

Stepping Stones Therapeutic Riding, Inc.

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to Stepping Stones Therapeutic Riding, Inc. We are a non-profit organization affiliated with the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) and the Michigan 4-H Proud Equestrian Program (PEP). We are one of several dozen therapeutic horseback riding programs in the state of Michigan.

Therapeutic horseback riding for the disabled was first started in England in 1954. In 1969, Lida McGowan, with the help of the Cheff Foundation, started the "Cheff Center for Handicapped" in Augusta, Michigan. The Cheff Center remains one of the premier facilities for therapeutic riding in Michigan and a training ground for many therapeutic riding instructors.

Stepping Stones was founded in 1983 to provide horseback riding and related activities to challenged riders of all ages in Monroe County and the Downriver Area. Our program has only one paid employee – our NARHA certified instructor who is responsible for student admission into the program, evaluation of horses to be used in the program, coordination of the classes and documentation of results achieved during each riding session. All other individuals involved with Stepping Stones are volunteers – just like you!

WHAT THE PROGRAM DOES:

When a child is on a horse, he or she is basically ten feet off the ground. Many of these children have never been out of a wheelchair or off crutches. The horse becomes the child's equalizer that allows him or her to perform as a normal person. The horse is a live animal that responds and shows emotion. Horses are mobile and large, lifting the child up both physically and psychologically.

In addition to the obvious emotional benefits of the program, horseback riding also offers the disabled an excellent means of physical therapy, improving balance, posture and coordination.

It is important to remember that the horse is held and not led. The child is taught to ride and is not just taken for a ride. If at all possible, the child grooms and does the various tasks associated with the horse. The child learns a skill and begins to participate in a sport. The benefits are incalculable, but obvious to all of us.

BASIC INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS:

The information in this booklet has been gathered to answer many of the questions you might have regarding the Stepping Stones Therapeutic Riding, Inc. program. We have also included some instructions, terms and discussion of those terms relating to you as a volunteer.

Volunteers are covered for liability by our insurance policy with Markal, provided through our affiliation with NARHA. In order to be covered all volunteers must sign in on the volunteer attendance log each time that they volunteer. For the insurance to cover you, we must be able to prove that you were assisting with the program on the date and time in question. Volunteers must also complete the emergency medical treatment and liability release forms each calendar year.

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS:

As a volunteer, you will or probably already have wondered about the riders' individual characteristics. You must realize that this information is only to help you become comfortable in talking and dealing with individuals with disabilities. It does not give you enough background to diagnose, treat, or do anything with the riders without the instructor's approval. You should get to know the riders as people only, not as "disabled" people. The instructor will inform you of any necessary information regarding your rider's conditions. For example, if your rider is visually impaired, be sure to speak to them before touching them.

You can follow these general principles:

- 1) Do not do things for them.
- 2) Be patient with them.
- 3) Do nothing to them without the instructor's permission.
- 4) And, most importantly, have a good time! The riders sense this and enjoy the experience even more.

TIME COMMITMENT:

As a volunteer with Stepping Stones, the amount of time you commit to our program is up to you; however once you have decided the amount of time you can give us, we expect you to be reliable and dependable. Ideally, we would ask for a commitment of three hours per week for the full session (usually six weeks). For reasons of safety we need a specific number of volunteers per rider. In addition, to provide consistency to our students, we prefer to have the same volunteers working with our students each week. This minimizes distractions and helps our lessons to run more smoothly.

If you cannot attend your assigned lesson(s), it is essential that you notify the Volunteer Coordinator AND the barn office as soon as possible! If we do not have enough volunteers, a rider may have to be sent home without riding.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING:

ALL new volunteers must attend a volunteer training session prior to working with the horses or riders. Returning volunteers need not attend an additional volunteer training session if they have volunteered during one of the previous three sessions.

Volunteer training will include:

- 1) Orientation to the facility, program and therapeutic riding, in general.
- 2) Volunteer Responsibilities
- 3) Emergency Procedures
- 4) Confidentiality Issues
- 5) Safety Rules and Regulations
- 6) Hands-on Practice

Specifics of these training areas appear in subsequent sections of this volunteer handbook. On-going training in specific skills and activities will be offered periodically.

After orientation, the Instructor and Volunteer Coordinators will determine where a volunteer is best suited to work. A volunteer's ability to assist a rider in an emergency situation as a leader, a sidewalker and other positions will be evaluated prior to assignments being made.

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES:

- 1) To be sincere in the offer of service and believe in the value of the job to be done.
- 2) To maintain the dignity and integrity of Stepping Stones Therapeutic Riding, Inc. with the public.
- 3) To carry out duties promptly and reliably.
- 4) To accept the guidance and decisions of the instructors, staff and coordinators.
- 5) To be willing to learn and participate in orientation, training programs and during class times.
- 6) To complete emergency medical treatment and liability release forms once per calendar year.

VOLUNTEER QUALIFICATIONS:

- 1) Dependable – able to make a commitment, arrive on time and have a reliable means of transportation.
- 2) Must enjoy working with young people and people with disabilities.
- 3) Must be in good health.
- 4) Must be able to follow instructions and help students relate to these directions.

VOLUNTEER ATTIRE POLICY:

Proper attire while at the barn includes proper footwear, long pants and possibly a hat. Volunteers should wear clothing that they won't mind getting dirty.

Volunteers should not wear open-toed shoes or sandals when working with or near the horses. It is suggested that volunteers wear hard-soled shoes that offer protection.

Dangling jewelry may be unsafe to wear with some riders and horses. Please keep earring and jewelry choices simple on days when you volunteer.

Perfumes can attract bees and other stinging insects and can trigger a reaction in sensitive riders. Please do not wear strong perfumes or colognes.

Shorts may be cooler, but we prefer volunteers to wear long pants. Please remember that there are always flies and mosquitoes around horses.

VOLUNTEER CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY:

Stepping Stones shall preserve the right of confidentiality for all individuals in its program. As a program, we keep all files (including rider and volunteer information) strictly confidential. As a volunteer, you must maintain the confidentiality of sensitive information regardless of how it is obtained. Information that must be kept confidential should include but is not limited to: all medical, social, referral, personal and financial information regarding a person and his/her family.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES:

All persons should know the location of the following items:

- Tack Room Telephone (with emergency numbers and directions to the stable)
- All exits from the stable and the arena
- Fire extinguishers
- First Aid Kits (Human and Equine)
- Water and the Fuse Boxes

Please see the emergency maps posted around the barn with the above items' locations marked.

GENERAL EMERGENCY PROCEDURES:

One of the most important things to remember in any emergency is to remain calm, and most importantly, to help the riders remain calm and feel safe.

In all emergencies, the instructor is responsible for making decisions on actions to be taken and designating persons to assist them.

If during the course of a riding session, an emergency of any kind (i.e. illness, injury, fall, seizure, fire, storm) should arise, please listen carefully to the instructor's directions. All riding will STOP until the instructor gives further directions. No one, including parents, will be permitted to enter the work area during the emergency. Only persons designated by the instructor are permitted to quietly enter the work area. There will be no excessive talking or noise. Sidewalkers are to position themselves to protect and support the rider, and should explain the situation calmly and quietly to reassure the other mounted riders. The leaders are to position themselves in front of the horse and maintain control of the horse at all times. The leader remains responsible for the horse and the sidewalkers are responsible for the rider.

If the arena/stable must be evacuated for an emergency situation, all persons should meet at the rear of the parking lot by the white fence surrounding the outdoor arena.

It is very important that all volunteers sign in when they arrive and that the Class Coordinator logs in all riders. This accounting is necessary for both an emergency and for insurance purposes.

If any person is injured at Stepping Stones Therapeutic Riding, Inc., while participating in the Stepping Stones program, an incident form must be completed at the time of the injury (if possible, or as soon as possible thereafter). Even if you feel that the injury is insignificant, an incident form should be completed in case your condition worsens.

LOSS OF ELECTRICITY:

Since classes are held during daylight hours, the arena is equipped with sky lights and the arena door is usually open, in the event that the arena loses electricity during a class, there is usually enough light to safely exit the arena. In the rare event that the arena becomes too dark to see, there are flashlights in the tack room that can be used to aid in safe exit from the arena. Do not use matches or lighters to illuminate the arena in the event of a power loss.

INCLEMENT WEATHER:

Classes will not be held during inclement weather including thunderstorms or high winds. A tornado, hail storm or severe thunderstorm warning, lightning, rain or winds strong enough to rattle the arena roof and/or cause flooding or power outages are all conditions that warrant canceling classes. Stepping Stones staff will make every effort to contact you if classes are cancelled. Make sure the Volunteer Coordinator has accurate and up-to-date contact information for you.

If weather conditions deteriorate while classes are in progress and include any of the conditions listed above, classes will immediately be dismissed and subsequent classes cancelled. If rain is severe enough to make the arena unsafe in which to ride, classes may be temporarily suspended while waiting to see if the conditions improve. If classes are canceled, all riders should be returned to their parent/guardian. All horses should be returned to their stalls and untacked.

In the event that the arena needs to be evacuated immediately due to a severe weather or tornado warning, all persons should meet at the barn owners' house where we will seek shelter in the basement.

FIRE:

In case of fire, anyone inside the arena and stable would proceed quietly to the nearest exit. Any person holding a horse would proceed out of the barn with that horse (if possible) and release them into the nearest paddock. The instructor will designate an individual to call 911 and report the fire. Stable personnel or individuals designated by the instructor will release any remaining horses to a paddock, if possible. Some horses may become so panicked that it may not be possible to lead them safely and they must remain in their stalls.

FERMI NUCLEAR PLANT EMERGENCY:

In the unlikely event that warning sirens for the Fermi Nuclear Plant are sounded during a lesson, the instructor will immediately instruct everyone to halt their horses and listen to the sirens for instructions. Once all riders are safely dismounted, participants should leave the barn area immediately and travel in the opposite direction of the Fermi Nuclear facility by heading South or West.

MEDICAL:

The Stepping Stones Instructor and Volunteer Coordinators are certified in CPR and First Aid. The instructor will designate individuals to get the first aid kit or call 911 if needed. Medical forms for all riders, volunteers and staff are kept in a secure box in the tack room. These forms include information on medical conditions, medications and emergency contact names and telephone numbers. The telephone is also located in the tack room. If you are instructed to call 911, please use the directions to the stable posted near the phone so that the emergency personnel can locate us. Do not hang up with the 911 operator until emergency personnel arrive and/or you are instructed to do so.

The human and equine first aid kits are located in the tack room. Gloves are located in the human first aid kit. Everyone should be aware that there is a risk of transmission of disease whenever anyone comes into contact with human bodily fluids. If you are assisting during an injury where such an exposure is possible, please wear gloves.

ARENA ACCIDENTS:

If an accident/incident occurs in the arena during class, all leaders must halt their horses immediately and sidewalkers must remain in position until further instructed. The sidewalkers must remain calm and keep their rider from becoming anxious while awaiting directions from the instructor. Leaders remain responsible for keeping the horses quiet during an accident. If a horse becomes overly agitated or excited, both sidewalkers would immediately place an arm over the rider's thigh, holding the saddle in front of the rider's legs. If a horse's behavior puts the rider at risk of falling, the instructor may ask the sidewalker to perform an emergency dismount.

EMERGENCY DISMOUNTS: If an emergency dismount is needed, the sidewalker to the inside of the arena notifies the rider that he/she is going to dismount. While the sidewalker wraps an arm around the rider's waist, the rider is asked to remove his/her stirrups (with sidewalker assistance, if needed). When his/her feet are clear, the rider is pulled off the horse and moved to a safe place. The instructor will review this procedure with you during the orientation session.

The leader and sidewalker paired with the horse and/or rider involved in the incident have the same responsibilities (leader is responsible for controlling the horse, sidewalkers are responsible for the safety of the rider). If necessary, the instructor will designate someone to call emergency medical services. The instructor will notify you if class can continue or if all riders must dismount and leave the arena.

***A complete emergency action plan is posted in the tack room.
Please review the posted action plans for more specific information on
emergency procedures.***

VOLUNTEER ROLES:

1 – THE SIDEWALKER:

The job of the sidewalker is to maintain the balance of the rider when he/she cannot maintain it themselves. Some students, especially in the beginning stages of riding have a definite balance problem, off the horse as well as on. Depending on difficulty, there will be either one or two sidewalkers assigned to the student. The instructors will inform you as to the requirements of a particular student. For example, some students will not have to be held all the time, but just have to have someone walk beside them for emergencies. Others will need to be held onto at all times. Sidewalkers are very important as they are constantly aware of the student and what he/she is doing.

Sidewalkers should be aware of the following:

- The safety of the students depends on the sidewalker and the sidewalker must always remain alert to the needs of the rider.
- In order to be in the best position to assist a rider in maintaining his/her balance, the sidewalker should walk next to the mounted rider, even with the center of the saddle.
- Do not just grab if a student starts to slip; do gently push him/her back into the right position.
- Do not walk behind the saddle next to the horse's hindquarters.
- Do not lean on the horse while you are sidewalking. It can make the horse tire more quickly and/or make the horse irritable.
- Riders often have various physical limitations. Therefore, the sidewalker should not handle the rider (as in attempting to change the position of his or her hand, arm, leg, etc.) unless specifically asked to do so by the instructor.
- Since the sidewalker is always close to the rider, you will find that the student will want to talk to you a great deal. Do not ignore direct questions, but do try and get your rider to pay attention to the instructor in the ring. If your student is not paying attention or does not hear the instructor, you can help by reinforcing the directions.
- One of the worst distractions in the ring is excessive talking. Please keep unrelated conversations for other times.
- If a problem arises, ask the leader to stop the horse and call the instructor.
- Never leave your rider's side unless you are specifically instructed to do so by the instructor.

At the mounting ramp:

The instructor may require a sidewalker on the ramp to assist her. If so, she will call for you. If not, wait at the bottom of the ramp to take your position next to the rider when asked to do so by the instructor.

Mounting at the block in the arena:

The instructor will call for the needed number of sidewalkers. One may be needed on the opposite side of the horse than the instructor. If a second sidewalker is needed, wait past the mounting ramp to take up your position as the horse moves forward. If the rider is lifted onto the horse, wait on the opposite side of the horse to help the rider be seated.

Mounting from the ground in the arena:

If you are assisting a rider who mounts from the ground, the instructor may ask you to counterweight the saddle on the off-side as the rider mounts in order to keep the saddle from slipping when the rider places his/her weight in the stirrup. It is the instructor's responsibility to assist the rider with mounting. Do not attempt to allow the rider to try to mount without the supervision of the instructor unless specifically directed to do so.

At the halt:

Remain in position next to the rider and listen for directions from the instructor. Be especially alert for balance changes as the horse stops and starts.

At the walk:

Remain in position next to the rider and listen for directions from the instructor. If the rider needs special attention (such as repositioning in the saddle or having his/her foot replaced in the stirrup), alert the instructor and the leader working with the horse. It is usually best to go to the center of the ring to make any necessary adjustments in order to avoid disrupting the rest of the class.

At the trot:

The rider should ask the horse to trot only when directed to do so by the instructor and only after he or she is fully prepared (holding the handhold, seat deep in the saddle, etc.). The instructor may take the sidewalker's place for a short time when asking the rider to trot in order to work with the student on a one-to-one basis to develop the skill. When assisting a rider at the trot, remember that the trot is a very bouncy gait and be especially alert for changes in a rider's balance.

During games:

Remain next to the rider and be ready to reinforce the instructor's directions as necessary. Enthusiasm is catchy, so encourage the rider to play well and allow him or her to participate as independently as is safely possible.

Dismounting:

The instructor is responsible for dismounting all riders. Remain next to the rider until the instructor is ready to help him or her dismount. Do not dismount the rider without the instructor.

Special Situations – Falls:

Occasionally, a rider will fall off of a horse or have a problem that requires special attention. If such an emergency occurs, sidewalkers should remain calm, alert the horse leader to the situation, and keep their riders from becoming overly excited while waiting for directions from the instructor. All other riders in the class will halt and sidewalkers will remain in position until the problem is solved and the lesson can continue.

Special Situations - Backriding:

Some riders may require a specially trained volunteer to ride behind them. These riders will always have a leader and two sidewalkers. The sidewalkers' job is to provide support for the mounted volunteer. The leader must be careful to make slow, careful turns and avoid sudden starts and stops.

2 – THE LEADER:

There are many students who need assistance in riding their horses. This is when the volunteer takes an active part in making the program work. Many students need volunteers and there may be as many as four with each student, especially in the beginning stages of riding. The leader is in charge of the horse.

A leader should be aware of the following:

- The leaders should be walking on the left side of the horse, alongside the horse's head, with his or her hand about eight inches away from the bit.
- The lead should be kept slack. Hold the extra lead line in your left hand, but never wrap it around your hand, just loop and hold tightly.
- Do not get in front or too far behind while leading. Being too far ahead can cause the horse to merely follow you and not react to the commands given by the rider. Being too far behind gives you less control and can trip the sidewalker behind you.
- The lead, whether attached to the bit or nose band should never be used to pull the horse forward. A steady pull will not accomplish anything and in many cases, may even excite a horse. If for any reason, the horse needs something stronger, a quick, hard pull of the lead, like you would do to discipline a dog wearing a choke collar, should do the trick.
- Care must be taken to insure the horse's head is not pushed up in the air, since that may throw the rider off balance. Also, do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground as that may pull the rider forward.
- Keep your hands away from the horse's mouth.
- Just as the size of the horse varies, so do his steps. With some horses, you will be able to walk faster than with others. Adjust your step to that of the horse so you are not pulling him forward or holding him back.
- The purpose of therapeutic riding is not to merely give pony rides. Our students are learning how to ride horses independently and should be encouraged to do as much as possible alone. No matter how lazy the horse you are leading may seem, the leader should not try to take the place of the rider by turning, stopping or pulling the horse in the correct direction. The instructor will point out to you when the rider does need assistance with these tasks. In some cases, the instructor may want you to serve only as an "emergency brake" and allow the rider to make a few wrong turns in order to encourage the rider to be more assertive with their commands.
- In order for the rider to have complete freedom to use the reins correctly, care should be given to insure that the lead does not run over the reins. This tends to put pressure on that rein and can cause the horse to lean in that direction. The lead must be hanging between the reins, not over them.

Mounting in the ring:

If the student you are leading is mounting in the ring, the instructor will give you instructions. The student may lead his/her own horse to the ring with your assistance, or you may be asked to lead the horse to the center of the ring and the student will come to you. Please do not attempt to mount the students on your own. The instructor will do all of the mounting unless the student is instructed to go ahead without assistance. During this type of mounting, once again, position yourself in front of the horse's head. If the

student is standing with you waiting to mount their horse, please be careful that the student does not go behind the horse, but stands quietly beside you.

At the mounting ramp:

If you are going to lead a student that has to be mounted from the ramp, pay close attention to the instructor because she will tell you where to position your horse at the mounting ramp. You will want to place the horse as close as possible to the side of the ramp on which the student will be mounting. Your responsibility while the student is mounting is to keep the horse as quiet as possible. Stand directly in front of the horse with your hands on the reins and your thumbs through the bit rings. Do not hold the bit too tightly as it will cause the horse to throw its head. Do not place your foot on the side of the mounting ramp, but keep both feet on the ground. After the student has mounted the horse and before the stirrups are adjusted, you will be asked to move the horse forward just a few steps. Do not turn around and walk, but walk backwards a short distance and stop when directed by the instructor. After the feet are adjusted in the stirrups, the instructor will then ask you to lead the student into the ring. At this time, take your position by the horse's head, turn to the direction you will be walking and walk to where the instructor has directed you. After this, wait for further instructions.

Leader in the ring:

Once your rider has mounted the horse, the instructor will tell you where she wants you to position your horse. Be sure you are a safe distance from the horse in front of you at all times. As the class beings, all instructions will be given to the student by name, so be sure you know the name of your rider. Try to discourage casual conversation that impairs your ability to hear directions from the instructor. Try to direct the attention of your rider to the instructor.

At the walk:

Many leaders forget that they have sidewalkers, possibly on both sides, and often get too close to the sidewalls of the arena. Though none of our horses are known kickers, all horses will kick if pressured by another horse being too close to their hind legs. Allow plenty of room between your horse and the horse in front of you. If your rider cannot maintain the safe distance, then you may always help to do so. Remember, many of our students have no space orientation, so consequently do not realize when they are too close to the horse in front of them. If this is the case with the student you are leading, then be careful to watch for them. If asked to turn for your rider, you will know that the rider needs assistance in making turns. Do not assist unless asked by the instructor to do so. Use common sense if you see your rider is getting into trouble and is not able to follow directions given by the instructor; you are certainly able to help him/her.

At the Halt:

One of the most important tasks the leader must do, particularly with disabled riders is to step in front and face your horse to keep them from moving at the halt. This is especially true while riders are doing their exercises. This is however, used as a breather for the horses and you should not hold their heads unduly tight at the halt. Allow them the freedom to move around. If they get too restless, a good way to calm them down is to rub their necks or use a soft, reassuring voice. Do not touch or rub their heads or nose. While in the arena, the horses are working and should not be patted excessively.

At the Trot:

Often during a lesson, students will be asked to trot. Trotting is faster than a walk so the leader has to be more alert. The instructor will come over if necessary to give instructions to the student and to you. Make sure the student is positioned securely in the saddle and that the sidewalkers have made sure the student is holding his/her handhold. Do not start the trot before the instructor gives the command. Tell the horse to "trot" and cluck or kiss to it. Start your gait a little faster and say "trot" again. When the horse starts trotting, try to keep your pace at an even speed and always trot in a straight line so as not to unseat the rider. If the horse does not begin trotting immediately when you request it, do not pull on the lead. This will only make the horse mad and he will fight it. Most of the horses are very good at responding to voice commands, though you can always run into a horse that is acting lazy on a particular day and does not want to do more than just walk. This type of horse may need some extra prodding. A quick forward push on the lead line and a more stern tone of voice usually helps.

During Games:

Games are an important part of every lesson. The games may be simple such as "Simon Says" or "Red Light, Green Light" or more complex, such as "Musical Stalls." The leader plays an important role in every game. The instructor will give the rules for the game to be played. Watch your student to see if he/she understands the directions. Then, if you are alone with no sidewalkers, talk to the student, pep him/her up and get him/her ready to play the game. It helps if the leader is excited about the game, but not so excited that the leader plays the game for the student. Allow the rider to do as much as possible on his/her own and give him/her credit for performing well.

Dismounting:

Unless otherwise specified, the instructor will dismount the students. You will receive specific instructions as to whether to bring your student near the ramp or to remain in the ring. Once again, keep your horse quiet by standing in front while dismounting is taking place.

Special Situations - Falls:

Falls are very rare, but they do happen. If your rider falls, your only concern is in the horse you are leading. The instructor (and sidewalkers, if necessary) will take care of the student. If another rider falls and the horse gets loose in the arena, then stop immediately and stand in front of your horse. NEVER let go of your horse. A loose horse in the arena can cause untold troubles. Do not panic if there is a fall. You have to remember that these children fall frequently in all types of situations – on sidewalks, off swings, etc. The fall off of the horse is really not any worse than any they could get at home. Be calm! The instructor is trained to handle any situation – that is her job! – so please just keep your horse under control and allow the instructor to do her job.

Special Situations - Backriding:

Some riders may require a specially trained volunteer to ride behind them. These riders will always have a leader and two sidewalkers. The sidewalkers' job is to provide support for the mounted volunteer. The leader must be careful to make slow, careful turns and avoid sudden starts and stops.

3 – GROOMING HORSES:

Horses should be well groomed at all times. Grooming, currying, brushing and cleaning feet will usually be done before the day's classes begin. Grooming removes dirt and loose hair and is important because it makes the horse more comfortable during classes. If you notice that a horse needs grooming, please feel free to grab a grooming box and groom your horse.

4 – TACKING HORSES:

Check the tack list to see which horses are being used for the class and what type of equipment is to be used on each. Often there will be an experienced volunteer to prepare tack for new volunteers to put on horses.

Tack typically consists of the following items:

- A saddle with a handhold and appropriate stirrups
- A saddle pad and sometimes a lift pad
- A girth (or cinch) to hold the saddle on the horse
- A bridle
- Reins (usually rainbow colored)
- A noseband or bit lead

5 – PREPARING STUDENTS TO RIDE:

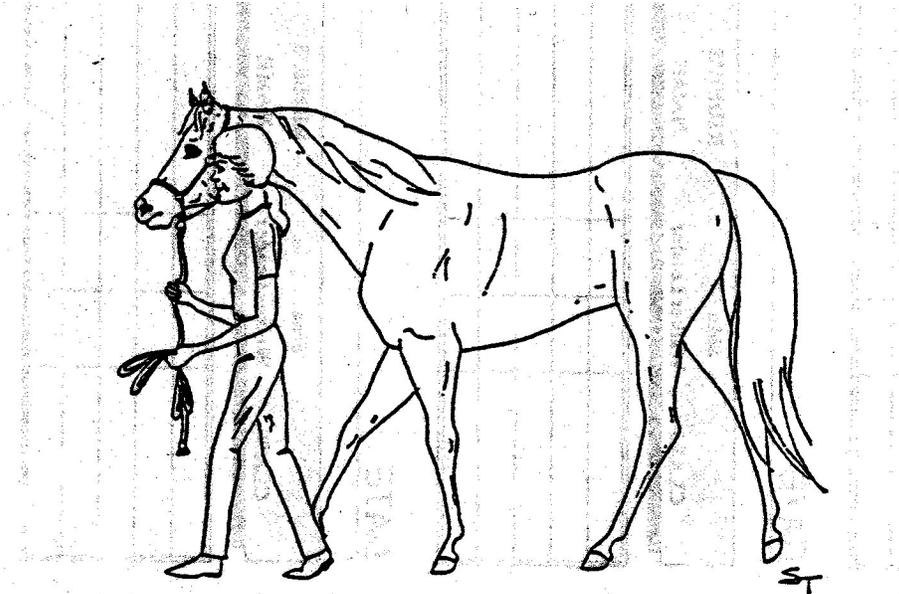
Each student is required to wear a helmet. If you see a rider without a helmet, encourage them to return to the tackroom to put one on. Make sure the helmet is snapped closed and is a good fit. Remember, have the student do as much as he/she can for himself/herself.

6 – ORGANIZING TACK AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

After each day's lessons, tack and supplies should be returned neatly to the tack room. Bit and noseband leads are removed from bridles. Pads, girths, stirrups and stirrup leathers are removed from saddles. Handholds always remain on saddles.

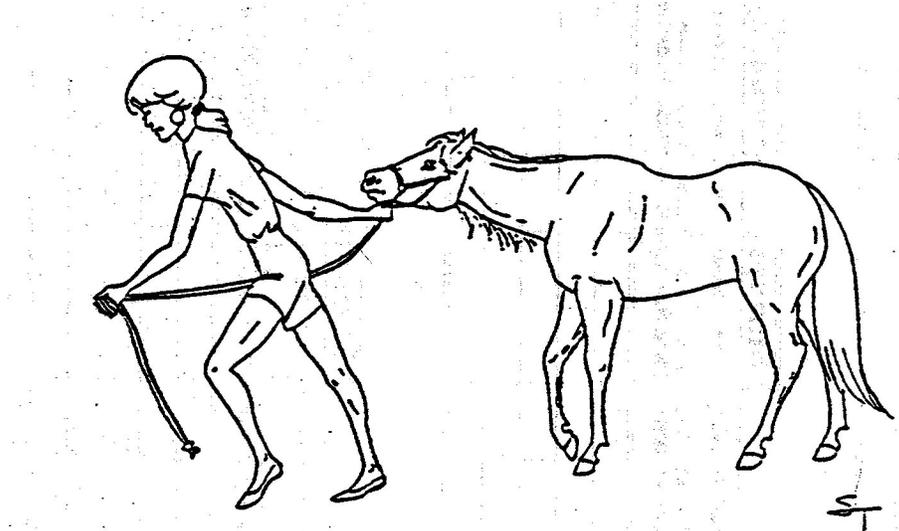
LEADER POSITIONS (Illustration):

Correct Leader Position:



- Walking next to the horse
- Holding lead 6 - 8" from the horse
- Folding excess lead into left hand

Incorrect Leader Position:



- Do Not walk ahead of the horse
- Do Not try to force the horse
- Do Not hold lead too close to horse's head
- Do Not wrap excess lead around left hand or let it drag on the ground

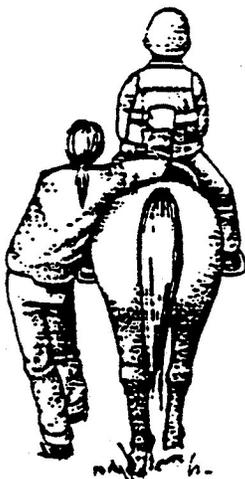
SIDEWALKER POSITIONS (Illustrated):

Correct Sidewalker Position:



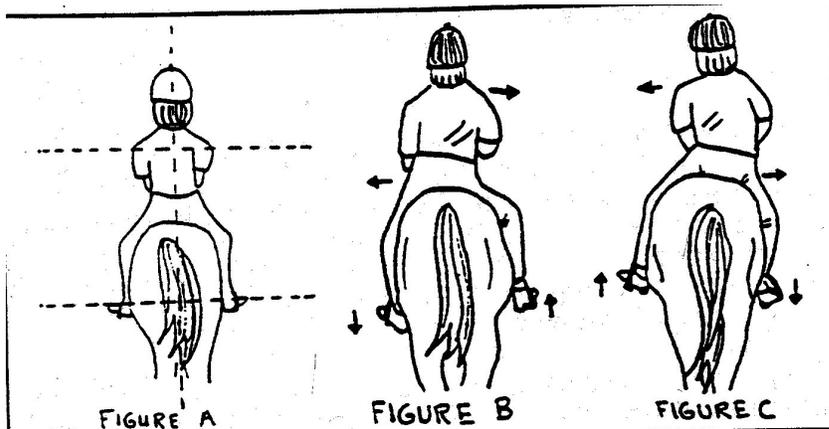
- Positioned even with the center of the saddle
- Arm is gently resting over the rider's thigh
- Hand grips the front of the saddle (notice hand is not buried under the saddle!)
- Paying attention to the rider

Incorrect Sidewalker Position:

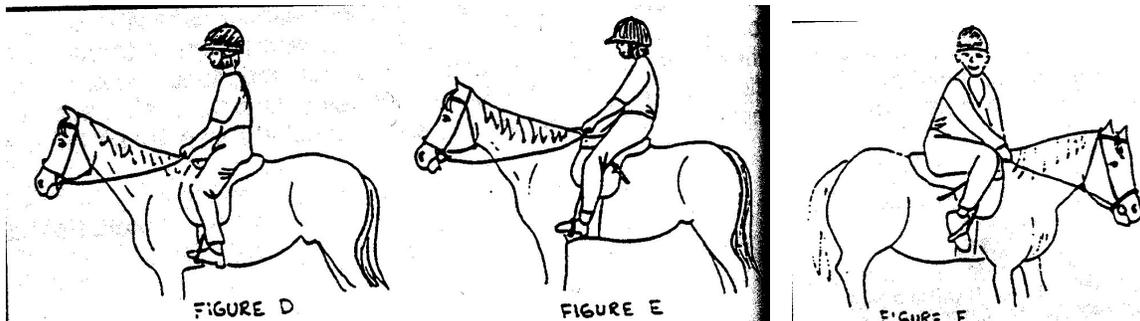


- Do Not walk behind the saddle next to the horse's hind quarters
- Do Not lean on the horse!

RIDER POSITIONS (Illustrated):



When viewed from behind, the rider should sit as straight as possible (Figure A). Many riders will sit to one side and then have to make corrections in the rest of the body to maintain balance. When this happens, one foot appears 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. This position does not help the rider strengthen muscles evenly. Correcting this position usually requires aligning the rider's base (getting the rider's butt square in the saddle).



When viewed from the side, the rider should sit as straight as possible (Figure D). Many riders often sit in a "sofa seat" or "C-Curve" fashion (Figure E). Often riders will sit up if asked. Sometimes the position reflects the rider's normal posture off the horse. Encouraging elongation of the leg or sitting with legs underneath and not in front of the rider usually improves the posture. Figure F shows a rider with a toe down and the leg pinched up. This could indicate a rider with tight leg muscles, an extreme forward-seat saddle or stirrups that are too short. The rider should be encouraged to lengthen his leg.

Keep in mind that all riders may not be able to achieve the "ideal" riding position. The rider's position has little to do with looking good and everything to do with being in balance and moving in harmony with the horse. The better the body position, the greater the therapeutic benefits. Always alert the instructor if you feel your rider needs to be re-positioned. Do not attempt to reposition a rider on your own.

(Excerpts from the article "Position of the Rider" by Lorrie Renker and Martha Biery. Published in NARHA's *Accent on Accreditation* publication)

SAFETY GUIDELINES:

- 1) Always speak to a horse when approaching it and before touching it.
- 2) Never approach a horse from directly behind it.
- 3) Never be loud or rowdy around the horses. They are likely to become frightened by loud noises or unexpected movements.
- 4) Do not feed the horses treats or any food from your hand. Horse treats can be fed using pie pans or treats should go into their feed buckets.
- 5) Never lose your temper with a horse or mistreat it. You will always get the best results with kindness.
- 6) While in the barn and around horses, always walk – don't run!
- 7) Do not enter a horse stall or paddock without permission.
- 8) When riding or leading, always maintain at least a horse length between you and the horse in front of you.
- 9) Never wrap the lead rope around your hand.
- 10) Always hold the lead rope with two hands.
- 11) Use only the program's equipment and return it to its proper place when you are finished.
- 12) Do not bring pets to the stables.
- 13) Do not feed or pet horses not used in the program.
- 14) Stay in designated areas. Do not play on or around any farm equipment. Do not go out behind the barn unless specifically told to do so for the program (fences are electric). Do not feed or pet the exotic animals.
- 15) Do not play on or around mounting ramps.
- 16) Never leave a horse in a stall with its reins, bridle or lead rope still attached.
- 17) If you have any questions about ANYTHING, please ask. There is no such thing as a stupid question.
- 18) No matter what you are doing, safety is the main priority – the safety of the rider and the safety of the horse.

INTRODUCTION TO RIDER DISABILITIES:

Stepping Stones provides services to riders with a wide variety of disabilities. In an attempt to familiarize you with some of these conditions and how they might affect a rider, we have included the following descriptions. Please understand that the confidentiality of each rider's condition is an important issue. You may only be told information pertinent to your participation in the program and that information is not to be discussed outside the riding environment.

A rider may have more than one of these conditions, such as mental retardation and a seizure disorder, but it is not the condition that is important – it is the rider! You will be given the necessary information to enable the person to have a safe, enjoyable ride. Remember, it is *ability*, not *disability* that counts!!

Autism: A neurological disorder that produces characteristics such as self-preoccupation, an inability to relate to and interact with others, and resistance to change. A rider with this condition may seem to be unaware of his or her surroundings, but usually becomes accustomed to the routine of a lesson. Changes in routine (such as mounting in a different order, riding a different horse and/or having different sidewalkers) can produce an emotional outburst. Repetition and consistency are important in helping the autistic rider.

Cerebral Palsy (CP): A motor disorder caused by an injury to the brain before or shortly after birth. Due to the brain's inability to control muscles, movement and coordination are affected. The muscles may be very tight, very loose, may move uncontrollably, or may be affected in a combination of these ways. CP may also involve difficulties in speech, hearing, vision, or learning. It may affect one side of the body or only involve only certain parts of the body. The amount of assistance required by a rider with this disability will vary depending on the type and severity of their condition.

Developmental Delay: A term used to include most or all functional disabilities seen in infants and children. The rider may have physical, mental and/or social disorders. The rider may or may not be retarded in his or her ability to learn, and the amount of needed assistance will vary with the individual.

Emotional/Behavioral Disorder: These problems may have a neurological basis and peculiarities may not be under the rider's control. The rider may be fearful or hostile and may act out verbally or physically. Try to direct the rider's attention to the task. The instructor will inform you of acceptable behavioral limits. We will do everything possible to prevent horse or volunteer abuse!

Hearing Impairment: Hearing loss can vary in degree from partial to complete. It may have an accidental or organic cause. A person with a hearing impairment may communicate by speaking, using sign language, or have an electronic communication device. To assist a rider with a hearing loss, simple gestures are often all that is needed to relay the Instructor's directions (such as moving your own hands back to demonstrate "whoa"). If a rider has partial hearing, unnecessary talking may be distracting, as could a lot of arm or hand movement (the rider may be attuned to visual cues). Be sure to have the rider's attention before attempting to communicate. There is sign language specifically for horseback riding and the Instructor will show you necessary gestures.

Learning Disabilities: A dysfunction of the brain that can affect perception, language, coordination, or attention. Riders may have difficulty processing information and may need to have directions repeated, reworded or demonstrated. The rider may need extra time to respond to instructions or may confuse concepts such as “right” and “left.”

Mental Retardation: A disorder due to brain damage, under-development of the brain, or genetic disorders. Difficulties that result can be seen in mobility, vision, hearing, speech, understanding, judgment and behavior. The amount of assistance required by the rider will be determined by the severity of his or her disorder and by the rate at which they are able to learn.

Neuromuscular Disorders (such as Muscular Dystrophy or Multiple Sclerosis): Conditions, often degenerative, affecting nerves and/or muscles that can cause pain and weakness. Which parts of the body are affected and the degree of involvement will depend on which disorder the rider has and its rate of progression. These riders often tire easily and their condition may cause them to have “good” days or “bad” days. Some days a rider may need more help or more time to follow through on directions.

Seizure Disorder: Seizures are caused by abnormal electrical discharges in the brain. They can range from a small episode of staring to sudden stiffness and jerking of limbs. They are usually controlled by medication, but may occur during the program. *There is nothing you can do to stop a seizure!* Do not try to force anything down the rider’s mouth. Support the rider, stop the horse, and inform the instructor. The instructor may decide to remove the rider from the horse and may require assistance. The rider may be fatigued and may not finish the lesson.

Spinal Disorders (Spina Bifida, Spinal Cord Injuries): The degree of dysfunction depends on the level of damage to the spinal cord. The rider may need physical support due to balance problems. These conditions cause structural damage to the body, not to the mind.

Visual Impairment: Occurs in varying degrees and has a variety of causes. A rider with this disability may need help to achieve proper body alignment and to develop an awareness of the correct body position for riding. Speak to the rider in a normal tone of voice before touching them – even a gentle touch can be startling if the rider does not know you are there. The rider may need help to determine when to turn or stop the horse, as they may not be able to see the corners or if another horse has stopped in front of them.

WHEN YOU MEET A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY:

- 1) First of all, remember that the person with a disability is a person. She/he is like everyone else.
- 2) Be yourself when you meet him/her.
- 3) Talk about the same things you would with anyone else.
- 4) Help only when it's needed. Use your own judgment and don't allow yourself to constantly assist students who need to develop more independence.
- 5) Be patient as it is often harder to wait for an inexperienced person to do something than it is to do it yourself. As you know, when you do things yourself, you learn faster.
- 6) Don't be overprotective or overly solicitous. Don't shower the person with a disability with kindness or be overly sympathetic.
- 7) Don't offer pity or charity. The person with a disability should be treated as an equal in all things. Having a disability should not be looked on as a negative experience. A person with a disability is just another person like you.
- 8) Don't make up your mind about a person with a disability ahead of time. You may be surprised at his/her interests and abilities.
- 9) Enjoy your friendship with the person with a disability. His/her philosophy and good humor may provide you with inspiration.

I Saw a Child

I saw a child who couldn't walk,
sit on a horse, laugh and talk.
Then ride it through a field of daisies
and yet he could not walk unaided.

I saw a child, no legs below,
sit on a horse and make it go
through the woods of green
and places he had never been
to sit and stare
except from a chair.

I saw a child who could only crawl
mount a horse and sit up tall.
Put it through degrees of paces
and laugh at the wonder on our faces.

I saw a child born into strife,
Take up and hold the reins of life
and that same child, I heard him say,
Thank God for showing me the way...

-John Anthony Davies