

# SPIRIT OPEN EQUESTRIAN PROGRAM, INC.



## VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



HOW TO KEEP IT SAFE AND FUN, TOO 😊

## **Welcome to SPIRIT Open Equestrian Program, Inc.!**

Thank you for interest in becoming a volunteer at SPIRIT. This manual will start you on the right path with the information and tools you will need to be an effective and productive volunteer. Our hope is that reading the manual and attending the orientation and training will provide you with a solid foundation that will enable you to become an important part of SPIRIT and that your time spent with us will be safe, fun, and rewarding. SPIRIT riders appreciate all of our volunteers. Without you and the gift of your time, energy, and skills, we would not be able to offer valuable services to our community.

### **SPIRIT Open Equestrian Program, Inc.**

SPIRIT serves approximately 50 participants each week. The disabilities you may encounter include developmental delays, ADHD, traumatic brain injury, learning disabilities, Autism/PDD, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, sight or hearing impairment, spinal cord injury, stroke/CVA, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, arthrogyrosis, Angelman syndrome, epilepsy, charge syndrome, speech and language delays, Prader-Willi paraplegia, Russell-Silver syndrome, Noonans syndrome, Fragile X sensory integration dysfunction, Rett syndrome, and Klippel-Feil static encephalopathy.

SPIRIT is proud to be a member of PATH, INTL. Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, PATH, INTL's mission is to "change and enrich lives by promoting excellence in equine assisted activities." The association ensures its standards are met through an accreditation process for centers and a certification process for instructors. PATH, INTL was founded in 1969 and has nearly 800 member centers. More than 38,000 individuals with disabilities benefit from activities, which include therapeutic riding, hippo therapy, equine assisted psychotherapy, driving, interactive vaulting, and competition. For more information visit go to <http://www.PATH, INTL.org>.

## **Programs at SPIRIT**

***Therapeutic riding*** is a recreational program designed to provide beneficial physical activity and emotional benefit through learning and applying horsemanship skills. Although learning riding skills is the goal, riders may develop improved balance, stamina, and coordination. The emotional or psychological benefits are many as the riders strive to meet the challenges of riding their horse.

***Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)*** incorporates horses experientially for emotional growth and learning. The participants learn about themselves and others by participating in challenging ground activities with the horses and then process or discuss the feelings, behaviors, and patterns they observed.

***Para equestrian sport discipline*** includes all equestrian disciplines practiced by people with physical disabilities. "Para" means "parallel to" able-bodied equestrian sports. This discipline opens the world of competition to riders and drivers with severe disabilities as well, allowing them to compete in a serious, focused environment.

***Equine Assisted Learning Activities*** are natural horsemanship based activities, which improves quality of life and develops basic life skills, communication, and social skills, as well as leadership, team work, and management skills.

## **SPIRIT Instructors**

SPIRIT instructors are in charge of all lessons. All directions come from the instructor, including the assignment of rider to horse, volunteers to rider, method of mounting, and the structure of the lesson. Unless notified otherwise, all volunteers must defer to the instructor's decisions. This is extremely important to ensure everyone's safety. During therapy sessions the instructor is there to ensure the safety of everyone involved, including the client, volunteers, therapist, and horse. The therapist directs the session. At various times there may be a student instructor teaching the class, but always under the direct supervision of a SPIRIT instructor. All SPIRIT instructors are PATH, INTL certified.

## **SPIRIT Volunteers**

**Commitment:** Regardless of the service you perform, it is your commitment that needs to be stressed. A program without strong commitment from its volunteers will not survive. If you have made a commitment to assist during lessons, our riders and instructors rely on you to follow through. No one is more disappointed than a rider who comes for a lesson, only to find that he/she can't ride because of a lack of volunteers.

**Please keep in mind:** Come each week on your assigned day. Plan to arrive at least 30 minutes before the lessons begin, which allows time for grooming and tacking the horses. PLEASE mark the attendance sheets in tack room with a letter A (for absent) if you know you are going to be absent in advance. Please give as much notice as possible when you know you are going to be absent to allow the volunteer coordinator time to find a substitute. Remember that riders can be very disappointed when they are unable to ride due to a lack of volunteers. Lessons are held rain or shine, except under high-risk conditions, which will be announced online (see the blog or Facebook).

**Confidentiality:** SPIRIT maintains a strict policy of confidentiality. All volunteers are asked to respect our clients' privacy in any setting away from lessons. This includes avoiding discussion of riders by name or in any way that might disclose their identity or their disability. SPIRIT preserves the right of confidentiality for all individuals in its program.

**Physical Fitness:** Volunteers assisting in our therapeutic riding lessons or hippo therapy sessions need to be able to walk with and/or help support a rider for up to 45 minutes, and in many cases will be asked to run along slowly as the horse trots for a few minutes at a time. If you have physical limitations that prevent you from meeting

these requirements, you should ask your instructor to find you a less strenuous job, such as mucking, grooming, and tacking up horses for the next lesson, or ask to rotate with another volunteer.

**Attire:** Wear outdoor clothes suitable to the season, including comfortable waterproof footwear. Open toed shoes are prohibited. Because of temperature variations, layering of clothing is a reasonably sure way of being comfortable. High socks can offer some protection against ticks and overgrowth on the trails. Avoid wearing loose, baggy clothes and jewelry, which could get caught in the tack. Long hair should be pulled back. Avoid wearing any perfumes--this may irritate the horses and riders or attract insects.

**Experience:** Volunteers at SPIRIT come in all ages, 14 years and older, and a variety of experience levels. Sometime, even younger kids are included in some activities under mentor supervision. Many volunteers have no horse experience, while others may have years of experience. We strive for a TEAM approach to volunteering.

Everyone's here to learn and to share his or her knowledge in order to make it a great experience for every volunteer and rider involved. We urge you to speak up if you are uncomfortable with a certain situation or rider. This is a "learning by doing" position. Do not feel intimidated if you don't know something--just ask--we love questions! We ask all volunteers, even those with horse experience, to do things the "SPIRIT way" to allow for consistency with our horses.

**Volunteer Input:** Your comments about riders, instructors, and horses are very valuable to us. If you have any concerns, suggestions, or comments, please feel free to contact your instructor or the Volunteer Coordinator. All conversations will be held in confidence. We are grateful for your willingness to share insights and information regarding our programs.

# A Day in the Life of a Volunteer

## Arriving at the Barn

- Check off your name on the attendance sheet in the Tack Room. SPIRIT needs to be able to report how many volunteer hours we have for the year.
- Put on a nametag--It helps the instructor, other volunteers and the riders learn your name.
- If you are not assigned to groom, please help with mucking the field and stalls.
- Check the saddling list for horses to be prepared for lesson.

## Community Service Hours

If you would like to receive credit for community service hours, it is **YOUR** responsibility to fill out the appropriate form and have it signed by a SPIRIT staff member each time you volunteer.

## The Tack Room

The tack room is the space where we store saddles, bridles, reins, and other horse-related equipment, collectively known as “tack.” A well-organized tack room makes the job of the volunteers easier. Knowing your way around the tack room and keeping things in order is vital to the smooth running of the program.

### *Rules for the Tack Room*

1. Each horse has her/his own saddle, bridle combination, and bit. They are stored on racks on the wall. Each rack has a horse’s name above it. Please be careful to put the tack away under the correct name. Return all tack to its proper place.
2. Grooming tools are kept in grooming boxes. After you use a tool, please put it back in the correct grooming box/bucket.
3. Always leave tack/barn area clean after lessons. Thank you!

## After Lessons

- During hot weather, horses may need to be walked until they are cool or bathed.
- Brush or wash the saddle area if needed.
- Return all tack to its proper place.
- Assist the instructor in turning out the horses.

## **Safe Tacking and Untacking**

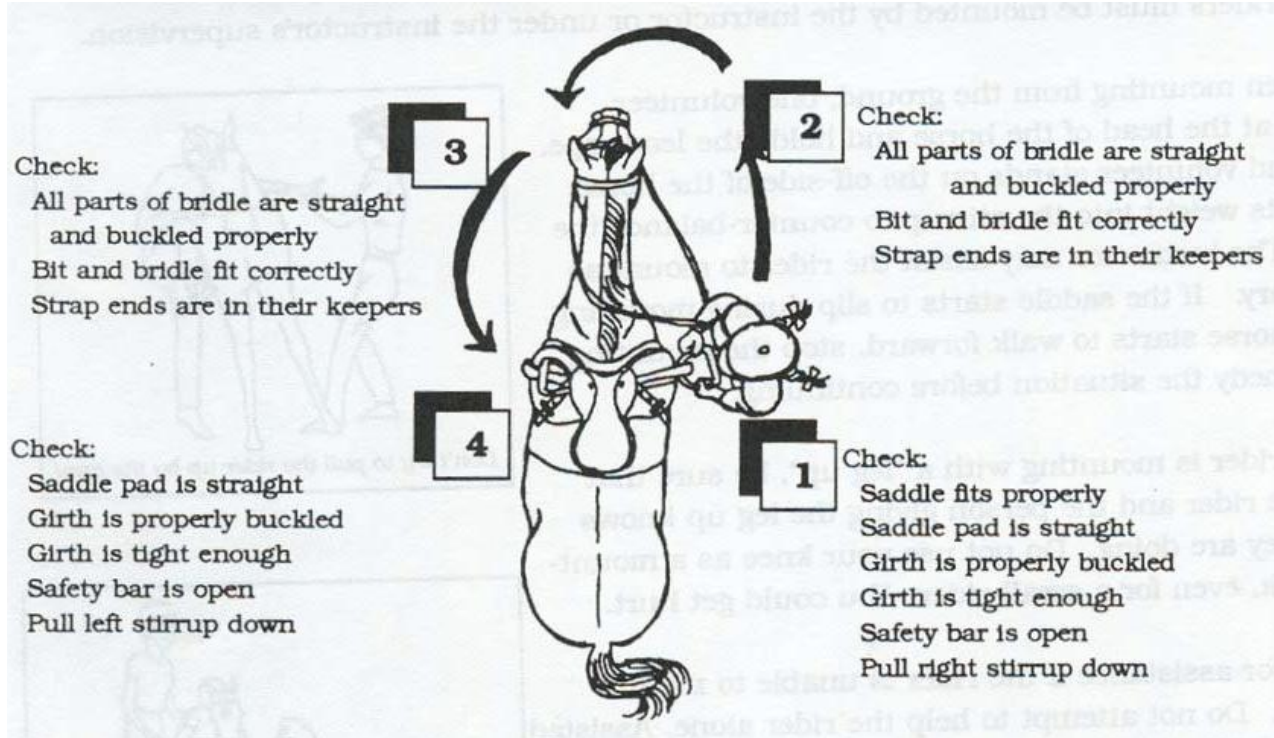
1. Think of a horse as having a 6-foot “danger zone” surrounding it. Within 6 feet, the horse can kick, buck, cow kick (kick to the side), bite, or rear – and you or a student can be seriously injured. Approach the “danger zone” with caution.
  - If you must walk behind a horse, approach from the side, touch the horse and speak to it. Keep touching it as you walk very closely around the horse.
  - Warn a horse that you are approaching. Use your voice and a gentle touch. Approach from the side, NEVER from the rear.
  - When standing next to a horse, stand VERY close. If the horse kicks, she can't kick very hard if you are close.
  - Keep your feet away from the horse's hooves and from beneath the horse. You might get stepped on.
  - Never walk under a horse's neck (it might rear from fright). Never walk under a horse. You might not be that short, but some children are.
  - Never stand directly in front of a horse except to hold the horse for a rider. Never stand behind a horse for any reason.
  - Hand feeding is an invitation to have your fingers bitten. After the food is gone, your fingers still carry the smell. A horse can't tell the difference between a carrot and a finger that smells like a carrot. Keep your hands away from the horse's mouth. ALL horses bite!
  - Don't yell, run, or make sudden movements near a horse. Be slow and gentle.
2. Keep horses well away from each other at all times. Fighting horses are a danger to everyone nearby. Keep an eye on their heads and rear ends. If the ears are flattened, the horse is about to fight. If he lifts his leg, he is getting ready to kick. **DO NOT ALLOW HORSES TO SNIFF EACH OTHER.**
3. Always use a halter to tie a horse in the crossties. NEVER tie a horse by his bit. NEVER tie a horse by his reins.
4. Always lead a horse by his lead rope and halter, not by the reins.
5. If a tied horse rears or pulls back, or otherwise acts upset, **STAY AWAY**. Let the instructor handle the problem. A panicked horse is very dangerous.

### **Advice if you are assigned to prepare horse for lesson or during a lesson time:**

When girthing a horse, the girth should be done loosely at first, then tightened in stages; never pulled tight all at once. It will be tightened a final time by the instructor just before entering the mounting ramp area. Also be aware of a horse's long winter hair and try not to get it caught in the buckle!



## How to do a Safety Check



### ***Why Do We Do a Safety Check Before We Mount?***

No matter how carefully we check when we saddle the horse, or how many times we have done it before, there is always the possibility that we overlooked something. An incorrectly fitted saddle or saddle pad can irritate or hurt the horse, and an unhappy horse may hurt the rider. A loose girth will cause the saddle to slip when mounting or riding.

If the bridle is not properly fitted and buckled, it may come off while riding. An extra minute is all it takes to do a safety check by walking around the horse before mounting and following the steps shown above

### **Mounting**

- Never mount a horse while the horse is tied. If the horse pulls back, the rider and the horse could be injured. Never mount next to a fence, car, another horse, or any solid object that the rider could be thrown into. Never mount on pavement.
- Lead or hold an unmounted horse on your right. Use two hands – the right hand should be about 6 inches below the snap, and the left hand holds the FOLDED (not coiled) end of the lead rope. Don't let the lead rope drag on the ground. It could trip you or your horse could step on it. Don't throw it over your shoulder. It could get tangled and choke you.

- Always check the girth for tightness before mounting or helping a student to mount. Check that the saddle and bridle are placed properly on the horse, the stirrups are the correct length and are down, and that nothing is broken or worn. **MAKE SURE THE RIDER HAS THEIR HELMET ON SECURELY.** Don't assume that someone else will do this. Better to check twice than not at all.
- All riders must be mounted by the instructor or under the instructor's supervision.
- When mounting from the ground, one volunteer stands at the head of the horse and holds the lead rope. A second volunteer stands on the off-side of the horse and puts weight into the stirrup to counter-balance the rider. The instructor may assist the rider to mount as necessary. If the saddle starts to slip or the horse starts to walk forward during mounting, stop the mounting and remedy the situation before continuing.
- If a rider is mounting with a "leg up," be sure that both the rider and the person giving the leg up know what they are doing. Do not use your knee as a mounting block, even for a small rider. You could get hurt.
- Ask for assistance if the rider is unable to mount unaided. Do not attempt to help the rider alone. Assisted mounting from the mounting ramp is always done by the instructor or therapist. You may be asked to assist on the opposite side of the horse.

**When assisting at the ramp, stand on the block, not on the ground. It is dangerous to be standing between the block and the horse, especially if the horse spooks or moves.**

- Students should never be in the arena other than when mounted, except to mount or dismount and leave the arena, or as part of a supervised activity.
- The arena gates must be closed and latched at all times when there are horses in the arena.
- All potential dangerous activities around the ring (both inside the ring and outside the ring) should be reported to the instructor for safety reasons (animals running off the leash; kids playing with ball, sticks, bats; making noise or acting in any way which can cause an incident with the horses)

### **During the Warm up**

- Volunteers may hold conversations while the riders are warming up but are urged to remain aware of the rider's safety at all times.
- Include the rider in the conversation. Choose appropriate topics, keeping the rider's interests in mind.

### **Leading**

- If you are leading a horse, walk between the horse's head and shoulder, **NOT** in front of the horse. When leading or holding a horse with a mounted rider, always



inform the rider BEFORE moving or changing directions. Avoid sharp turns or sudden stops.

- Allow the rider to initiate all movement if possible. Give the rider time to give commands to the horse. ALWAYS let the riders do as much as possible.
- Help your rider if he or she needs it, but first allow plenty of time for the rider to perform independently. Responses often take longer than we expect. Allow the rider to perform at his or her own pace. But do make sure the rider understands the instructor.
- Riders should always stay at least 2 horse lengths apart from each other, whether moving or standing still. If your rider's horse gets too close to another horse, ask the rider to circle or cross to the other side of the arena.
- When passing another horse, always pass on the inside (the side closest to the center of the arena) and at least 6 feet away from the horse being passed.
- Do not circle a horse near another horse. Watch that no other horses are in the way.
- All horses should be going in the same direction. If one rider reverses, all riders must reverse. A reverse is always made by turning in toward the center of the arena.
- Never trot a horse up to or past a walking horse.
- Never canter up to or past a walking or trotting horse. When leading a rider in the arena, always walk on the inside (closest to the center of the arena). Do not allow the horse to get too close to the fence.

### **In The Arena**

- It is very important to pay attention to the rider and instructor. Don't chat with riders or other volunteers while the class is in session. Be friendly, answer direct questions from the rider briefly, but keep your ears on the instructor and your eyes on the rider.
- You may reinforce what the instructor is saying by showing the rider or touching the appropriate area. Try not to talk. If you are talking, you might miss an emergency instruction.
- Never *yank* on the reins or lead rope to stop the horse. Pull slowly and steadily on the lead rope or reins. Yanking frightens the horse and can cause rearing or backing up. If a horse pulls back, do not resist. Move with her, holding the lead rope. The harder you pull a horse, the harder she will resist you.
- NEVER HIT OR KICK A HORSE. If a horse is misbehaving, call the instructor for help. If the horse or rider you are working with is nervous or upset, walk the horse to the center of the arena and ask the instructor if you should dismount the rider. Horses should be calm and riders should be alert. If this is not the case, bring it to the instructor's attention immediately.
- If you aren't comfortable for any reason with your horse or rider, tell the instructor immediately. You are often the first person to be aware of a potential problem. Trust

your instincts. During classes, horses should not stand at the rail (fence) except under the instructor's directions. If your rider needs to stop, come off the rail and move to the center of the arena so you don't block the movement of other riders.

- If a horse is running away, (with or without a rider) STAY CALM. Do not yell and do not run. Halt *your* rider and stay with him/her. Wait for instructions from the instructor.
- If you are not with a student, but are spotting (observing rider), walk slowly toward where the horse is running to and wait for instructions.
- If another rider has a problem or a fall, DON'T rush to assist. Stay with your rider and listen for instructions. The instructor will handle the problem and ask for assistance if needed. The rider you are assisting is YOUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY.
- If your rider falls, the horse leader is responsible for the horse, not the rider. A loose horse is a danger to every rider in the arena. Stop the horse, get it away from the rider, and call for the instructor. The side walker stays with the rider until the instructor arrives and then follows the directions of the instructor.
- When dismounting to the ground unassisted, make sure the rider takes BOTH feet out of the stirrups before lowering to the ground. Assisted dismounts should always be done by the instructor.

### **During the Lesson**

- To avoid distracting or confusing the rider, volunteers are asked to talk only when necessary once the lesson starts. The instructor will advise volunteers how to appropriately interact with the rider.
- Volunteers may need to prompt the rider and will be instructed as to the proper method to use.
- It is important to remember to give the rider time to process a request or command--some may need more time to process information and then respond.
- It is very important that only one side walker interacts with the rider--people talking from both sides may only confuse the rider. The instructor cannot see everything that is going on. Relate pertinent observations to the instructor.

### **Have Fun!**

- We value the observations of the volunteers participating in lessons.
- Feel free to talk to the instructor before or after lessons if you have questions/comments about any student's progress.
- Every effort should be made to keep the lessons running on schedule. Work as a team when making tack or horse changes for maximum efficiency.
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## **The Equines at SPIRIT**

All program horses are evaluated before being accepted into the program and are trained to accept new equipment and props they may encounter at SPIRIT during their trial period.

They receive regular schooling and conditioning and are evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that they remain appropriate for the program. Always remember horses are horses, with the nature and innate responses of a horse. Humans must learn to understand “herd mentality.”

The horse should respect the human handler as if he or she were the lead horse.

Leaders during lessons must learn to be the alpha horse to gain the respect of the horse they are working with. This must be done with confidence and without using force or aggression.

Horses are easy to handle if they are trained consistently and if you understand why they behave as they do. If you're not consistent with the horses, they may become confused or unwilling.

### **“Horse Sense”**

- Horses are herd animals with a distinct pecking order.
- Horses, being a prey animal, react to danger by fleeing.
- Horses can't see directly in front of them or directly behind them.
- Horses are creatures of habit and learn best by repetition.
- Horses move away from pressure and resist force.
- Horses show their moods by their ears and by their body language.
- Horses are inclined to take cues from an identified leader, whether horse or human.
- Horses learn to trust and follow the lead of the one in the herd that has earned their respect.
- Horses are highly social animals.
- Horses not only respond to voice commands, they also respond to “tone of voice.”
- Horses instinctively know when another horse (or human) is their equal, their superior, or one that can be dominated.
- To the horse, you are just another two-legged animal.

### **Body Language**

Horses communicate with each other using body language. Humans can also communicate with horses using body language. Horses learn to read humans quite easily. In a herd, horses will take their cue from the lead horse and react accordingly. In our situation, the person leading the horse should be the “lead horse.” A strong and confident leader will tell the horse that he or she should be following the cues of the

human leader. Precise and consistent cues from the leader will keep the horse alert and responsive to what is being asked of them.

There must be no confusion over who is in charge. It is not about physical size and strength, it's about confidence. Humans ask for respect from horses, just as horses ask for respect from humans. It starts by respecting their space—don't always be in their face, don't reach into their stalls, and don't groom them in their stalls unless absolutely necessary. Firm and consistent handling in the ring allows horses to respond in calm and respectful way. It is a mutual respect that provides the best relationships between horses and humans!

### **Horse Lingo**

A big part of being consistent with the horses is using the same language. If everyone uses the same words and terms during all handling the horses will better understand what is being asked of them.

**Walk on** is used to ask the horse to move forward at the walk.

**Whoa** (or Ho) is used to stop the horse.

**Easy** is used when you want the horse to slow down.

**Stand** is used when a horse is fidgety and not standing quietly.

**Trot** is used to ask a horse to trot.

Tone of voice is also very important. A quiet, gentle tone can be used to soothe a nervous horse. A firm and assertive tone can command a quick response from the horse. These words should be used while grooming and tacking, in the warm-up, and during the lessons. Consistency is the key to success with this herd.

### **The Movement of the Horse**

The horse's movement is the key to what happens in hippo therapy at SPIRIT. The horse's walk provides sensory input through movement that is variable, rhythmic, and repetitive. The horse's walk is also similar to the way a human pelvis moves while walking, allowing the movement of the horse (the horse's walk) to "teach" a human pelvis how to walk. The movement can be modified or adjusted for each client's specific needs. The horse's movement becomes a very valuable therapy tool. It is the responsibility of the leader to create the highest quality movement with each horse. Quality movement is easy to attain if the leader handles the horses in a manner consistent with SPIRIT training.

## Volunteer Jobs

The five main volunteer jobs at SPIRIT that involve horse care (**Leader, Side Walker, Volunteer Trainer, Junior Volunteer Mentor, and Volunteer Mentor**), are described on the following pages.

Other volunteer jobs at SPIRIT are....

Field Work	Special Events	Volunteer Coordination
Stable Maintenance	Fundraising	Volunteer Recruitment
Stable Repair	Public Relations	Future Planning
Photography/Video	Budget and Finance	

### General Dos and Don'ts for All Volunteers

- Don't put a horse in the stall unattended with a bridle on.
- Do approach any horse from the side or front, speaking to them to alert them to your presence. Never approach them from the rear.
- Do put the bridle on last, and take it off first.
- When working with a rider grooming or tacking the horse, always stay by the rider's side to reinforce safety rules.
- Don't play with the horse's face or mouth.
- Do make tack changes as quickly as possible between lessons.
- Do alert the instructor if you find a piece of tack that is broken or needs repair.
- Don't change assignments without the instructor's approval.
- Don't coach the riders--let the instructor teach the skills.
- Don't talk about horse behaviors in front of the riders or comment in a negative way to others.
- Do open the stall doors all the way when taking a horse through, and close the doors all the way when leaving the stall after you've put the horse back in.
- Do allow the horses to have "quiet time" in their stalls. Let their stalls be the place where they can relax and not be bothered by humans.
- Do not change the bridle--if you have a concern with the way a bridle fits, bring it to the attention of the instructor.
- Do use the 15 minute break between lessons to get a quick drink.
- Do feel free to make any suggestions/comments to the instructor or ask questions after the lesson, out of the presence of riders and their parents.

**Do HAVE FUN!**

## Volunteer Job Description: LEADER

Volunteers who come to our program with horse handling experience may be asked to be horse leaders. As a leader, the volunteer is responsible for handling the horse throughout the mounting procedure, the lesson, and dismounting. Horses are extremely aware of and sensitive to the person leading them. A leader's manner of walking on briskly or just sauntering along can greatly affect how the horse will respond and how effective the rider's lesson will be.

The primary responsibility of the leader is the horse--making sure the horse is groomed and tacked properly, warming up the horse in the ring before the lesson, controlling and calming the horse in an emergency situation, and ***helping the horse follow the cues from the rider, or in hippo therapy to follow the directions of the therapist.*** Most riders who have leaders are unable to fully control their horses. It is the leader who must help in guiding -- stopping and starting -- without making the rider feel that they are simply a passenger. The rider must be allowed to do as much as possible, with the leader helping only when necessary.

### Methods of Leading

**Active Leading** -- The leader is totally responsible for all movements of the horse. The horse is getting all aids from the leader, not the rider. This type of leading is primarily used in Hippo therapy, for riders doing exercises, or brand new riders. Program horses are trained to look to the leader for directions if none are coming from the rider.

**Supportive Leading** -- The horse is still on lead, but the leader is not actively giving the horse aids. The rider will be giving the horse aids for walk-on and halt and rein aids for steering, but may not be proficient enough to be completely independent. In this way, the rider can practice skills while the leader makes sure the horse is following the cues given by the rider.

**Passive Leading, On or Off Lead** -- The leader continues to stay by the horse's head, but virtually does nothing to control the horse. When the rider is ready, the lead line will be removed. This is a big step for many riders. It's their first big move to independence, and while they are actually riding independently, the leader is still very close by to help out when necessary.

**Spotter** -- The leader is asked to take the horse off lead and stand in the center of the ring. Spotters watch one rider/horse at all times during the lesson. While it may seem a non-active job, spotters are extremely important to independent riders. They must be ready to assist instantly if the rider or instructor needs their help.

## Dos and Don'ts of Leading

- Do walk the horse actively in the ring before the rider mounts. This loosens up the horse's muscles and "wakes him up" so he will be ready to work when the rider gets on.
- Do lead the horse as close to the mounting ramp as possible and help her to stand squarely. Stand in front of the horse to keep her still while her rider mounts.
- Do stand in front of and facing the horse whenever the horse is asked to stand still for any period of time.
- Don't ask the horse to walk before making sure the rider is ready to move and the instructor has given the OK.
- Do walk on the horse's left side.
- Don't give the horse a command before the rider has had a chance to try it themselves, but do encourage the horse to follow the rider's command as soon as possible.
- Do watch the rider and allow the horse to follow the rider's cues.
- Do keep your focus on the horse, but be aware of the rider as well.
- Don't wrap the extra lead rope around your hand, instead... Hold the lead rope in two hands with the extra lead *folded* in your LEFT hand.
- Don't have a "death grip" on the lead rope too close to the horse's head.
- Do allow the horse's head to move in a natural rhythm.
- Don't let the extra lead rope dangle where it might trip you or the horse.
- Don't drag the horse behind you...
- Do use short quick forward snaps of the lead to get the horse to move quicker.
- Do lead from between the horse's head and shoulder, on the side of the horse nearest the center of the ring.
- Don't lead the horse too close to the wall...this squashes your side walkers and makes them quite unhappy.
- Do use the entire ring... don't cut corners.
- Do lead at an even, steady pace.
- Don't stop suddenly.
- Don't make sharp turns.
- Always have two horse lengths between you and the horse in front of you.
- Do get your horse in a brisk walk before asking him to trot.
- Don't pick up balls, cones, poles etc.--remain focused on the horse during activities.
- Do alert the instructor immediately if the horse is being difficult, making you uncomfortable, or if you see **ANY** unsafe situation.
- Don't pull against the horse if they are scared and backing up in a panicked state. Instead, follow them, speaking to them in a calm voice, while gently asking them to stop with the lead rope.
- Do wait until all riders have left the ring before leading your horse back into the barn.



## **Volunteer Job Description: SIDE WALKER**

Side walkers are volunteers who directly assist the rider during the lesson. A side walker's responsibility is the safety and well being of the rider at all times. Side walkers can be actively involved in maintaining the riders balance, reinforcing the instructor's directions, or giving the rider moral support. Riders may be assigned 1 or 2 side walkers, depending on their needs. Some riders do not require any side walkers. The side walker's attention must ALWAYS be focused on the rider.

Communication between side walkers should not interfere with the instructor's directions. Side walkers may communicate with the horse leader or each other in regard to the rider's balance. In an emergency situation, the side walker stays with the rider, unless otherwise directed by the instructor.

### **Methods of Side Walking**

- **Waist Band Hold** – each side walker holds the waistband of the rider with the hand closest to the horse AND places their other hand on the rider's knee for additional stability.
- **Single Arm Lock** -- the side walker places their forearm closest to the rider over the rider's thigh, grasping the front of the saddle or pad with their fingertips.
- **Double Arm Lock** -- The side walker places their forearm closest to the rider over the rider's thigh and the other hand holds the rider's heel or ankle in place.
- **Ankle Hold** -- The side walker holds the rider's ankle to stabilize the rider's lower leg.
- **Passive Side Walking** -- The side walker walks alongside the rider and is available for moral support, reinforcing directions or physical assistance when needed.
- **Spotter** -- The side walker is asked to spot the rider from the center of the ring.

**Safety belts:** Waist belts are sometimes used for a rider that needs more trunk support. It is important to remember not to pull down on the belt, as this may unbalance the rider.

**If side walkers need to change sides:** Riders with two side walkers that are providing arm locks for the entire lesson may need to change sides to avoid tired arms. To do this:

- (a) Ask the horse leader and rider to halt in the middle of the ring,
- (b) Side Walker 1 walks to the opposite side and takes over that side,
- (c) *Then* Side Walker 2 walks around to the other side,
- (d) Riding resumes. The rider should never be without one side walker providing an arm lock while at the halt. If a rider has two side walkers and the instructor

asks for his/her instructions to be reinforced to the rider, only one side walker should do the talking so that the rider does not get confused.

## Dos and Don'ts of Side Walking

- Do talk to your rider in the mounting area before he/she is mounted and in the ring before lessons begin, but...
- Don't talk to the rider or other volunteers during the lesson while the instructor is talking, but...
- Do reinforce the instructor's directions, if necessary, and do give appropriate praise to the rider.
- Don't talk about inappropriate subjects or use inappropriate language
- Do ask the instructor what type of hold the rider requires.
- Don't change the hold because your rider tells you to, always check with the instructor first.
- Don't use too much or too little pressure when performing an arm lock; allow the weight of your arm to rest on the rider's leg
- Do an immediate arm lock on any rider if an unexpected situation arises.
- Do let the instructor know if your arm is tired and you need to switch sides.
- Do make sure both side walkers are doing the same hold.
- Don't rest your arm on the horse's side or hindquarters or lean into the horse with your elbow.
- Don't hit the horse or "tickle" it in the flank to get it to trot.
- Don't lag behind.
- Don't pull on clothing or waist belt of the rider, as this unbalances him/her.
- Do redirect the rider's attention back to the instructor if they are not paying attention.
- Do have only one side walker assist the rider verbally... too many people talking may just confuse or overwhelm the rider. Give only as much support as the rider requires, both physically and cognitively!
- Do allow the riders to attempt to perform each activity as independently as possible. Let them be challenged!
- Do keep your focus on the rider at all times.
- Don't stop to tie your shoelace without warning.
- Do let the instructor know if the rider is becoming agitated or seems nervous.
- Don't allow the rider to dismount until the instructor is at his/her side; and do not remove the rider's feet from the stirrups until the instructor has asked you to.
- Do alert the instructor immediately if you see **ANY** unsafe situation with your rider or another rider.
- After dismounting, do walk with your rider back to the entrance to the ring and help them put away their helmet and find their parent/guardian before leaving.
- Don't reprimand a rider--bring any behaviors to the attention of the instructor.

## **Volunteer Job Description: VOLUNTEER TRAINERS**

Volunteer trainers, who are also leaders and side walkers, teach and supervise new volunteers. They have shown a high level of commitment to the SPIRIT program and its practices and goals. They have demonstrated proficiency in the following: leading and side walking during lessons; assisting with instruction during lessons; horse care, grooming, tacking, and first aid; and stable and tack maintenance.

## **Volunteer Job Description: JUNIOR VOLUNTEER MENTORS**

Junior volunteer mentors, who are also leaders and side walkers, assist the volunteer mentor with many tasks including feeding, grooming, tacking, exercising and untacking the horses. They have shown a high level of commitment to the SPIRIT program and its practices and goals. They have demonstrated proficiency in the following: leading and side walking during lessons; assisting with instruction during lessons; horse care, grooming, tacking, and first aid; and stable and tack maintenance

## **Volunteer Job Description: VOLUNTEER MENTORS**

Volunteer mentors, who are also leaders and side walkers, assist with training new volunteers and are involved in all aspects of the program, including exercising the horses. Mentors have shown a high level of commitment to the SPIRIT program and its practices and goals. They are long-term volunteers who can perform many varied tasks and commit to volunteering for lessons multiple days a week, arriving early as needed. They also assist with special events, horse shows, and off-site demonstrations. They have demonstrated proficiency in the following: leading and side walking during lessons; assisting with instruction during lessons; horse care, grooming, tacking, and first aid; training new volunteers; stable and tack maintenance; and horseback riding.

## **Volunteer Job Description: BARN MANAGERS**

Barn managers care for the needs of the horses and maintain a safe barn environment. They have shown a high level of commitment to the SPIRIT program and its practices and goals. They are long-term volunteers who help care for the horses, field, and stables on a daily basis. They have demonstrated proficiency in caring for the basic needs of horses; recognizing and calling attention to problems with the horses or their environment; and performing barn care functions, including stall cleaning.

## **Volunteer Job Description: HORSE CARE COORDINATOR**

The horse care coordinator helps supervise before- and after-lesson tasks, including field and stable maintenance and feeding, grooming, and tacking, and also assists

during lessons as needed. They have shown a high level of commitment to the SPIRIT program and its practices and goals. This long-term volunteer can perform many varied tasks and arrives early and stays late, as needed. They also assist with special events, horse shows, and off-site demonstrations. They have demonstrated proficiency in horse care and horse handling and can work independently and serve in the role of a volunteer supervisor.

## **From the Therapy Horse's Point of View**

We, the hard-working therapy horses at SPIRIT, have a few pet peeves we'd like to share with you. Not that we're complaining mind you, it's just that we'd like for you to try to understand our point of view.

We love our jobs! We enjoy people and are very proud that we can help so many of our riders accomplish so many things! But we do get burned out...

### **Groom only at assigned time and space.**

Horse's stalls are their sanctuary--it's where they can go to get away from everybody and relax. Just imagine having 3 or 4 people crowd into your space and invade your privacy or "quiet time." This is why we do not enter the stall, except for mucking.

### **Leave my face alone, please!**

Please know that you may be invading the horses' personal space when you constantly bother with their face. They may love having it brushed but please don't poke and prod their face. When you fuss with horse's mouth, they think you want to play because that's how they play with their horse friends!

### **Don't smother me when I'm fidgeting.**

Sometimes horses get impatient and want to walk away or not stand quietly. Please don't hang on a horse's face to keep the horse standing quietly--they hate that and want to get away from you even more. Instead, tell the horse to "Stand" in a firm voice. DO NOT HIT OR YELL--this only makes horse more nervous and fidgety!

### **Don't cut off my air supply.**

Horse would appreciate it if you would attach the girth just tight enough to keep the saddle on during the warm-up. And be careful when buckling the girth—the horse may have long winter hair, and there's nothing worse than when it hurts to walk because hair is pinched in the buckle!

### **Make sure my clothes fit.**

Please make sure that the saddle pad you are using fits properly. It should extend 2 to 3 inches beyond the front and back of the saddle. If the pad is too short and ends under the saddle, it rubs and creates a really sore spot on the back!

## **Bridling**

Putting a bridle on is a skill that every person should know how to do properly. Jamming the bit against teeth will not make horse open the mouth, in fact, the horse will probably lift their head to get away from you next time! Instead: Slide your finger into the corner of the horse's mouth and "tickle" their tongue to get them to open the mouth. Then gently slide the bit in while raising the bridle over the ears. Also be careful when taking off the bridle. Gently slide the bridle over the ears and let it slide down along the face so the bit drops gently out of the mouth. Bringing the bridle forward away from horses face twists the bit in the mouth and hurts the roof of the mouth and teeth.

## **"Whatever"**

Inconsistency is the biggest annoyance with horses. When they have many different people doing the same thing many different ways--that's really hard for them! But they thrive on consistency. They need to know what is expected of them and need to have their boundaries clearly defined. That's why the staff wants you to do things the SPIRIT way.

## **Respect**

Respect the horse's space, and horse will respect yours. Be aware of personal space at all times, especially when leading.

## **From The Mouth of the Horse About . . .**

### **Leading**

Leading is such an important job! It's important for you to understand what makes a good leader. A good leader is somebody who is very aware of me and what I am doing at all times. I admit that sometimes some of us are lazy... but constantly dragging us to make us go faster isn't going to work! I outweigh you by 1000 pounds--do you really think you're going to "pull" me faster? When you drag me, my head goes up and my back hollows out--this really makes it uncomfortable for the rider and will eventually lead to a sore back for me.

Remember the quality of the movement is what makes therapeutic riding and hippo therapy work. Ask an instructor how to make a lazy horse move along better. Use your voice as an aid, and use your body language to let me know what I am supposed to be doing. Don't just slam on the brakes when the instructor says stop. Shift your weight back and apply several gentle downward tugs on the lead before asking me to halt. It's as if you need to give me a hint before you ask me to do or change something. Same thing when we are going to go faster--ask me to walk at a brisker pace and then glide into the trot--don't burst into the trot! When we halt, respect my space and don't hang onto my head. If you stay calm and cool, chances are I will too! The key to a good

leader is communication between you and the horse. Think of it as the human leads, the horse follows. We prefer for you to be as gentle as possible, but as firm as necessary.

### **Side walking**

Again, respect my space! I know that sometimes you need to provide lots of support to your rider, but don't forget about me! It's really, really, really uncomfortable for me when you jab me with your elbow or when you constantly bump into my side. Horses find it much easier to do their job if you do yours properly and with consideration.

## **From the Riders' Point of View**

In an effort to help volunteers understand why riding is so important to us, we would like to share some of our thoughts...

First of all you should know what riding a horse does for the rider. Riding a horse is hard work and allows us to use many different muscles in different ways. The movement of the horse is the key to hippo therapy and even to therapeutic riding. There are so many physical benefits to riding a horse. The rhythmical and constant movement allows tight muscles to relax and weak muscles to strengthen. A horse's pelvis moves in the same way that a human pelvis moves. Putting a human with walking difficulty on a horse enables the horse to "teach" the human pelvis how to correctly move. Then there are the cognitive benefits... The movement of the horse can help stimulate areas of our brains or even help us organize our thoughts better. And wow, the incredible power we feel when we make the horse do something all by ourselves! The sense of accomplishment when we learn a new skill is amazing for our confidence and our egos! We can go on and on about all the good things riding does for us, but we need your help too! We depend on you to help us feel safe, even when we're nervous or scared.

Sometimes if too many people are talking to us at once, we'll just tune everybody out--our brains just can't handle it. We will not be able to process anything at all!

It's much easier for us if just one person works with us and helps guide us. We might depend on you to help us learn a new skill, but remember, if you always do it for us, we'll never be able to do it on our own, and we really want to do it for our own satisfaction. Don't feel bad for us if we fail sometimes--it may take us a while to get something, but when we do, imagine how great we will feel! Oh, and be very careful if you are holding the waist band of my pants--sometimes it's all we can do to maintain our own balance without somebody accidentally pulling us to one side!

We all like to have fun and hope that you have fun too, but remember that we are here to do more than just ride a horse: we are here to build muscles and coordination and learn to skills that can carry over into our everyday lives, so that we can be more independent and able to do things on our own! So please respect us and help us, but don't do everything for us... Celebrate our accomplishments with us!



# EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

*In the event of an emergency during a lesson, all leaders must immediately stop horses and assume halt position in front of horse. Side walkers must assume double arm-lock position on all riders.*

## **If a rider loses his/her balance during a lesson:**

- Leader stops horse.
- Side walkers try to keep rider in the saddle by stabilizing rider with arm-locks over the rider's thighs.
- If possible, gently push the rider back into the saddle.

## **If a rider must be removed from the horse (Emergency Dismount):**

- Leader should stop the horse and the rider will be dismounted to ground quickly and quietly. The LEFT side walker will do the emergency dismount.
- Rider's feet should be quickly removed from BOTH stirrups. The RIGHT side walker should assist rider's leg over the horse.
- If the horse will not stand quietly; the leader should circle the horse around him/herself as the LEFT side walker hugs the rider around the waist from behind and slides the rider off and away from the horse.
- Once rider has been dismounted, leader should circle the horse away from the rider (so hindquarters are NOT towards the rider) or back the horse away from the rider.

## **If a rider falls from the horse:**

- Side walkers should make sure both of rider's feet are out of the stirrups.
- Side walkers should try to soften the rider's fall if possible.
- Leader should halt the horse and move the horse away from the fallen rider by either circling so that hindquarters are NOT towards rider, or backing the horse away.
- **NEVER** move a fallen rider--wait for the instructor.

## **Things to keep in mind:**

- Communicate with everyone involved in the emergency in a calm, concise manner.
- If a horse suddenly pulls backwards, DO NOT pull against him. Slowly and calmly follow the movement of the horse until he stops.

## **IN THE EVENT OF A MEDICAL EMERGENCY**

The safety and well being of all individuals is a priority. By following basic safety procedures, most emergencies can be avoided. However, if an emergency does occur, please try to remain calm. Take a deep breath. In all emergencies, only a trained individual may apply first aid (a staff member who is certified in first aid is always on site during program activities). A volunteer may be called upon to assist.

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S A LOOSE HORSE**

### **What to Expect from a Loose Horse**

- A single horse may want to remain with other horses.
- A horse will have a tendency to remain near or return to the barn or pasture area.
- If a group of horses are loose, try to identify the lead horse(s). If the lead is caught the rest of the horses may follow.

### **If a Horse is Loose**

- DO NOT CHASE IT!
- Walk slowly, approaching the horse from the side.
- Talk in a low, soothing tone of voice.
- It may help to look at the ground when approaching the horse, so you are not a "threat."
- A small amount of grain may encourage the horse to wait or come to you.
- Put the lead rope over the horse's neck first, then put on the halter with the lead rope attached.
- Do not lead the horse with just the halter and no lead rope. You could be injured if the horse bolts.

### **Loose Horse in the Ring While Other Horses Are Being Ridden**

- Have all riders halt on the rail.
- Horse leaders should attach lead ropes, if not already, and stand in front of the horse's head.
- Side walkers should remain with their rider and use an arm lock and prepare to assist with dismounts if the instructor decides to do so.
- If necessary, horse leaders will be asked to lead horses from the ring. Side walkers or designated volunteers will be asked to assist the riders to a safe location.

## **EXCITED HORSE PLAN**

If a horse becomes overexcited, the side walkers should place an arm lock on the rider. If the rider seems to be able to handle the situation and is stable, they should remain on the horse. This puts side walkers in the best position for their own security, for the riders' safety, and for keeping up with the horse. If necessary, the instructor may ask for an emergency dismount.

# Glossary of Disabilities

*The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of some disabilities and conditions of participants one might encounter in a therapeutic riding setting. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability. Rather, it is a general overview with an explanation of how therapeutic riding can be beneficial.*

**Arthritis**--Inflammatory disease of the joints.

**Types:** Osteo, rheumatoid and juvenile rheumatoid.

**Characteristics:** Pain, lack of mobility, deformity, loss of strength.

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** Gentle rhythmic movement to promote joint mobility and relieve pain.

**Autism**—A self-centered mental state from which reality often tends to be excluded.

**Characteristics:** Unresponsiveness to the presence of others; withdrawal from physical contact; severely delayed and disordered language; self-stimulating behaviors; unusual or special fears; insensitivity to pain; unawareness of real dangers; hyperactive; passive; unusual behaviors such as smelling/tasting/licking or mouthing all objects; ritualistic behaviors; developmentally delayed; unusual response to sounds; clumsiness; social withdrawal; resistance to change.

**Benefits:** Interactions in a group setting stimulates interest away from self and toward others and the horses. Postural and verbal stimulation.

**Cerebral Palsy**—Brain damage occurring before, at, or shortly after birth. It is a non-progressive motor disorder.

**Types and Characteristics:**

**Spastic**—hyper tonicity with hyperactive stretch reflexes, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes.

**Athetoid**—extensor muscle tension, worm-like movements, abnormal posturing and slow and deliberate speech.

**Ataxic**—poor balance, difficulty with quick, fine movements and are often described as having a “rag doll” appearance.

**Benefits:** Normalization of tone, stimulation of postural and balance mechanisms, muscle strengthening and perceptual motor coordination.

**Associated Problems:** Seizures; hearing defects; visual defects; general sensory impairment; perceptual problems; communication problems; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; learning disabilities.

**Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA or Stroke)**—Hemorrhage in brain, which causes varying degrees of functional impairment.

**Characteristics:** Flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of body. May cause mental impairment, impaired speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength.

**Benefits:** Promotes symmetry, stimulates balance, posture, motor planning, speech and socialization.

**Developmental Disabilities (DD)**—A general term applied to children functioning two or more years below grade level.

**Characteristics:** Varied, but can include slow physical, motor and social development.

**Benefits:** Provides arena for success, opportunity for sport and recreation, stimulates body awareness.

**Down Syndrome**—Condition in which a person is born with an extra chromosome, resulting in mental retardation and developmental delay.

**Characteristics:** Broad flat face, slanted eyes, neck and hand are often broad and short.

Usually Hypotonic, have hyper mobile joints and tend to be short and slightly overweight. Prone to respiratory infections.

**Benefits:** Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance, muscle tone, and coordination.

**Emotional Disabilities**—A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies.

**Characteristics:** Trouble coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia and schizophrenia may be exhibited.

**Benefits:** Increases feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness, and provides appropriate social outlet.

**Epilepsy**—Abnormal electrical activity of the brain marked by seizures with altered consciousness.

**Types and Characteristics:**

**Petit Mal:** Brief loss of consciousness with loss of postural tone. May have jerky movements, blank expression.

**Grand Mal:** Loss of consciousness and postural control. Usually preceded by an aura. (Note: an active seizure disorder is a contraindication for horseback riding.)

**Benefits:**

**Hearing Impairment**—Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound.

**Characteristics:** Communication difficulties – may use lip reading, finger spelling or sign language. Often phase out and have attention deficits.

**Benefits:** Stimulates self-confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

**Learning Disabilities (LD)**—Catch-all phrase for individuals who have problems processing, sequencing and problem solving, but who appear to have otherwise normal intelligence skills.

**Characteristics:** Short attention span, easily frustrated, immature.

**Benefits:** Effects depend upon the particular disorder. Stimulates attention span, group skills, cooperation, language skills, posture and coordination.

**Mental Retardation (MD)**—Lack of ability to learn and perform at normal and acceptable levels. Degree of retardation is referred to as educable, trainable, severe or profoundly retarded.

**Characteristics:** Developmentally delayed in all areas. Short attention span.

**Benefits:** Stimulates group activity skills, coordination, balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Provides a structured learning environment.

**Multiple Sclerosis (MS)**—Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation.

**Characteristics:** Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40 year old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Fatigues easily. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity.

**Benefits:** Maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides opportunities for emotional therapy.

**Associated Problems:** Visual impairment, emotional lability, and impaired bowel and bladder function.

**Muscular Dystrophy (MD)**—Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males.

**Characteristics:** Progressive muscular weakness, fatigues easily, sensitive to temperature extremes.

**Benefits:** Provides opportunity for group activity, may slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, and allows movement free of assistive devices.

**Associated Problems:** Lordosis, respiratory infection.

**Polio**—Infectious viral disease.

**Characteristics:** Flaccid paralysis, atrophy of skeletal muscle, often with deformity.

**Benefits:** Strengthens non-paralyzed muscles, stimulates posture.

**Scoliosis**—Lateral curve of the spine with C or S curve with rotary component.

**Characteristics:** Postural asymmetry. May wear scoliosis jacket or have had stabilization surgery.

**Benefits:** Stimulates postural symmetry. Strengthens trunk muscles. (Note: Severe scoliosis is a contraindication for therapeutic riding.)

**Spina Bifida**—Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure with resultant damage to spinal cord.

**Characteristics:** Varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss.

**Benefits:** Stimulates posture and balance, improves muscle strength and self-image.

**Associated Problems:** Hydrocephalus, incontinence, urinary tract infection, lordosis, scoliosis, and hip dislocations.

**Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)**—Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function.

**Characteristics:** Paralysis of muscles below the level of injury – can be flaccid or spastic. Fatigue, sensory loss and pressure sores.

**Benefits:** Stimulates posture and balance, strengthens trunk muscles, is an option for sports participation and recreation.

**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**—Accidental injury to the head resulting in intra-cranial bleeding with death of brain cells.

**Characteristics:** Gross and fine motor skills deficits. Often have impaired memory, speech and/or vision. May have psychological effects.

**Benefits:** Stimulates balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, speech and perceptual skills.

**Visual Impairment**—Moderate to total loss of sight.

**Characteristics:** Insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity, fearfulness and developmental delay.

**Benefits:** Stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture and coordination. Provides social outlet, structured risk taking and freedom of movement.