrup. Offside sidewalker may assist to make sure the foot is clear of the stirrup and doesn't get caught.
- The rider will put their hands on the horse's neck, and lean forward looking towards the offside sidewalker (this helps twist their body in the right direction).
- The rider will then swing their right leg over the horse's hindquarters. If needed, the offside sidewalker helps lift their leg over the hindquarters and spots to make sure the leg doesn't hit the horse.
- The rider will lean their belly over the saddle, take the left foot out of the stirrup and with the instructor's support, slides to the ground. The onside sidewalker or leader may assist to make sure that the left stirrup is out of the way. The instructor will ask the rider to thank his or her team and give the horse a pet on the neck.
- Onside sidewalker will walk the student back to the observation area making sure that they walk away by the horse's head, not around the hindquarters.

### **Crest Dismounts**

1. This is for a rider that is physically able to croup dismount but needs to dismount over the crest due to insecurity, fear, or anxiety.

- Rider places reins forward on the horse's neck.
- Rider takes feet out of stirrups and places hands on the horse's neck.

- They are going to bring both legs up at the same time to the horse's neck/crest.
  - Offside sidewalker supports rider's back and helps bring their right leg up if needed.
  - The instructor will bring the rider's left leg up.
- The rider brings right leg over the horse's neck/crest, so both legs are side by side.
  - Offside sidewalker supports or spots the rider's back and helps bring their right leg over if needed.
  - The instructor will assist and support both legs.
- The rider places one hand on the pommel and one on the cantle, turn sideways in the saddle so they are sitting sideways facing the inside.
  - Offside sidewalker supports the rider's hips as they turn if needed.
  - The instructor helps the rider bring their legs to the side.
- The rider will then put both hands on horse's neck, or one on the neck and one on the instructor's shoulder.
  - Not the pommel because it pulls on the horse's withers.
- Rider dismounts by turning onto their hip and sliding down.
  - Instructor will support them as they slide down the horse on their hip.
  - **Or** the rider dismounts by turning onto their belly and sliding down

2. This crest dismount is for a rider that needs to dismount over the crest due to lack of flexibility, tight leg muscles, a shunt, etc. – but can walk on their own once they're on the ground.

- Rider places reins forward on the horse's neck.
- Rider takes feet out of stirrups and places hands on the horse's neck.
- They are going to bring both legs up at the same time to the horse's neck/crest.
  - Offside sidewalker supports rider's back and helps bring their right leg up.
  - Onside sidewalker supports the rider's back.
  - The instructor will bring the rider's left leg up.
- Bring right leg over the horse's neck/crest, so both legs are side by side.
  - Offside sidewalker supports rider's back and helps bring their right leg over.
  - Onside sidewalker supports the rider's back, as the rider will need to let go and maneuver their hands to let the leg pass.
  - The instructor will bring both legs together and take control of them.
- The rider places one hand on the pommel and one on the cantle, turn sideways in the saddle so they are sitting sideways facing the inside.
  - Offside sidewalker supports the rider's hips as they turn.
  - Onside sidewalker supports the rider's hips as well.
  - The instructor controls the rider's legs and brings them to the side.
- Take a moment to let the rider relax, find their balance, and a comfortable position sitting sideways.
- The rider puts both hands on horse's neck, or one on the neck and one on the instructor's shoulder.
  - Not the pommel because it pulls on the horse's withers.
- Rider dismount by turning onto their hip and sliding down supported by the instructor.
  - The rider will twist onto their side and slide down the horse on their hip.
- **Or** dismount by turning onto their belly and sliding down supported by the instructor.

3. Crest dismount to a wheelchair.

- Rider places reins forward on the horse's neck.
- Rider takes feet out of stirrups and places hands on the horse's neck.
- Instructor positions themselves facing the rider

- Sidewalker (or caregiver) prepares to lift rider from behind with hands under the rider's armpits or with their arms across their chest holding the wrists.
- Instructor and offside sidewalker lift rider's legs from under the thigh near the knee.
- Sidewalker (or caregiver) lifts rider's torso slightly.
- Offside sidewalker gently hands off the rider's right leg to the instructor and the team lifts the rider off the horse and places him or her into their wheelchair.

This will vary depending on the rider's ability.

**Note: a crest dismount is often used for very young or small riders. In these cases, once the rider is sideways the instructor (or parent) may simply lift the rider off the horse into their arms.**

### **Sidewalker Roles in an Emergency**

#### **Rider Falls during a Lesson**

Although rare, falls from the horse occasionally occur, if this happens, STOP! Remain calm. Follow these steps:

- If your rider has fallen, do not move him/her. Stay with the rider and keep them calm.
- The horse leader will move the fallen rider's horse carefully away from the sidewalker and fallen rider.
- The instructor will check the rider for signs of injury and determine if the rider is able to remount and finish the lesson, if they are injured or if the lesson needs to be ended.
  - If the rider remounts, give him/her time to rebuild his/her confidence.
  - If the rider has a minor injury, the sidewalker will escort the rider out of the arena to be given first aid.
  - If circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated (serious injury or emotional upset), other mounted riders will be dismounted by the instructor. Stay with the fallen rider. Other sidewalker(s) will escort their riders out first and the horse leaders will then escort the horse(s) back to the stable.

#### **Spooked Horse**

Should a horse become frightened and spook, sidewalkers are to apply a thigh hold to their rider.

Sidewalkers should attempt to stay with their rider and maintain the supportive hold until the horse calms.

Listen for directions from the instructor and follow directions.

#### **Loose Horse**

If a horse should become loose during a lesson - DO NOT panic, stay with your rider and keep calm. The leader will move to a safe area out of the horse's path and halt until the loose horse stops. The instructor, a staff member or leader will catch and halter the horse.

#### **Severe Weather**

- In the case of unexpected severe weather **pending**, evacuation of the arena is preferred, if time allows.
  - Sidewalkers assist staff with dismounting riders and moving riders, family and visitors to a safe place.
- If there is no time to dismount and evacuate the arena (ie: sudden thunderstorm), leaders will bring horses to a halt in the center of the arena. The instructor will decide whether to dismount students or stay mounted.
  - If dismounted, sidewalkers escort riders out of arena.
  - If staying mounted, sidewalkers remain in position with their rider.

**Refer to the Emergency Procedure Manual for further details.**

If you are done for the day, make sure to return your nametag and sign out!

### **The Benefits of Sidewalking for the Volunteer**

While sidewalking is fundamentally about supporting the rider, it also offers significant rewards for the volunteer. Sidewalkers form strong bonds with the riders and give them emotional support and encouragement. These relationships can be profoundly rewarding, providing a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Sidewalkers witness the growth and achievements of the riders firsthand, whether it's a breakthrough in communication, improved balance, or simply a smile that lights up the rider's face.

Sidewalking is also a fantastic way for volunteers to engage socially, not just with the rider but with the broader therapeutic community. Each session is a unique experience, offering opportunities to learn about the rider's strengths, challenges, and triumphs. Many sidewalkers report that these experiences enrich their own lives, offering insights into resilience, patience, and the profound impact of human-animal interactions.

Sidewalking is a cornerstone of equine-assisted services, providing critical support to riders and enriching the lives of volunteers. It's a role that requires dedication, empathy, and a willingness to form meaningful connections. For those interested in volunteering, sidewalking offers a unique opportunity to make a tangible difference in someone's life while experiencing the joy and fulfillment that comes from helping others. So, the next time you see an equine therapeutic riding session, take a moment to appreciate the sidewalkers—they are truly unsung heroes in the journey towards healing and empowerment.

*The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and meet his/her full potential. You are there right by his/her side, so help the instructor to challenge him/her to be their very best!*

Thank you for fulfilling this important role and for being part of the Bluff & Ridge Team!

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