



4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program

4STEPS is a 501c3 charitable organization and a Premier Accredited Center of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Riding Intl. (PATHIntl.)

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4STEPS PROGRAM Policy Manual January 2022

Table of Contents

Welcome to 4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program

Program background

Participant Policies

Proper participant attire and safety gear

Safety stirrup policy

Guest policy

Participant acceptance

Dismissal of a participant from the program

Participant forms

Confidentiality

Riding session general information

Ground session policy

Scheduling considerations

Cancellations

Choosing equines & tack for participants

Volunteer Policies

Volunteer acceptance guidelines

Volunteer conduct

Volunteer attire

Mounting and dismounting

Dismissal of a volunteer from the program

Facility Policies

Tack area guidelines

Off limits areas

Emergency and evacuation plans

Equine Policies

Accepting equines

Removing an equine from the program

Leasing equines

Equine health records

Equine conditioning and training

Introduction and Background

4STEPS goal is to improve the minds and bodies of our riders, using our horses as partners. Our riders build strength in their bodies by learning to groom, saddle and ride. They improve their confidence by learning from our horses and receiving unconditional love that only animals can provide. 4STEPS specializes in riding instruction for special needs individuals, but provides therapeutic riding to individuals of any ability. The organization was founded in 2002 by Sandy Winter who is the Executive Director and Head Instructor. All instructors with the program are at least Registered Level Therapeutic Riding Instructors certified with Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH Intl.). All activities at 4STEPS are run according to PATH Intl. standards, and safety is our primary goal. This policy booklet is meant to address some of the most frequent questions we receive and to establish guidelines to ensure our program continues to operate as safely as possible.

Participant Policies Attire and Safety Gear for Participants

All individuals who participate in the activities of 4STEPS must wear an ASTM / SEI approved riding helmet during mounted activities. Participants must also wear long pants (unless they are unable) and covered shoes at all times. The instructor or a qualified volunteer will perform safety checks on the tack and equipment at the beginning of the lesson.

Safety Stirrup Policy

A participant must wear riding boots, hard -soled shoes, sneakers will be fine. Safety stirrups are used on all saddles.

Guest policy at Our Facility

Family and friends of our participants are most welcome at our facility. We ask that only the participant enter the tacking area at their designated session time. We have several areas where guests can relax and observe the riding session. NO DOGS or other pets are allowed at the facility at any time.

Acceptance of Participants into the Program

Participants accepted into program activities must have no medical contraindications that prevent them from riding. In the case that they have a diagnosis that requires a physician's release, that release must be obtained before any mounted activities may occur. The PATH Intl Standards of Precautions and Contraindications will be consulted and followed. Individual medical history will be reviewed at least annually in the case of a participant with medical diagnoses. Any participant with Down Syndrome must present a physician's clearance that includes a neurological exam, obtained within the last year clearing them of Atlantoaxial Instability. Participants must be of a height and weight that can be accommodated by the program's equines. As the available equines vary from day to day, these limits may vary from day to day, depending on the health and scheduling of the equines.

Dismissal from Program Activities

In the case that a participant can no longer participate safely in the program's activities the participant will be asked to leave the program. Situations in which this might occur include:

- Participant's health changes to the point that it prevents them from continuing
- Participant's behavior is dangerous to themselves, the equines, the staff, or volunteers in the program
- Participants cannot follow directions to the point that they become a danger to themselves, other participants, the equines, staff, or volunteers in the program
- Participants experience a change in height, weight, or other physical condition such that the program's equines can no longer accommodate them

Participants/ Volunteer Required Forms and Updates

All participants and volunteers are required to complete the Participant/Volunteer sign up packet, which includes a liability waiver, medical clearance forms, and general information. Individuals not willing to complete the forms may not participate in any activities at the facility. 4STEPS will obtain updated participant and volunteer forms annually starting in January. The updated forms will be added to the participant's or volunteer's files. These updates will include physician's releases where applicable.

Policy on Confidentiality of Participant/Volunteer Information Forms

4STEPS keeps all required forms for each participant and volunteer in the office. Access to participant information is restricted to staff and board members only. All staff, volunteers and participants of 4STEPS have signed the Confidentiality Agreement for the organization and will not discuss any information contained in the completed forms that are kept in the files. No personnel will access the files for anything other than information needed for contact, in case of an emergency, or to support riding sessions. Centers may receive requests from outside sources for release of information. Such outside sources could include judicial officer, caseworkers, therapists/medical practitioners or other equine assisted activity centers. All client information is considered confidential and must be treated as such. If you wish for your participants information, such as contact information, instructor progress notes or equestrian skill goals to be released to an outside source, please complete the form in the sign up packet.

Riding Sessions General Information

All riding sessions are conducted under the direct supervision of a PATH Intl. certified instructor. Riding lessons are an hour long. Grooming and tacking will take place both before and after riding for an hour long session. The physical and emotional capabilities of the participant may influence the riding time in each lesson.

Riding sessions generally have one to four participants in them. We will only allow one participant per horse. Our normal riding lessons are group sessions, mostly having between two and four participants per lesson. We believe that riding sessions are more fun, engaging and educational when there is more than one participant in the arena. If individual sessions are desired, they may be arranged with the instructor at certain times.

Equine Assisted Learning Activities (unmounted) - Offered for those individuals who are unable or unwilling to horseback ride but still enjoy spending time with the horses and learning about horsemanship. Program includes grooming, feeding, learning natural horsemanship and spending quality time with the animals and staff. **Fee** - The cost is \$180 for a regular session and \$80 for the abbreviated Late Summer session.

MAKE ARRANGEMENT FOR PAYMENT IN ADVANCE. Riders unable to pay the Session Fee should contact our Program Director at 410-835-8814 for assistance in obtaining scholarships or other funding to meet or defray the expense. If you are working with an agency for funding we will provide an invoice upon your request. If you cannot afford the total cost of a session please submit a scholarship request on the registration form. 4STEPS board of directors make decisions on scholarship award. Please submit the request early for consideration.

Inclement Weather and Adverse Conditions - If the weather is adverse for conducting therapeutic riding lessons on your scheduled lesson date or time the instructor may cancel the lesson. However, the weather on the Eastern Shore is often different in one place than in another. Lessons may be cancelled on account of such factors if the conditions at 4STEPS are adverse. Therefore if the weather where you are is inclement do not assume that the lesson will be cancelled. Please call us at 410-835-8814 to find out whether your lesson will be held.

Make-up Lessons. Makeup classes must be scheduled during the current session. Makeup classes will be offered subject to availability of the instructor, horses and staff. Clients who have attended all of the classes in a session may also participate during makeup weeks.

Applications: Updated applications must be on file in order for an individual to participate. You can find a Participant Application on file at www.4stepstrp.org under Program Services.

Scheduling

Our program is very busy, and we will do our very best to schedule your session when it is convenient for you. We depend on our income to keep our program running so make every effort to come on your scheduled ride time. Our volunteers work hard to attend sessions regularly so that you can develop a relationship. Please consider your volunteer's time.

Cancellations

Cancellations must be made at least 24 hours in advance except in the case of emergency or illness. We may be able to schedule alternate participants in the case of known cancellations and appreciate the ability to rearrange our staff and volunteers when we know that you are not able to make it. Cancellations made less than 24 hours prior to the lesson or no-shows may result in forfeit of the lesson. In the case that weather or an emergency causes us to cancel riding sessions, we will give you as much advance notice as possible. Please make sure that 4STEPS staff has a correct phone number and email address to reach you in case of weather or other emergent cancellations. Please be considerate when cancelling your lesson. Our volunteers make a big effort to be here for you!

Choosing Equines and Tack for Participants

We have a variety of horses at our program and a wide range of saddles and tack. Our PATH Int. credentialed instructors will choose your participant's horse and gear for their riding session. Decisions are made based on safety, physical ability, goals for the session and horse availability. The instructor will also assign volunteer leaders or sidewalkers as needed. The tack and equipment are inspected by an instructor before each use to make sure it is safe and in good repair. The tack must be an appropriate fit for both the equine and the participant. The instructor will also be responsible for ensuring the correct fit of the participant's helmet prior to mounting.

Equines have different personalities and ways of moving, and they each react differently to people. They are able to teach participants different things. We will do our best to choose the most appropriate horse for each participant, but be aware that we will frequently change horses as goals and abilities change. Requests for a particular horse will be taken into consideration.

Documentation of Occurrences

In the case where there is an incident that results or nearly results in injury or danger to any individual an Occurrence Report needs to be completed and submitted to the Executive Director. These occurrences may be falls, behavior of a participant, volunteer or a guest, a natural disaster, or documentation of a "near miss".

Volunteer Policies Ability of Volunteers to Perform Activities

Volunteering with 4STEPS can be a very wonderful experience, however it is a physically and mentally challenging job. Volunteer duties must be performed in a safe and competent manner. Volunteers must be able to perform to a certain standard to participate in the following activities:

Leading a horse

Volunteers must be capable of walking and jogging for an hour while maintaining vigilance and control of the equine in the lesson. They must be able to participate for the duration of a lesson without water or bathroom breaks. They must be able to exercise safe control of the equine in the case of unexpected behavior from either the equine or the participant. They must be able to follow directions of the PATH Intl. Instructor in control of the lesson at all times. They must be able to lead the equine in a manner that maintains the training of the equine and exhibits good ground manners.

Sidewalking

Volunteers must be capable of walking and jogging for an hour while maintaining vigilance and often using upper body strength to assist the participant. They must be able to assist the participant with the activities and follow the directions of the PATH Intl. Instructor in control of the lesson. They must be able to participate in this activity for the duration of a lesson with no water or bathroom breaks. They must be able to maintain safe control of the participant in all situations, including incidence of unexpected behavior of the equine or participant.

Volunteer Conduct

Volunteers of 4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program will conduct themselves at all times as role models and good citizens. The mission of our program is to improve the lives of our participants, and they must be treated with respect at all times. Some of our participants may look differently or act differently; however, it is never acceptable to treat them in a manner that could be viewed as inappropriate or rude. We expect our volunteer to be honest, helpful, friendly and mature.

Volunteer Attire

Volunteers must wear covered shoes at all times and avoid flapping clothing such as jackets tied around the waist or loose jackets that are not zipped or buttoned. Sunscreen and hats are advisable. Please avoid shirts with inappropriate wording or logos. Shorts are fine and even preferable due to the heat and humidity at certain times of the year. Volunteers are encouraged to drink lots of water during breaks and have snacks handy.

Lease or Borrowing of Equines

4STEPS leases their horses from Hoof Prints Trail Riding Center for use in the program. Hoof Prints has the responsibility of the equine's care, including feed, vet, shoeing, board and maintenance of horses and facilities.

Equine Health

Records are kept on the health of our equines including worming, shoeing and health issues. Our herd maintenance program includes active assessment of feed and behavior, a regular worming and shoeing schedule and vet visits for annual vaccinations and in case of injury or illness. All equines are evaluated at the start of the work day by the instructor on duty. Any horse that appears to be unsound in mind or body will be excused from sessions for the day and appropriate actions taken to rectify the issue. No equine in the program will be used for more than six hour of lessons or more than three continuously. Horses with age or soundness issues may have lower time limits. Records will be kept on horse use to ensure this policy is followed.

Equine Conditioning and Training Program

4STEPS/Hoof Prints staff will provide conditioning and training specific to the needs of our equines. Every week, horses will be scheduled for appropriate riding or turn out. The schedule will be kept on a pen board in the barn.