

Volunteer Manual

WELCOME to Boots to Grasses Therapeutic Horsemanship Program! As a non-profit organization, Boots to Grasses Therapeutic Horsemanship Program (BTG) relies heavily on the strength of dedicated volunteers to assist our students and staff in a variety of different areas. This manual is to serve as a guide for any questions or concerns you might have regarding your job as a volunteer for BTG. Keep it in a safe place; it is a great reference tool! Because of the nature of our work and the people we serve, it is important that everyone be as knowledgeable and consistent as possible to uphold the highest quality and safety standards. Most of all, volunteering for BTG is a wonderful way for you to make new friends and help make a difference in the lives of some very special riders. However, if you ask any volunteer they will tell you, “I get more back from our students than I could ever give.”



Any time you spend volunteering with us is GREATLY appreciated. You are a very important part of the BTG team! Thank you in advance for your time, effort and help! IMPORTANT! Please remember that it is very important you let your instructor know as soon as possible if you are unable to make a class for which you are volunteering (at the very least, one day prior to the class For last-minute emergency cancellations, please call or text Bella 419-602-1143 or Laura 419-602-0912. If the instructor does not have time to replace you, the student you work with may not be able to ride. Thank you for your cooperation.

Confidentiality Policy—please read carefully

At Boots to Grasses Therapeutic Horsemanship Program, we place great importance on protecting the confidential information of our clients, our staff and our volunteers. “Confidential Information” includes, but is not limited to, personally identifiable information such as name, nickname(s), telephone numbers, addresses, e-mails, etc., as well as the non-public business records of Boots to Grasses Therapeutic Horsemanship Program. In particular, medical information about clients, and information about their disabilities or special needs, must be protected as Confidential Information. Volunteers shall never disclose Confidential Information to anyone other than Boots to Grasses Therapeutic Horsemanship Program staff. In addition, volunteers must seek staff permission that consent has been given before taking any pictures or videos.

Volunteer Positions

- **Leaders/Sidewalkers** - These volunteers help during the lessons. Some students, due to the nature of their disability, must remain on-lead at all times while riding. Also, some students require assistance from sidewalkers on one or both sides. Sidewalkers may be asked to physically assist the riders with position, balance, body placement, and rein

holding. The instructor will answer any questions you may have on appropriate touch techniques to ensure everyone is comfortable and safe.

- *Tip* Always ask for consent before touching riders (even if they may not understand)
- **Barn Chores Helpers**
- **“Handyman” Services or Project Helpers**
 - **examples: Welding, Construction, Roofing, Landscaping, Pasture Mowing...**
- **Fundraising & Marketing Committee**
 - **examples: Soliciting donations of goods or services, distributing marketing material (schools, businesses, churches, parks, residential facilities,...)**

Volunteer Criteria Guidelines: Boots to Grasses Therapeutic Horsemanship Program accepts volunteers regardless of race, color, nationality or ethnic origin and economic status.

In the interest of maintaining the highest standards of quality and safety, volunteers of BTG will be assessed according to the criteria outlined below.

All BTG volunteers must:

- commit to a regular schedule or be available to substitute
- inform their instructor when they are unable to attend
- be a minimum of 15 years of age and demonstrate mature, responsible and reliable behavior
- submit to a criminal background check if over 18 years of age
- abide by barn rules and general facility procedures
- demonstrate good judgment
- work with students, staff and fellow volunteers in a respectful, cooperative and positive manner
- take direction willingly from staff and fellow volunteers
- communicate areas of concern to the instructor

Physical Guidelines: All BTG volunteers should possess the willingness and ability to:

- lift at least 25 lbs
- thoroughly groom a muddy horse and tack up
- pick up a horse’s hoof and balance it while picking it out
- react quickly and sensibly to an emergency situation
- lead or sidewalk for one full hour without leaning on the horse or taking breaks
- lead or sidewalk at the trot one full lap or maximum 2 minutes) around the ring while maintaining control of horse or rider
- as a leader, be able to handle a misbehaving horse without jeopardizing the safety of the rider, horse, volunteer(s) or any other person
- as a sidewalker, be willing to physically touch a rider and deal with their bodily fluids such as saliva

Rules & Reminders

1. All volunteers must have a volunteer registration form on file. If you are under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must also sign the form.
2. There is absolutely NO SMOKING OR VAPING anywhere on the property.
3. Please leave personal pets at home. We do not allow dogs in the barn and leaving them in your car is unsafe.
4. Please refrain from giving the horses treats brought from home. We provide treats that meet the nutritional needs of our horses.
5. ALL volunteers must wear ASTM-SEI approved helmets when they are riding.
6. Remember, volunteers are asked to help in many ways. Please speak up if you are asked to do anything you don't know how to do or are uncomfortable with.
7. Once volunteers have started to work with and around the horses and students, cell phone use is prohibited. If you have an emergency call or text, please inform your instructor so they may find a temporary replacement for your position.

Background Checks: All volunteer applicants over the age of eighteen are subjected to a criminal background check before they begin their service for BTG. BTG reserves the right to reject applicants who have been convicted of crimes involving violence, alcohol, theft, and any other crime we feel pose a possible risk to our students, staff and/or horses. All information will be kept strictly confidential.

VOLUNTEER PROCEDURES

Key Suggestions

- Introduce yourself to your student and the other members of your volunteer team if you don't already know them.
- Learn along with your student. Each lesson presents something new.
- Enjoy yourself. An anxious volunteer can cause tension for the horse and/or the student. Enthusiasm is contagious!
- Be empathetic. Try to understand your student and their challenges, and develop a rapport with them. However, avoid mothering, caretaking and over-sentimentality.
- The students are there to perform to the best of their ability, and we are there to foster their independence and encourage them to new heights.
- Be patient and sensitive. A considerable amount of patience may be needed to adjust to a student's slow movements and rate of progression. Learn to work with your student's pace of communicating and responding.

Lesson Procedures

(In the ring) There are two types of jobs for volunteers in the arena. They are LEADER and SIDEWALKER. The student should be the center of the volunteer's attention. Unrelated and unnecessary conversations between volunteers should not take place in the ring. However, you

certainly should introduce yourselves to each other and to your student. Also, make sure your student knows the name of their horse.

IF AT ANY TIME, NO MATTER WHAT YOUR JOB, YOU HAVE A QUESTION, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO ASK FOR HELP. WE WOULD RATHER HAVE YOU ASK THE SAME QUESTION 100 TIMES THAN NOT BE SURE THAT WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS CORRECT!

The Sidewalker: Sidewalkers are the ones who normally get the most hands on duties in therapeutic riding. They are directly responsible for the rider. As such, they have the capability to either enhance or detract from the lesson. In the arena, the sidewalker should help the student focus their attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with the rider or other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and for some riders with perceptual problems, it can be overwhelming. If two sidewalkers are working with one student, one sidewalker should be the designated talker. 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 student's right hand and say "Right" to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and will learn when they need help and when they are just not paying attention. It is important to maintain a good position by the rider's knee. Being too far forward or back will make it difficult to assist with instructions or provide security if the horse should trip or shy. The most commonly used way to hold a rider without interfering is the "arm over the thigh" hold. The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle (flap or pommel depending on the horse's size) with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm gently rests on the rider's thigh. Be careful not to dig your elbow into the rider's leg or the horse's side or pull back on the flap of the saddle. Avoid wrapping your arm around the rider's waist. At times, this can pull the rider off balance and make riding more difficult. During exercises, pay attention to your student. Sometimes volunteers forget that the riders are to do the exercises and the sidewalkers are to reinforce and assist. The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to reach their fullest potential.

During mounting - Sidewalkers may be asked to stand offside (on the right) of the horse in the mounting area. Other tasks may include helping guide the rider's leg over the saddle, putting the rider's foot in their stirrup, help adjust the rider's clothing or body for maximum comfort and stability, etc. The instructor will provide direction.

At the walk and trot - The sidewalker will need to adjust his/her speed to match the speed of the horse in order to keep their student balanced and safe. They may also be asked to provide hand-over-hand assistance to the rider while using the reins.

During dismounting - Sidewalkers should keep a student from dismounting without an instructor helping. They may be asked to help guide the rider's leg over the horse's back. After dismounting, sidewalkers will stay next to their rider and walk them safely back to the crossies.

***During emergencies:

Falls - Falls are very rare, but they can and do happen. If another rider falls, or another horse gets loose, REMAIN CALM and remember your only concern is your student. If you feel

like it would be safer for your rider to dismount, you may get them off the horse without the instructor's assistance. Get your student to a safe place (a corner or exit the arena) and remain with your student. If your rider falls, REMAIN CALM. Keep them still and calm. The leader will move the horse away. Sidewalkers may be asked to call emergency services if necessary.

In fire or tornado emergencies - Sidewalkers do not need to wait for the instructor to dismount their rider in any emergency. Get the rider off in the quickest and safest way possible. Tornado shelter is in the crawlspace of the house. The entrance to the crawlspace is in the garage to the right of the fridge.

The Leader: As a leader, your first responsibility is the horse. If you are working without sidewalkers, you must be constantly aware of your student also. If a situation arises (and you are working alone, no sidewalkers) where you must choose between the student and the horse, the student always comes first. If you are working with sidewalkers, they will take care of the student. You must take care of the horse.

During mounting: The mounting process is the most stressful part of the lesson for the horse. While in the mounting area, pay close attention to the instructor. The instructor will tell you where to position the horse at the lift or block. Your responsibility is to keep the horse as quiet as possible while the student is mounting. Stand directly in front of the horse. If the horse is uneasy, rub the horse's neck and speak quietly to help calm it. After the student has mounted, ask if everyone is ready, then move the horse forward. The student will have their stirrups adjusted at this time.

Tips for leading your horse - The proper position for the leader is to walk about in line with the throatlatch (where the head meets the neck). Care must be taken that the horse maintains a natural head carriage. Lead from the left side of the horse. A good rule of thumb for holding the lead line is to hold it in your right hand approximately six to twelve inches away from the buckle. The excess lead line should be held in your left hand. NEVER WRAP THE EXCESS LINE AROUND YOUR HAND. No matter how slow the horse you are leading is, the leader should not try to pull the horse forward nor should you stop the horse unless your student is unable to do it himself. The student is encouraged to do as much as possible on their own. The instructor will point out to you if the rider is in need of assistance. In order for the rider to have complete freedom to use the reins, care should be taken to ensure that the lead line does not interfere with the reins. The lead line should be hanging between the reins, not over the top of them. None of our horses are known kickers, but all horses have the potential to kick if pressured by another horse positioned too closely to their hind legs. Give yourself enough room from the horse in front of you. If your student cannot maintain a safe distance, then help them to do so. Remember, many of our students have a poor sense of space orientation and do not realize when they are too close. Use common sense. If you see that your student is getting into trouble and is unable to follow the directions given by the instructor, you should give assistance.

At the halt - The leader should step in front of the horse, and act as a physical barrier, to keep it from moving.

At the walk - Be aware of your sidewalkers and give them enough room to walk behind you and still be at the student's side, and between the horse and the side wall of the arena.

At the trot - The instructor will give directions at this time for each student and horse. Start to jog and stay near the horse's head. Do not pull or hit the horse with the lead line or your hand. Say "TROT" if the student is unable.

During dismounting: Do the same as during mounting. A student should not dismount without an instructor's assistance.

***During emergencies:

Falls - Falls are very rare, but they can and do happen. If another rider falls, your only concern is the horse you are leading. Stop your horse immediately. Go in front and hold your horse as you would at the halt. NEVER let go of your horse. Remember to stay calm at all times. If your rider falls, REMAIN CALM. Regain control of your horse and move them away from the rider and sidewalkers.

In a fire emergency - the leader is responsible for taking the horse to the nearest exit away from the barn. If the rider is still on the horse, use the big garage doors. If the rider has been dismounted, you may use the human door.

In a tornado emergency - As soon as you hear the tornado siren, let the sidewalkers get the rider off the horse, then quickly and calmly put the horse in its stall. If they are wearing a bridle, take it off. Tornado shelter is in the crawlspace of the house. The entrance to the crawlspace is in the garage to the right of the fridge.

Other Lesson Procedures For All Volunteers

Getting the horse from the stall: If you have a student with you, talk to them about the things you are doing and show them the equipment before you enter the stall to use it. If your student uses a wheelchair, leave them outside the stall while you are getting the horse from the stall and taking it to the cross ties. Always check with an instructor before you take any student into the stall. When approaching the stall, talk to the horse so they know you're there. (Remember that horses sometimes sleep standing up.) A horse may be easily startled if they don't know you are there. Before you open the stall door all the way, make sure that the horse's hind end is not facing the door. If it is, open the door slightly and call to the horse, using the horse's name. When they are in a position that you can easily approach their head, open the stall door just wide enough for you to slip through. Then quietly, but confidently approach the horse's head. Never let the horse get between you and the door. Put the halter on and clip a leadline. **OPEN THE STALL DOOR ALL THE WAY!** Many horses get injured getting caught on the door latch. Lead the horse out of the stall, holding the lead line in your right hand near the horse's chin. Hold the remaining lead line in your left hand, folded neatly. Never drag the end of the leadline on the ground or wrap the excess around your hand.

Entering the crossties: Take the horse into the cross tie area and turn them around so their head is centered between the cross ties. Attach the cross ties to either side of the halter. Take off the leadline while the horse is in the crossties. Do not drape the lead over the horse's neck. A student should not be left unattended in the crossties. This is potentially a very dangerous area. Students and/or volunteers should never walk behind a horse. Care should be taken when working near the horse's face that the ties are not where a student might be injured. Many students with poor balance will try to support themselves by holding on to the ties. This is not only uncomfortable for the horse, it is also dangerous to the student should the horse throw their head. Remember that the students will imitate the things you do, even if you tell them something different.

Grooming: We have set up the following guidelines for grooming specific to BTG. We hope that this will help to ensure that everyone is teaching the same thing to all students. If students are assisting you in the grooming process, use the time in the cross ties to teach the student about the various parts of the horse. Before a student starts to groom, he should walk up and greet his/her horse. Approach in a quiet and unhurried manner and speak to the horse quietly while using slow body movements. The student should greet the horse with a gentle pat on the side of the neck. Remember, many horses do not like to be touched on their face or head. All grooming equipment that you will need is located in the grooming boxes on the ramp. Please be sure that all brushes are returned after they have been used, and be sure that the equipment is CLEAN when returned. This is especially important in the spring when horses shed out their winter coats.

Grooming Tools

1. Curry Comb or Shedding Blade
2. Dandy Brush (also sometimes called stiff, hard, or soft brush)
3. Hoof Pick
4. Mane & Tail Brush or Comb

Picking out hooves: Stand facing the back of the crossties starting with the front left hoof. Run your thumb and fingers down the sides of the horse's leg, between the knee and ankle, pressing firmly to make them pick their foot up. If they do not lift their foot, push against their shoulder with your shoulder. Wrap your hand around the whole hoof to give maximum support. Always stand up and lean over from the waist to do this. Do not squat down or kneel down to clean a hoof. You cannot move out of the way if the horse decides to move. Using a hoof pick, clean the depressions at the sides of the frog, the spongy pad at the center rear of the foot; scrape the sole free of dirt. The indentation in a V shape is called the frog and should be clear when the hoof is clean. The angle of the V points to the toe and is shallow. The ends of the V are deeper and come out at the heel. Work from the heel to the toe with your hoof pick. Use no more force than is necessary to clear out all foreign matter, although it might take a little muscle to remove impacted dirt! Many volunteers are uncomfortable picking out hooves at the beginning of their volunteer service. If you are uncomfortable doing this, please ask another volunteer or instructor to help you. Clean and healthy hooves are very important to the overall health of a horse!

Saddling or tacking up: Be sure the horse is clean, especially in areas that will be covered by the tack. Therapy horses work hard and should be made as comfortable as possible. A clean girth

area is especially important to prevent sores. Every horse has different equipment or combinations of equipment for their comfort. Be sure to ask if you are unsure what tack to use.

Bridles: Some riders do not use the bridle. If so, attach the reins directly to the halter. If a bridle is being used, clip on the lead rope, disconnect the crossties, and put the bridle on over the halter. Attach the reins directly to the bit. Once your horse is tacked, the leader and student may take their horse into the arena and walk them around. Your student may or may not walk with you at this point.

After dismounting: Once your student is dismounted, it is time to put away your horse and its equipment. If you are the leader, your student may assist you in leading the horse back to the crossties. Lead the horse back to the cross ties and re-attach the ties to the halter. If your horse is wearing a bridle, remove it before you attach the crossties to its halter. Remember, never attach a horse by its bit. This is very dangerous and will more than likely result in injury to the horse if it becomes startled. Once the horse is reattached, encourage the student to take all the tack off with as little assistance as possible. Help the student return all the equipment from where you got it. Lastly, it's treat time! Help your student get a treat from the feed room, put it in a small black bowl, and give it to their horse. Ask the instructor where to put the horse. Most of the time they will go back in their stall, however sometimes they will be turned out in the pasture. Unless told otherwise, always remove halters. During hot weather, you may be asked to help give the horse a cold shower or cool-down walk.

* Safety tip when turning a horse out in the pasture: Always turn them to face the door before removing their halter and setting them free. Then move away from them quickly without turning your back. Some horses kick out with excitement when turned out.

Final information: When you meet a person with a disability, be yourself. Be a friend and treat them as an equal. Be age appropriate when speaking to them (no baby talk). Many people with disabilities get talked down to. Teenagers want to be treated like teenagers and adults want to be treated like adults. Even if you know the students does not understand you or will not respond, it is still appropriate to include them in conversations. Also, try not to predetermine your student's abilities. They will always surprise you.

One of the hardest aspects of volunteering is standing back and letting the students do things for themselves, even if that means letting them make a mistake (safely). Lend a hand if asked, or if you see a dangerous situation arising. Be patient. Information about students and their disabilities is CONFIDENTIAL. Details are shared on a need-to-know basis. If you have a question about a student please ask your instructor.