



Volunteer Handbook

*Welcome to Rainbow Riding Center
Sharing the Power of Horses as Teachers*

Rainbow Riding Center is a nonprofit corporation formed for the purpose of providing a wonderful growth experience for children and adults with special needs.

RRC uses the healing power of our team consisting of the horse, the farm, VOLUNTEERS and staff to help individuals seeking physical, mental, spiritual or emotional healing.

Examples of conditions that therapeutic riding benefits:

- cerebral palsy
- spina bifida
- neuromuscular disorders
- post traumatic brain injury
- cognitive limitations
- emotional challenges
- autism spectrum
- attention deficit disorder

Rainbow Riding serves riders over the age of 2 to people into their 70s or 80s. A site visit and screening process is conducted by staff to determine a rider's eligibility into the program. During the process, staff can determine if the program activities will be safe and appropriate for the individual and what resources would be needed, such as horse, instructor, volunteers and equipment. Once in the program, rider goals are determined and progress is documented. Most participants ride one time per week for 60-minute lessons over an 8-week session.

Lesson activities may include developing riding skills, exercises, games on horseback and riding on the sensory trail or on our trails through woods and fields.

Benefits of Equine Assisted Activities

Physically the horse's movement produces a movement in the rider that resembles the normal human gait of walking in the rider's pelvis and trunk. This movement helps to:

Strengthen muscles:

- improves muscle coordination and motor skills
- improves balance
- improves posture
- increases endurance

Socially and emotionally therapeutic riding improves:

- self esteem
- self confidence
- social and communication skills
- relationship building
- overcoming fear and anxiety

Cognitively the horse is a strong motivator for participants to work on:

- following multi-step and sequential directions
- staying on task
- counting, reading and other similar skills

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer opportunities are varied and include working in the lesson program or helping with other tasks that may consist of facility maintenance, cleaning tack, cleaning stalls, walking and checking fences, etc. We encourage you to let us know your preference on the Volunteer Information sheets you must fill out prior to starting.

1. If volunteers want to work in the lesson programs, they must commit to 1 hour each week for the length of the 8-week session.
2. Volunteering may involve moderate physical activity and working outside in varying weather conditions. Please be sure you are comfortable with the role that you select.
3. Volunteers must be able to work independently with minimal staff supervision.
4. Volunteers must have a positive attitude, be flexible and able to adapt to change.
5. Volunteers must possess the ability to follow directions and take instruction.
6. Volunteers must maintain strict confidentiality expectations.

Qualities of a RRC Volunteer:

- reliable
- flexible
- empathetic
- punctual
- possess common sense
- patient
- alert
- physically fit
- positive attitude
- willingness to have fun

Lessons Require Teamwork

In program lessons you will be part of a team which may consist of the:

- horse
- rider
- leader
- side walkers (1 or 2)
- instructor

There may be many opportunities to talk socially with your rider and provide verbal support, however please do not disrupt the lesson.

There may be times when the rider cannot focus on anyone far away or does not understand the instructions given, it is then the side walkers job to reinforce and help the rider to carry out the instructions.

Team members need to communicate to each other. Let your team know if you need to halt, change directions, cut across the ring or proceed into the center of the ring.

Team Member Responsibilities

Horse Leader

The leader is responsible for maintaining control of the horse: they need to be alert and aware of the horse's movement and behavior at all times, as well as staying tuned in to the rest of the team.

Side Walkers

Side walkers are positioned next to the horse in line with the rider. They are positioned to help the rider maintain stability, to reinforce the instructors' instructions and to also give the instructor feedback if the rider is uncomfortable or there is a safety issue.

In the Lesson

Our goal is to help the rider be as independent as possible. We encourage the riders to bring in the horses they will use from pasture or stall, groom, tack and lead them up to the ring with our supervision.

The rider leads the horse up to the ring, leading from the left side. A horse leader will accompany the rider at this time. Then they make a lap of the ring once in each direction. This allows the horse to stretch a bit, gives the instructor a chance to check for soundness on the horse and let the rider and horse bond and check in with each other. The horse is then brought into the center where the instructor will do a final tack check and tighten the girth.

The Horse Leaders Job

During the class, to help save the horse's back, all riders mount from the mounting block or ramp. Dismounts are from the center of the ring or the ramp. The leader's role during mounts and dismounts is to prevent the horse from moving.

The horse leader leads from the left side of the horse positioned between the horse's head and shoulder. Allow the horse to move freely. **DO NOT HANG ON THE LEAD ROPE.**

INFORM THE INSTRUCTOR ANYTIME DURING THE LESSON IF YOU FEEL OR SENSE THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH THE HORSE

It is the relaxed movement of the horse that makes therapeutic riding so successful. Keep your attention focused ahead of you and square your shoulders in the direction that you are going. Do not drag the horse. Look where you are going and assume the horse is going to go with you.

During the time a horse is standing still, remain relaxed standing directly in front of the horse facing the horse and rider; hold the lead line as loosely as possible.

IN AN EMERGENCY, A HORSE LEADER STAYS WITH THE HORSE

When the lesson is complete the rider will go to the center of the ring, dismount and with the leader, lead the horse back to the barn where they untack and groom the horse with a soft brush. The rider then gives the horse a pat, says thank you to the horse and team and returns the horse to the pasture or a stall.

The Side Walkers Job

The side walker's primary role is to walk alongside the rider and provide support as indicated by the instructor. It may be direct physical support, verbal support to reinforce the instructor's directions or acting as spotters during the lesson. One or two side walkers may be assigned to the rider depending on the rider's needs.

At the start of a lesson you may greet your rider, assist with getting their helmet and grooming kit. Horse leaders will generally assist the rider to bring their horse into the barn from the pasture.

There are a variety of side walking techniques used according to the rider's needs. The instructor will indicate which type of support should be used.

--**SPOTTER POSITION**: the side walker walks beside the rider (lined up with the rider's shoulder), prepared for "hands on" support if necessary.

--**THIGH HOLD**: the side walker places an arm closest to the rider over the rider's thigh and grasps the front edge of the saddle or surcingle applying light pressure to provide stability but not enough pressure to cause discomfort. (See illustration on next page.)

Thigh Hold Support



--THIGH HOLD AND ANKLE SUPPORT: occasionally a rider needs support provided by doing an arm over thigh and cupping the ankle or a flat palm on the rider calf for a "calf hold". This will be demonstrated if needed.

SIDE WALKERS STAY WITH THE RIDERS TO ENSURE THEIR SAFETY

Additional Information for Side Walkers:

--When a rider requires two side walkers, only one side walker at a time should be communicating with the rider. Too much input can confuse a rider.

--If a rider has only one side walker, the leader and side walker should walk on opposite sides of the horse.

--The role of the side walker varies greatly among riders. It is important to have an understanding of your rider's needs and knowledge of his or her goals. Please ask the instructor to provide this information to you if they haven't already done so.

--The side walker needs to be aware of the rider at all times. Even when the rider is not mounted, the side walker should be conscious of the rider's safety.

--Side walkers NEVER place your hands or fingers in any of the saddle's rings or buckles while side walking.

--If a rider or a horse behaves inappropriately or in an unsafe manner, please notify staff immediately.

--Never leave your position next to the rider. If you need to stop for any reason, the whole team stops with you. Inform the instructor if you cannot continue your role of side walker for any reason.

--Side walkers may need to encourage, calm, reassure or divert the rider's attention to the instructor--be helpful but do not interfere. Side walkers may need to reinforce what the instructor says and make sure the rider hears and understands what the instructor is asking.

--Remind the instructor if you need to change sides in case your arms get tired when supporting a rider.

--Keep your eyes on the rider and in the direction you are going.

--DO NOT interfere with the horse by petting, poking, leaning on or bumping. Allow the leader to do the job of moving the horse forward. If you get left behind, do not run up behind the horse.

Facial expressions of the horse you should be familiar with



Ears forward but relaxed
interested in what's
in front of him.



Ears turned back but relaxed
listening to his rider
or what's behind him.



Ears pointed stiffly forward
alarmed or nervous about what's
ahead. Looking for danger.



Ears pointed left and right
relaxed. paying attention
to the scenery on both sides.



Ears stiffly back
annoyed or worried about what's
behind him; might kick if annoyed.



Droopy ears
calm and resting.
horse may be dozing.



Ears flattened against neck
heavily angry, in a fighting mood.
May fight, bite or kick.

Other Signs You Should Notice

- Tucking the tail down tightly
 - danger to the rear
 - horse may bolt, buck or kick
 - WATCH OUT if ears are flattened back
- Switching the tail
 - annoyance and irritation may be occurring due to biting flies, stinging insects or some kind of tickling or bothersome actions by the rider or another horse

- Droopy ears and resting one leg on toe
 - calm and resting, horse may be dozing
 - DON'T WAKE HIM UP SUDDENLY
 - gently move reins, say his name or nudge him on the shoulder
- Wrinkling up the face and swinging the head
 - threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse
 - WATCH OUT FOR BITING OR KICKING!!