



**Southern Delaware Therapeutic Riding, Inc.**

# **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

## **Welcome!**

Welcome to SDTR! We're very excited you have decided to be a part of our dedication to improve the lives of the individuals we serve. Volunteers are a very important part of the success of SDTR. Everyone's job is important, so take yours seriously while having a good time and helping the participants and riders have an enjoyable experience.

## **SDTR's Mission**

Our mission is to provide equine-assisted therapy promoting the physical, emotional and educational growth of children and adults with special needs in our community.

Approximately 20 riders come for lessons weekly. Some of the disabilities may include:

Cerebral Palsy	Speech/Language Delays
Attention Deficit Disorder	Sight/Hearing Impairments
Autism	Behavioral Disorders
Developmental Delay	Multiple Sclerosis
Learning Disabilities	Spina Bifida

## **Benefits of Therapeutic Riding**

The benefits of therapeutic riding are available to individuals with all forms of disabilities. Research shows that students who participate in therapeutic riding can experience physical, emotional and mental rewards. For individuals with impaired mobility, horseback riding gently and rhythmically moves their bodies in a manner similar to a human walking gait. These riders can experience increased balance, muscle control and strength. Individuals with learning or mental disabilities are motivated by riding to increase concentration, patience and discipline. If a psychological or emotional disability is present, the unique relationship formed with a horse can help improve interpersonal relationships. As is expected, all riders experience increased self-esteem, confidence and independence.

## From the Rider's/Participant's Perspective

1. Laughter and humor make the world a richer place to live---for ALL OF US!!
2. Patience is a virtue—with some, it is a necessity.
3. Charity begins at home---pity does not belong anywhere.
4. You cannot judge a book by its cover—so give us a closer look because there is more to us than meets the eye!
5. To have a friend, you have got to be a friend—some of us may have a hard time telling you how thankful we are for your friendship, but without you, we would not be able to ride—so THANK YOU!!
6. Faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love—we can learn a lot from each other about love!!!

### **BE SENSITIVE TO:**

1. Separating a rider from his wheel chair, crutches or braces unless asked.
2. Helping a rider only when he/she requests it. When a rider falls down or has difficulty outside of the class period, allow him/her time to solve the problem him/herself before asking if he/she needs help.
3. The commitment you have made to the program. Without you, we cannot ride. If you cancel at the last minute, we may have to cancel class.

## Volunteer Guidelines

### **A VOLUNTEER SHOULD:**

1. Direct rider's attention to instructor's directions throughout lesson.
2. Reinforce instructions with riders who have hearing problems.
3. Lead horse at arm's length away from your shoulder.
4. Stay even with your horse's head when leading.
5. Do not do anything with rider without instructor's permission.
6. Be patient with the rider.
7. Notify instructor of any discomfort if the rider complains of any discomfort.
8. Become familiar with the riding equipment and its use.
9. Know where to stand while leading during exercises, mounting and dismounting.
10. Know how to assist as a Sidewalker.
11. Know how to assist when rider is mounting from the ramp, block or ground.
12. Be Dependable.
13. Dress Appropriately

### **A VOLUNTEER SHOULD NOT:**

1. Leave rider for any reason.
2. Switch sides unless asked to do so by instructor or before you tell the instructor.
3. Allow riders to mount or dismount without instructor.

4. Have conversations with other volunteers during class instructions.
5. Visit with rider during class instruction.
6. Pull on horse's head while doing exercises, mounting and dismounting.
7. Reprimand horse while the rider is mounted.
8. Wear short-shorts, short tops for sandals.

### **Reliability**

Regular attendance is important because the riders and instructors rely on the volunteers. Volunteers help the program run smoothly. PLEASE call the instructor directly if you are going to be late or if you are unable to attend. Please contact Kelly at 302-381-0009 if you discover, at the last minute, you will be unable to attend as scheduled.

### **Punctuality**

Volunteers should arrive 30 minutes before the lesson to assist with tacking up the horse and greeting riders.

### **Physical Fitness**

Assisting with lessons shall include being able to walk with and/or support a rider for at least an hour, and in some cases may be asked to run slowly as the horse trots for a few minutes at a time. If you have physical limitations that prevent you from meeting these requirements, please notify your instructor to assign you to a different activity.

### **Clothing**

Clothes should be comfortable, durable and appropriate for the weather. Sneakers or boots provide protection from the deep footing in the indoor ring or the mud outdoors. Loafers, sandals or other loose fitting footwear should not be worn. Remember, you will be working around horses and your foot can be stepped on.

### **Willingness**

The riding instructors count on your calmness and willingness to help in a variety of situations. To aide a nervous rider the volunteer must remain calm and reassure the rider. The volunteer leading the horse also needs to be calm and aware to keep the horses relaxed.

### **Alertness and Anticipation**

The volunteer must be alert to any unexpected situations when working with the horses and riders. They also must be aware of the rider's position on the horse, the rider's feelings and the horse's disposition including reactions to changes in the environment.

### **Patience**

Patience is required to adjust ot the often painfully slow movements of the handicapped person. The rider needs, firm, positive encouragement by avoiding false sympathy that implies pity.

# Major Areas of Responsibilities for a Volunteer

At times one person may be asked to do more than one job within a lesson. Responsibilities of volunteers working with therapeutic lessons fall into three general areas:

## The Stall

### Entering a Stall

- Always approach the horse from the front where they can see you. As you approach, speak to them in a quiet voice. Never surprise a horse by running or shouting loudly. If you have to approach a horse from behind, talk to the horse and pat the horse lightly so that he knows you are coming.

### Taking a Horse out of the Stall

- Always use a halter and a lead shank.
- Look both ways before exiting.
- Make sure the stall door is completely open before exiting.

### Putting a Horse in the Stall

- Always use a halter and lead shank.
- When entering the stall, make sure to walk ahead of the horse, turn the horse's head to the stall door and remove the halter before leaving the stall.
- Always lock the stall doors after exiting.

### Placing a Horse in Cross Ties

- Always make sure the snaps hook to the halter not the bridle
- When placing the bridle on the horse, slide the halter from the horse's head and place it on the horse's neck.
- Leave the cross ties attached to the halter during the transition...only remove the cross ties once the bridle is completely secured.

**Preparing the Horse and Putting the Horse Away** - safely prepare the horse for the lesson and untack and put back out after lesson.

- Find out what horses are needed.
- Groom the horse including picking feet.
- Tack the horse up with appropriate equipment.
- Untack the horse after lesson.
- Brush horse where saddle and bridle were.
- BRIDLING AND UNBRIDLING ARE TO BE DONE BY AUTHORIZED

PERSONNEL ONLY. This rule must be observed because bridling done by many different people can make the horse head shy.

## Grooming

Each horse is to be groomed before and after each lesson. Please remember to watch for cuts, scrapes, sores or swelling and tell the instructor.

- Each horse has their own identified brush bucket.
- Start at the poll and work your way to the rump, repeat on other side.
- First use a currycomb in a circular motion to loosen the excess dirt.
- Use a hard brush to clean and loosen dirt away by brushing in the direction of the hair.
- Use a dandy brush to give a shine to the coat after removing all the dirt.
- Use the mane and tail brush to groom the mane and tail. □ Use a hoof pick to clean the dirt out of the hooves.

## Tacking the Horse

Tack the Horse in the Following Manner:

- Saddle pads—place over the withers and slide back into place.
- Saddle—position over pads and adjust to fit properly.
- Girth for the English saddle—attach non-elastic end to the right side of saddle, then go around and tighten only to the point of keeping the saddle in place. Girths should be re-tightened just before class time. NOTE: To aid the instructor at mounting, please adjust the girth more on the right to allow for final adjustment on the left.

*Be mindful of safety at all times. **Never** leave a horse unattended while bridled.*

## Side Walking & Leading

### Side Walkers/Aides -

1. Assist the rider in maintaining balance.  
One or two sidewalkers may be assigned according to the rider's needs. Some riders do not require sidewalkers.
2. Reinforce instructor's directions. Some riders need a sidewalker to help them understand what to do.
3. Provide support while student is riding.
4. Keep the rider on the horse if something unexpected occurs.
5. Focus attention on rider-encourage them to follow instructor's direction.

### How to Sidewalk -

1. Different methods are used with individual riders, depending on their needs. For example:
  - a. Place your arm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edges of the saddle.

- b. Walk beside rider's leg to assist when needed. (i.e. at the trot or to reinforce directions.)
2. If a rider has a leader and one sidewalker, walk on the opposite side of the horse.
3. If a rider has a leader and two sidewalkers, designate only one sidewalker to verbally reinforce instructions. Too much input can confuse a rider.
4. Focus student's attention on the instructor.
5. Reinforce instructor's directions after giving rider time to process. For example, if the instructor says "turn right" and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say "right."
6. Use little strokes and tickles on shoulders/back to encourage good posture, if verbal cues are not working.
7. Do not rest your elbow on the horse's back. It hurts the horse.
8. If you tire, raise a hand, come to the center of the ring to prevent a traffic jam, stop and change sides one at a time.
9. The sidewalker who drops behind the rider's thigh on corners is in an unsafe position.

*Avoid aimless conversation with rider, other volunteers or instructor.*

#### **Horse Leader** -

1. Leads the horse during lessons.
2. Maintains control of the horse's pace to the rider's ability.
3. Takes charge of the horse.
4. Is responsible for the rider's safety.

#### **How to Lead** -

1. Lead with the horse standing on your right side and with your hand four to six inches away from the bridle.
2. Left hand holds the excess lead.
3. Stay even with the horse's head, not behind or in front.
4. Maintain at least one horse length between horses.
5. Wait until the rider initiates actions. DO NOT give student any more support than needed.
6. Make sure lead rope never touches the ground.
7. Never leave the horse unattended with lead rope attached.
8. Pay close attention to instructor to determine which direction the horse is to go.
9. Use caution when outside-horses respond more dramatically to events when outdoors.
10. Make turns wide. Allow room for side walkers when next to a fence or obstacle.
11. Make sure the horse steps forward unless directed otherwise.

**NEVER wrap the lead rope around your hand.**

## Mounting and Dismounting Procedures

**REMEMBER:** Horse Leaders remain in front of their horses during mounting, stirrup adjustments, or any time the horse stops for more than a minute. Stay alert during mounting. Listen to instructor talking to rider.

- The instructor shall assist the rider in finding a properly fitting helmet.
- The instructor will check all equipment for safety.
- If you do not feel comfortable as the leader in the ramp, tell the instructor.
- When you are holding the horse, it is your only job.
- A side aide shall be present on the mounting block to assist the instructor.
- Do not enter the ramp area until the rider is at the top of the ramp and the instructor confirms they are ready. Time in the ramp should be kept to an absolute minimum.
- Hold the horse with one hand on each rein. Do not hold the horse by the bit rings.
- The horse should stand quietly in the neutral place until it is time to go forward.
- If the horse really jumps backwards, let him go to the end of the lead shank. Do not yell "whoa" or pull hard on the lead rope. If possible, position the horse in the same spot.
- When the rider is mounted, the instructor will tell you when they are ready. Bring the horse straight forward and gradually turn towards the middle of the arena.
- Continue to the middle of the arena for adjustments.
- Riders are dismounted to the ground by or at the instruction of the instructor.
- The instructor shall offer specific directions to the leader and side aide.

## Description of Disabilities

The following is a brief, non-medical description of some of the disabilities and conditions of riders. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability but rather as general overview, along with an explanation of how therapeutic riding is a beneficial treatment aid.

CEREBRAL PALSY: "cp"—a non-progressive disorder thought to be due in part to loss of oxygen to the brain. Speech, hearing, vision, learning and/or memory deficits may be present; however, normal intelligence is generally not affected unless further brain damage has occurred. There are three main types of cerebral palsy:

1. SPASTIC: Occurs in approximately 70% of all cases. It may effect motor function in one or more of the limbs. The muscles stay flexed and tense and the facial muscle involvement may affect speech. Benefits: Riding may improve balance, posture, and the ability to relax. It also strengthens weakened muscles.
2. ATHETOID: Occurs in approximately 20% of all cases. It manifests itself in slow, jerky, involuntary movements of the arms and/or legs. It appears more obvious during period of emotional tension. Speech functions are usually involved. Benefits: Riding may improve balance, relaxation of muscles and posture.
3. ATAXIC: Occurs in approximately 10% of all cases. Weakness, poor coordination and difficulty with quick and fine motor movements result in loose, rag-doll appearance. Benefits: Riding may help strengthens and tighten loose muscles, while improving balance, posture and fine motor skills.

**DOWN'S SYNDROME:** Also called Trisomy 21, Trisomy G. It is one of the easily and widely identified hereditary disabilities. Down's Syndrome individuals have a mean IQ of about 50 and are physically, mentally and developmentally delayed. Benefits: Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance posture and coordination.

**EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES (ED):** A congenital and acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies. In general, emotionally disturbed individuals have trouble coping with every day life situations and interpersonal relationships. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia and schizophrenia may be exhibited. Benefits: Riding can provide structure to a disorganized thought pattern, increase feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness, and provide appropriate social therapy.

**HEARING IMPAIRMENT:** Hearing impairment may vary from mild to severe and may be congenital or acquired. True deafness is defined as hearing loss in both ears severe enough to prevent communication through the ear even with amplification. Communication with the deaf may involve lip reading, finger spelling (the manual alphabet), or sign language. Benefits: Riding helps increase self-confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

**LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD):** Learning disabled is a catch-all phrase for individuals who have problems processing, sequencing and problem solving but who appear to have otherwise normal intelligence skills. New learning generally takes time to be integrated and may need to be reviewed frequently to ensure retention. Benefits riding may increase attention span, group activity skills, cooperation, receptive and expressive language skills, posture and coordination.

**MENTAL RETARDATION (MR):** A genetic defect where the individual develops at a below normal rate in terms of intelligence. It may also involve physical and emotional development. Benefits: riding helps increase group activity skills, coordination, balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, and eye-hand coordination.

**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS (MS):** A slowly progressive central nervous system disease usually occurring in adults between 20-40 years of age more frequently in women than men. Symptoms and manifestations include weakness in one or more limbs, visual impairment, minor gait disturbance, course of progression with periods of remission. There is no known cure for MS. Benefits: Riding maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides highly recommend opportunities for emotional therapy.

**MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY (MD):** A hereditary disorder usually appearing in infancy or early childhood. It is characterized by progressive skeletal and muscle deterioration. There is no know cure for the disease which often shortens life. Benefits: Riding may slow muscle tone degeneration and maintain muscle function. Riding provides appropriate opportunities for social interaction and alleviating emotional depressions.

**SPINA BIFIDA:** A congenital defect where there is incomplete closure of the spinal column at birth. There are usually varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs; however, life expectancies are not necessarily shortened. Benefits: Riding improves coordination and muscle strength in the affected limbs.



TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI): Head injuries cause more disabilities in people under the age of 50 than any other neurological cause. Injuries may be closed head (CHI) where intracranial bleeding causes pressure or open penetration where profuse bleeding and open wounds cause permanent damage. Deficits may include gross and fine motor skills, cognitive disabilities, speech, balance, and psychological alterations. Benefits: Riding improves balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and cognitive deficits such as sequencing and processing.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: Visual deficits may range from severely limited to total and may be caused by congenital defect, traumatic illness or injury. If the onset of impairment is from birth to five years, the person affected has no visual memory. Impairments occurring after five years are accompanied by memories of people, places and things. Benefits: riding helps orient the body in space and improves balance, posture, coordination and self-awareness.