

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



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SOLID ROCK THERAPEUTIC RIDING PROGRAM

Solid Rock is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide equine therapy to children and adults in an effort to improve their functioning and well-being in life. We strive to foster and maintain a safe atmosphere of cooperation, respect and love that is healing and nurturing for all of our clients and their families.

Our Beginning: The vision for Solid Rock TRC began many years ago upon meeting a little boy who was born with Cerebral Palsy. Seeing this little guy come home from the hospital, so tiny but yet such a fighter awe-inspiring. Over the years seeing him from time to time, trying so hard just to walk pulled my heart-strings. We wanted to be able to do something for him and this is why Solid Rock TRC became a reality.
~Nicki VonGunten and Brad Byler

Why is the help of a horse therapeutic?

Internationally, equine movement has been used as a treatment tool by medical professionals for over thirty years. The Federation of Riding for the Disabled International reports membership of 24 countries worldwide with formal therapeutic riding programs.

Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Speech-Language Pathologists in the United States use the movement of the horse as a therapy tool – “Hippotherapy”. Hippotherapy research has shown relevant functional outcomes such as significant improvements in postural control, motor function, weight-bearing, and gait, as well as relaxation of spasticity.

Therapeutic work with the horse is not just for those in wheelchairs, but also those with learning disabilities and related challenges. Sensorimotor input provided by the horse’s movement and horse-care tasks can help the central nervous system organize itself, improving eye-hand coordination, spatial awareness, midline orientation, attention span, dexterity, right/left handedness, verbalization and vocabulary, and sequential thinking.

Mental health professionals and educators are using equine assisted therapy to promote mental and emotional health in the burgeoning field of Equine-facilitated Mental Health, as studies have shown statistically significant decreases in aggressive behaviors, and improvements in self-concept, intellectual and school status, perceived popularity, and self satisfaction in emotionally disturbed children and adolescents. The therapeutic riding experience provides a rich environment for teaching cooperation, thoughtfulness, self-control, and for fostering self esteem through the ability to do and succeed.

Therapeutic Program participants are children and adults with traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, autism, multiple sclerosis, stroke, cancer, genetic disorders, developmental delays, sensory integration disorders, learning disabilities, conduct disorders, mental illness, and speech, hearing or vision impairments and other disabilities. Participants range from two years of age to over sixty years of age.

Benefits of Equine Assisted Activities and Therapeutic Horseback Riding

Intrinsically riding a horse is a beneficial activity for any person challenged with a physical, cognitive and/or emotional disability. The uniqueness of equine assisted activities lies in the gait of the therapy horse. The horse having gaits with a three dimensional swinging motion is a living therapy tool for the rider, enabling the rider to experience up/down, forward/backward, and side-to-side motion – all the while stimulating muscle, brain and social activity. Without doubt equestrian activities, in and out of a therapeutic setting, increase a rider’s posture, balance, strength, focus and coordination while also positively enhancing flexibility, self-awareness, confidence and a sense of independence. Social and emotional growth is too gained from the natural bond created between horse and rider.

The physical benefits of therapeutic riding include:

As the horse moves, the rider is constantly thrown off-balance. In an attempt to rebalance the rider’s muscles are required to contract and relax.

- Improved posture control and balance
- Increased muscle tone and strength
- Greater range of motion

- Decreased spasticity
- Better hand-eye coordination
- Reduction of abnormal movement patterns

The cognitive benefits aide participants to excel in:

The repetition of patterned movements required in controlling a horse quickens the reflexes and aids in motor planning.

- Development of learned skills
- Tactile awareness and sensory integration
- Improved application of direction
- Greater skill at sequencing, patterning and motor planning.

The overall experience contributes to emotional gains by the rider:

Riding provides excitement and the sense of achievement of working independently as well as with a team.

- Independence
- Increased self-control and awareness
- Better emotional control
- Greater self-awareness and self-confidence

The social benefits reaped by riders:

Being involved as a rider creates a shared interest and experience on which to build a social foundation.

- Friendship building
- Increased experiences
- Improving social skills and cooperation

VOLUNTEERING – MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONE’S LIFE

Our volunteers are a necessity in the day to day operation of Solid Rock TRC, and a huge part of the healing processes for our clients. Many volunteers of various talents are needed to keep everything running properly so that we may best serve our clients and maintain a professional quality atmosphere to promote their growth. It takes a lot of special talents to keep the wheels turning, some examples of which would include:

Riding Lesson Volunteers - tack horses and work as leaders (horse-handlers) or side-walkers (providing physical support to the rider) throughout sessions.

Barn Volunteers - assist with grooming and saddling horses for lessons. They also help with sweeping floors, clean stalls, cob webbing, cleaning water troughs, general cleaning, maintenance, painting, and other barn responsibilities.

Carriage Driving Volunteers - commit to a lengthy training process. They learn how to assist with harnessing a carriage horse, long-lining, and some even drive a horse-drawn carriage.

Equine Adventure Club Volunteers - work with summer campers participating in daily riding lessons, barn activities, art projects, nature activities and more.

Classroom Volunteers - work with instructors and students in non-mounted activities, helping students learn about horse care and participate in art & crafts, and other educational activities.

Maintenance Volunteers - help keep our facility running smoothly and looking good by assisting with cleaning, trash removal, mowing, weeding, light carpentry and other "handyman" type jobs.

Fundraising Volunteers- work together with management to solicit and gather voluntary contributions of monies & materials.

Office Volunteers - help with all types of projects, such as sorting and stapling, making phone calls, making newsletters, sending emails, addressing envelopes, filing and more.

Special Event Volunteers who help plan, coordinate, and operate our fundraising events and manage other volunteers working on the day of the event.

These are just a few of the special people and special talents that it takes for us to be successful in our important work. We appreciate each volunteer's dedication, time, and energy, without which, very few of our riders would have the opportunity to mount up and "walk on"!

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

ALL VOLUNTEERS must **COMPLETELY** fill out proper paperwork. If under the age of 18 years a parent signature is required to participate. And for the security of our clients, volunteers and property, a **background check is required** for all volunteers age 18 and over at the cost of \$5 per volunteer. This small fee will help Solid Rock cover the cost of these services. Cash or checks made payable to Solid Rock TRC will be collected at training check in.

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Complete volunteer registration & agreement forms. Including parent signature when required.
- Complete volunteer training program.
- Volunteers 18 years & older must complete criminal background check
- Dress appropriately for the task and arrive on time.
- Understand & abide by the confidentiality policy.
- Understand & follow emergency procedures.
- Arrive 15 minutes prior to lesson or class to help prepare.
- Only handle horses within your color assignment.
- Wear your nametag and keep it with you at all times. Return before departing, **do not** take it home with you.

SOLID ROCK'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Provide orientation / training program
- Review volunteer responsibilities
- Review emergency procedures
- Additional training and in-services as available.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY: Information regarding clients of Solid Rock is highly privileged and confidential. Additionally, all persons associated with Solid Rock TRC have a right to privacy that gives them control over the dissemination of their medical history or other sensitive information. All medical, social, referral, personal and financial information regarding any person and his/her family shall remain confidential. It is the responsibility of every volunteer to adhere to the privacy and confidentiality of all clients. These obligations are continuous and shall survive the termination of the relationship between all parties.

VOLUNTEER ATTIRE POLICY:

As part of a team in offering therapeutic services to the Solid Rock clients, volunteers are encouraged to wear attire that is appropriate to the work, yet professional. Volunteers are a significant part of the image that Solid Rock presents to the surrounding community and the general public.

Attire must also be safe. For this reason, volunteers will be required to wear appropriate footwear during work in barn & arena. Volunteers wearing open toed shoes or sandals (crocs) will be unable to participate. Shoes or boots that offer foot protection are suggested. Please, no halter tops or sports bras showing.

Dangling jewelry may pose a hazard when working around horses as well as loose, floppy clothing or hats. These may catch on other items or equipment, or blow and spook a horse.

Perfumes can attract bees or biting insects or bother some participants.

Dress in layers as able for comfort or warmth. Bring a jacket and gloves and a secure hat during winter months. Sunscreen and a water bottle are suggested in warmer months.

NOTE: Please keep valuables locked out of sight in cars. Turn off cell phones and pagers during lessons.

No texting or phone usage when side walking or leading a horse or in the arena.

SCHEDULING: You may request a “regular” time slot. If you have a day, time or student you prefer, please contact the volunteer coordinator to place a scheduling request.

CANCELLATIONS: When Solid Rock is made aware of a **student cancellation**, we will call, text or email (if the cancellation is several hours to days in advance) the volunteers assigned to that rider’s lesson to inform them of the cancellation. There will be times when we are not notified. Should there be a reason such as icy weather or dangerous weather and classes have to be cancelled for the day, you can call the office at 330.990.1777. If you have any question about the weather, please call this number.

If you have to cancel a time you have signed up for, please call the office cell phone as soon as possible so a qualified replacement can be found. **OUR RIDERS DEPEND ON YOU.**

LESSON VOLUNTEERS:

The two important volunteer tasks at Solid Rock TRC are **horse leader** and **sidewalker**.

The horse leader is in charge of the horse. The sidewalker walks beside the rider during the lesson. On the following pages, these jobs are described. **Please read these carefully!**

GUIDELINES TO DETERMINE ABILITY TO PERFORM AS A LEADER OR SIDEWALKER:

1. Must be 14 years of age or older.
2. Must complete volunteer training with Solid Rock personnel.
3. Must complete volunteer registration & agreement forms. Including parent signature when required.
4. Must adhere to all Solid Rock policies.
5. Must be able to respond to instructor’s directions.
6. Must be attentive to rider and horse.
7. Must be reliable in attendance.
8. Must be able to follow emergency procedures.
9. Must perform only tasks covered by training.

Horse leader is responsible for the *horse*; the side walker is responsible for the *rider*.

STANDARD EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

REMEMBER THAT THE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES WILL BE DIRECTED IN MOST CASES BY THE CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR!

In the event of an accident or an emergency:

- Remain with your team.
- Leader – halt and face horse.
- Sidewalkers – remain with rider.
- Stay calm and follow instructor's directions.

If the rider(s) must be dismounted:

- Remain or line up where instructor indicates.
- Sidewalkers – assist rider's feet out of stirrups.
- Left sidewalker – assist rider to dismount .
- Sidewalkers – escort/carry rider around front of horse to designated area.
- Leader – run up stirrups, tuck reins under left stirrup – await direction from instructor.

If a rider must be dismounts quickly (emergency!):

- Instructor will indicate need for **emergency dismount**.
- Leader – halt horse then after rider is dismounted turn horse towards the action.
- Right sidewalker – remove rider's foot from stirrup and assist leg over horse, go around front of horse to assist other sidewalker **after** the left sidewalker has a hold on the rider.
- Left sidewalker – pull rider from horse with their back on your chest, drag away from horse, and wait for further instructions.

If emergency personnel must be called:

- Instructor – ask one volunteer to go to phone and call emergency personnel

- Dial 911 and report location of emergency
 - Telephone number of phone being used
 - Caller's name
 - What happened
 - Number of victims
 - Condition of victims
 - Help being given
 - Advise responders - NO SIRENS close to barn
 - Stay on line for further instructions

Contact barn manager on sight

REMEMBER:

- The safety of our riders and other personnel is our first priority.
- The safety of the horses we are using is our next priority.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE HORSE LEADER

As the horse leader, you are in charge of the horse at all times!

Walk on the left beside the horse's head staying just behind the horse's nose.

Hold right hand a couple inches from the clip end of the lead rope.

Hold extra rope folded in a figure eight in your left hand. NEVER wrap or loop the rope around your hand.

Look up and forward, but always be aware of the horse's focus.

Keep your attention on the lesson and your team. Glance back occasionally at the rider and sidewalkers to make sure they are safe.

Keep at least a horse length distance between your horse and the other horses.

Wait for your rider to ask the horse to "walk on" before proceeding.

Be sure you don't crowd your sidewalkers. If you don't watch your distance they can become trapped between the horse and the fence.

Walk on, giving a couple of clucks with your voice and use a gentle tug with the lead rope if your rider is unable to motivate the horse. Don't pull on the horse or face him to try and get him to walk on. If you have trouble getting the horse to start walking, turn their head away from you a bit (to the right) and then begin to walk forward.

When it is time to trot, wait for your rider to ask the horse to "trot on" before proceeding.

When trotting, look up and forward. Stay aware of the horse's focus. Start jogging slowly, cluck with your voice, and gently tug forward on the lead rope.

During the walk and the trot, avoid downward tugs or pulls on the lead line – the horse may become unbalanced.

Do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground. This may unseat the rider and it affects the way the horse moves.

Adjust your step to the horse – be careful not to get too far ahead, behind, or away.

Be aware of what the rider is asking of the horse. Turn as or after the rider uses the reins to turn the horse, not before. Encourage the rider to do as much as possible on his/her own – do not do it for them.

If you have the feeling your horse is tense, inform the instructor immediately. Pay extra attention to your horse when there is abnormal activity around the arena which might scare the horse (wind gusts, people running, trash blowing, noise from the parking lot, dogs barking, etc.).

Avoid the temptation to interact and assist the rider while leading the horse.

Horse Body Language

A horse communicates with its head and hindquarters. These are the "speaking ends" and the "dangerous ends". Watch both when you are working around the horse. The following is a quick look at some of the key signals to be mindful of.

EARS BACK

The horse's ears are its most mobile and expressive feature. Most people believe that when a horse puts its ears back it is expressing anger or aggression. This is true only some of the time. Other times it may indicate that he's listening behind him, that he's afraid, or even that he is a little sleepy. When a horse puts his ears flat to his neck

and shows the whites of his eyes, he means it! You should react with caution. You will mostly see this expression flashed between horses as they pass. You could see a mild version of this if you tighten the girth too rapidly.

When a horse's ears go back, it doesn't always mean it is angry or threatening. When you are working around him, a horse will tip one or both ears back. This shows that he's paying attention to you. He's listening for your voice or footsteps.

This is a good attitude which increases your coordination together and your safety. If the horse is bored or half asleep, his ears will tip back and out to the side at a gentle angle. Approach a horse in this position slowly and give him a chance to realize you're there.

EARS FORWARD

People usually interpret ears pointed forward as an expression of friendliness and good cheer, a safe expression. Often this is true, but there are situations in which a horse's pricked ears are a definite danger signal. A horse's ears will always point to where its interest lies; that grain pile, the horse across the road, or the flying piece of newspaper. Usually the horse is taking in the sights and paying more attention to his surroundings than to you. It can mean that the horse is nervous about some new object and needs a moment to establish that it is not a threat to him. It is a good idea to be extra watchful for a minute when the horse is in this posture because he can jump or spook if pushed before he settles back down.

If the horse doesn't seem to be settling down, inform the instructor right away.

HORSES HEADS

Horses make a lot of moves with their heads. Shaking their heads usually means they are being playful as they frequently are when turned out with a friend. They also shake their heads when flies are bothering them. A horse may also turn his head toward you for a good rub if he is itchy, or he may turn his head to nip you. To stop this, pull his head away from you or let him bump into your pointed finger a few times to discourage it. If you use this approach, bump on his cheek, not his muzzle to prevent head shyness.

A horse that lowers his head as if to touch his nose to the ground, or paws as doing so may be thinking about dropping to roll. Gently tug the horse's head up to a higher position and keep him walking.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE SIDE WALKER

As the side walker, you are responsible for the rider at all times!

You are the person responsible for the rider's safety. You will help them maintain their balance and feel safe during their lesson.

Depending on the rider's condition or balance, one or two sidewalkers may be assigned to the rider by the instructor.

Reinforce the instructor's directions. Some riders need a sidewalker to help them understand the instructor's directions.

When only one sidewalker is needed, this sidewalker will be on the right side of the rider, while the leader walks on the left side of the horse.

Different methods are used with individual riders depending on their needs. The instructor will tell you how much support the rider needs.

If directed to do so, give support at the thigh and/or ankle. Try NOT to lean on the horse or to put pressure on the rider's leg, the horse will think he's being signaled to go faster.

If directed, walk beside the rider's leg assisting only when needed, for example at the trot or to reinforce the instructor's directions. Stay in position by holding excess stirrup leather or other piece of tack. Do not drop back beyond the horse's middle.

In the case of an emergency dismount, the sidewalkers must make sure the rider's feet are out of the stirrups and the rider should be taken off the horse immediately.

Remember:

Be sensitive to where you are touching the rider. It's easy to be holding a small child without realizing where your hands are. Be sure you are never touching a rider where you would not want to be touched.

Learn to visualize the basic riding position so you can help your rider adjust his position.

If the rider slips in one direction or another, have the rider regain position in the center of the horse. If necessary, halt, reposition the rider and continue the lesson.

Limit conversation during class. Direct the rider's attention to the instructor. Reinforce the lesson, encourage the rider, give congratulations for a good effort.

If a problem arises, tell the leader and the instructor so that they can take appropriate action.

If you need to change sides with the other sidewalker-notify the instructor then ask the horse leader to halt and sidewalkers change sides one at a time. Never leave the student alone or unassisted. Always walk in FRONT of the horse when changing sides.

Be sensitive to your rider. A student who cannot speak can frequently hear and understand.

Be careful that your elbows don't dig into the horse.

Be careful that you don't apply too much pressure to the rider's legs. Sometimes pressure on the thigh can increase or cause muscle spasticity. Check with the instructor on the best way to assist.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

At times there will be landscaping, trash pickup, office work and a variety of other possible volunteer jobs that need to be done. When these opportunities are available they will be posted within the barn. But feel free to ask if you have extra time-there are always extra jobs that need to be done.

Fundraising is a regular part of our yearly activities at Solid Rock Therapeutic Riding Center. You will receive notices of fundraising activities and possibly a request for volunteers for some of these fundraisers.

Interested in becoming a certified therapeutic instructor? Check with the Therapeutic Riding Program Director for more information.

There are many needs when operating a therapeutic riding center so there are many ways we try to raise the funds we need in addition to our regular fundraisers. We have the "adopt a horse" program, scholarships for our therapeutic riders, a "wish list" of equipment we need. Please take a look at the Solid Rock TRC web site and review these opportunities. **We need you to tell our story; word of mouth is the best advertisement.**

If you have any questions please call us at 330.990.1777 or email us at solidrockvolunteers@yahoo.com.

We thank you for volunteering with us.