



# *Grace Lake Ministries*

## **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

Grace Lake Ministries, Inc.

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**Dear Valued Volunteer,**

Welcome to Grace Lake Ministries Therapeutic Horsemanship Program. This handbook is designed to give volunteers an overview of Grace Lake and our program policies and procedures. Please read through this manual and let me know if you have any questions.

**What is our mission?**

Grace Lake Ministries mission is to provide therapeutic horsemanship to people with disabilities and others in need of hope and healing in a Christian environment.

**Why is our program a ministry?**

Grace Lake is a God centered program. Our goal is to facilitate the development of wholeness into the lives of the people that we serve. We believe that wholeness begins by knowing and following Jesus Christ. We strive to provide an atmosphere of people with hearts purified by God through which He can work to bring hope and healing to those in need. We trust in God to lead us down the path that each individual needs to reach their full potential. Only God understand their needs and how to meet them.

**Who do we serve?**

We serve anyone in need of hope and healing. This includes children and adults, people with disabilities and people without disabilities, youth with obvious social problems, and youth without obvious social problems.

**How are horses used to bring wholeness into people's lives?**

Our horses receive special handling in "natural horsemanship" techniques. Our goal is to bring the horse and rider into a perfectly harmonious relationship. This can only be achieved through respect, communication, kindness, and trust. These "natural horsemanship" techniques coupled with a loving heart encourage the horse and rider to begin working like partners to achieve the feeling of oneness. Eventually it feels as if the horse responds to the mere thought of what you want to do.

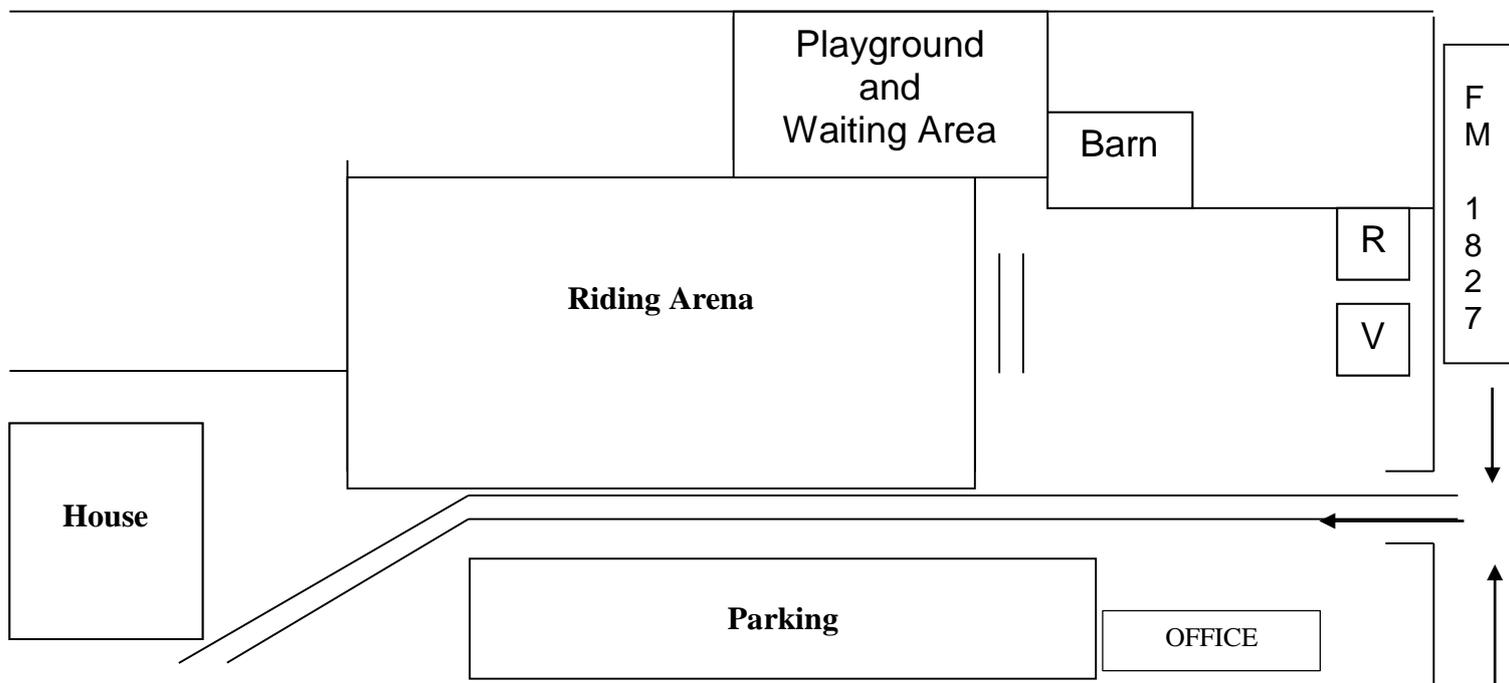
This is the kind of relationship that God desires to have with us, perfect unity. The learning process begins as the rider begins building a relationship with the horse. The rider begins to see who they are and understand how they relate to others. Success with the horse is only achieved as they overcome these personal barriers. In some amazing way, God has given these horses the ability to help us heal those areas.

Sincerely,

Holly Robinson  
Grace Lake Director

GRACE LAKE MAP and Directions

Driving Directions: from Highway 75, take the 121/Bonham exit east towards Melissa. Turn right at the 2<sup>nd</sup> light onto FM 545. Go approximately 5 miles and turn right onto FM 1827. Grace Lake is the first barn and house on the right.



**R = Wheelchair Accessible Restroom**

**S = Office**

**|| = Mounting Ramp**

\* Please park in the grassy area to the left of the driveway after entering the gates. Do not park in the handicap area. These are reserved for our riders.

\* We have a designated waiting area with chairs. We ask that observing visitors and family members stay in this area while classes are in progress to minimize distractions.

INSIDE THE BARN:

\*The trash can is located inside the barrel labeled "TRASH". Please throw your trash in the trash can.

*Please note that water is available in the refrigerator in the barn for your comfort and safety. Feel free to enjoy it and bring water to help replenish our supply.*

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

We are excited that you have decided to join our family as a volunteer. Our goal is to facilitate the development of wholeness in the people that are a part of this program. We believe that wholeness involves giving to something bigger than ourselves. Serving in the area that God calls you to is rewarding and helps you to grow to your fullest potential.

We operate based on the principle in the bible (Ephesians 4:11-16) known as the Body of Christ. Each of our bodies have hands, skin, and a liver. Our hands, skin, and liver have different roles, but each role is important to the proper functioning of our body. In the same way, God has called some people within Grace Lake to support our program with finances and others with different types of service. With Christ as our head, we rely on the resources, talents, and gifts of our participants and volunteers (the body) in the program to meet our needs of operation.

As a volunteer supported organization, we ask that you prayerfully consider the areas that you can serve and volunteer at Grace Lake. Below is a list of possible ways to contribute other than directly participating in classes:

- A. Become a Barn Ambassador. Clean the barn, muck the pen, groom and bathe horses, clean tack, water flowers, or pick-up sticks on the playground. Check out the Calendar on Grace Lake Ministrie's website for current days and times.  
[www.gracelakeministries.org](http://www.gracelakeministries.org)
- B. Make a donation. Rider tuition funds approximately 30% of our operation costs. 70% of our income comes from donations and fundraising. Every donation counts. Both small and large donations are needed to operate the program.
- C. Donate items. We regularly send emails listing needs for things like stamps, Kleenex, paper towels, etc.
- D. Advocate for Grace Lake in the community. Connect us to resources in the community. Hand out brochures and refer people to our website and Facebook page.
- E. Share specialized skills that you have such as website design, carpentry, horse training, accounting, grant writing, or body work for horses.
- F. Participate in our "Scholarship Drive". The Scholarship Drive will raise money to support our riders receiving financial assistance to cover their tuition each session. A \$10.00 donation will make a difference!
- G. Other Opportunities. We have additional opportunities available in the areas of facilities, maintenance, marketing, fundraising, and legal.

## BARN RULES

1. Show respect to all animals, people, and to yourself.
2. Family members and visitors, please watch from the waiting area during class time.
3. Keep our facility clean. Put your trash in the trashcan inside the barn.
4. Do not climb on hay, gates, or fences.
5. Do not feed the horses.
6. Pet the horses in the pen at your own risk! Horses may bite!
7. Do not enter any horse pens without permission from a staff member.
8. Parents are responsible for the supervision of their children.
9. Pet the cats at your own risk! They may bite or scratch. No picking up or chasing cats.
10. In the event of an emergency, please follow the Instructor's directions. A telephone and emergency information is located in the office and volunteer building for dialing 911.
11. Have a good time, grow, and give God the glory!

**No Horse Treat Policy** - Due to some of our horses being on a special diet, Grace Lake has a policy of no feeding treats of any kind to the horses. Thank you for your support in ensuring the health and safety of our wonderful therapy horses!

**We ask that all volunteers be mindful of the fact that Grace Lake facilities are located on private property. Access to the property is limited to specific class times and scheduled events.**

## LESSON SCHEDULE AND CANCELLATION POLICY

Lessons are 45 minutes long and held once a week. Lessons are grouped together in sessions (10 weeks for Spring and Fall and 5 weeks for Summer). Classes are offered 25 weeks per year.

In the event that weather hinders our lesson time and the lesson must be rescheduled, an extra week will be added onto the session. These days will accommodate inclement weather only, such as rain, snow, extreme cold, etc. Please check the Calendar at [www.gracelakeministries.org](http://www.gracelakeministries.org) if the weather is in question on your scheduled class day. You can also sign up to receive a text if your class is cancelled. Please email Shelley for instructions at [admin@gracelakeministries.org](mailto:admin@gracelakeministries.org).

Classes are not normally scheduled on the following holiday weekends or days: Memorial Day weekend, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Labor Day Weekend, Thanksgiving, and the 2 weeks of Christmas and New Years.

If you are sick or unable to make your class for any reason, please text or call the Volunteer Coordinator, Shelley Egger, at 214-334-9867, as soon as possible that day. If you have dates that you already know you will not be able to fulfill, please inform the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible so that a sub may be found for you. Our riders depend on the support of the volunteers!

If a rider cancels or if a class cancels due to weather, it will be noted on the calendar at [www.gracelakeministries.org](http://www.gracelakeministries.org) and a Remind text message will be sent out.

## **DRESS**

It is important that you dress safely, comfortably, and conservatively.

1. Boots with a heel are recommended but not required. Closed toed shoes are required.
2. Long pants are recommended. The grass is sometimes very tall when we go out for a trail ride.
3. Please do not wear big or priceless jewelry as it can easily get lost or caught on something.
4. It is common for the temperature to feel significantly different at the barn (colder or warmer). Therefore, we suggest that you wear layers. This means wear warm clothes (sweatshirt, jacket, gloves) that can be taken off if you get warm.
5. Wear clothing that you don't mind getting dirty!
6. On sunny days, wear sunscreen and sunglasses. We will be enjoying the outdoors!

## **THE RIDING LESSON**

One, two, or three volunteers and an instructor can work with a rider or family in an enclosed arena, open field or barn area for any of several purposes. The rider may learn special riding skills, care of the horse, or how to saddle a horse. The rider may play games on horseback, learn dressage, or trail ride. Each rider or family will have individual goals to work toward. As a volunteer, you will be involved in every aspect of the lesson from grooming and tacking, through the class itself, and cleanup afterward.

Lessons are tailored to meet the specific needs of each rider. Lessons may include the following:

1. Prayer time: All family member, riders, and volunteers present at the time are welcome to participate.
2. Grooming and tacking the horse.
3. Leading the horse and ground work to learn to control the horse from the ground.
4. Stretching tight muscles and practicing mounting on the Equisizer.
5. Riding: This may include body awareness activities, stretching exercises, riding skills instruction, navigating through an obstacles course, games, and trail rides.
6. Unsaddling and grooming the horse.

## **VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT**

We value volunteers. Each person at Grace Lake plays an important role in the success of the rider. But always remember that in a class, the instructor is in charge. Please show respect to the instructor by allowing them to do the instructing. Instructing is the responsibility of the instructor only. Parents and volunteers have a valuable perspective to share, and we encourage you to share with the instructor before or after class. We ask that you participate in the lesson only in the role assigned to you or upon the specific request of the instructor. We put prayer and time into developing specific goals and lesson plans for each rider. Enjoy watching as God's plan unfolds with the riders.

## **PREPARING FOR CLASS**

It is important to arrive 30 minutes before class time for grooming/tacking horses and volunteer assignments. It is primarily the Horse Leaders responsibility to groom, tack, and warm-up the horse prior to class. (Horse Leaders are trained by our methods by attending a Horse Handling Training Program focusing on Natural Horsemanship Techniques.) Sidewalkers are responsible for pulling the tack (saddle, blanket, reins) and are encouraged to help the leader groom the horse. Some of our riders groom and tack the horses with assistance during their class.

### **Each day:**

1. Record your hours on the sign-in sheet
2. Pick up your nametag.
3. Check the Class Schedule Sheet for horses and tack to be used.
4. Begin grooming and tacking the horse for class.
5. Warm-up the horse

New volunteers will "buddy up" with another volunteer until you get comfortable with our procedures.

Most of our riders will ride with a natural hackamore. If the rider has progressed to riding with a bridle with a bit, call for a staff person to bridle the horse. Bridling is to be done by either staff or trained volunteers only. This rule must be observed because bridling done by many different people and methods can make the horse head-shy. Bridles are to be put on over halters.

**\*\*\*If you are new to working around horses and are unsure about any tasks, please ask for assistance or clarification from a staff member or another volunteer. Do what you feel comfortable doing-it's okay to ask for help!\*\*\***

## **MOUNTING PROCEDURES**

Before mounting, leaders hold horses in the arena and complete warm-up activities, while sidewalkers stay with the riders. Make sure your rider's helmet fits correctly, then wait to be called by the instructor for our prayer circle. The instructor mounts all riders, volunteers will assist as directed.

There are three types of mounting:

1. Ramp Mount – used for riders using wheelchairs or otherwise not able to climb stairs. Also used for back riders.
2. Block Mount – used for small riders or with taller horses to get the rider to stirrup level.
3. Ground Mount – used when the rider is tall enough and physically capable of reaching the stirrup from the ground. The leader holds the horse quietly while the sidewalker assists as directed.

When using the mounting ramp or block ramp the leader should:

1. Approach ramp or block in the direction requested by the instructor, stop before entering ramp or block area until instructed to walk on, and then enter while turning to face the horse upon entering;
2. Position horse close to the side from which mounting takes place;
3. Do not put pressure on the lead rope; this may cause the horse to back up. If the horse should back up, DO NOT PULL; simply release pressure on the lead and go with him – he will stop;
4. Allow the horse to relax, holding him quietly and not restricting his head;
5. Once the rider is mounted and the cue is given by the instructor AND rider to “walk on,” guide the horse out and along the mounting ramp slowly and quietly while still facing him. Once the horse is clear of the ramps or block, the instructor will give the command “halt” for final adjustments. Sidewalkers join the rider so that support can be given while instructor adjusts stirrups; and
6. Lead the horse slowly and quietly from the mounting area once the rider and/or instructor has said, “walk on.”

When using the mounting ramp or block, the sidewalker(s) should:

1. Position yourself at the end of the ramp or block when called by the instructor; and
2. Support rider as directed by instructor.

## CLASS TIME

### LEADER GUIDELINES

Check with the instructor to complete a proper warm-up with your horse. Warm-up will prepare the horse to willingly complete the tasked planned for the class. Check to make sure your horse is properly tacked and re-tighten the girth if necessary. Attach lead rope to halter if not already done, and proceed to the mounting area as directed by instructor.

### **The leader is responsible for and constantly aware of the horse.**

Hold the lead rope about 12 inches from the snap to allow for the natural motion of the horse’s head. Hold extra rope in your left hand, doubling the excess back and forth across your palm. Never wrap it around your hand.

Lead on the left side of the horse exactly next to the horse’s head, holding the lead line unless otherwise directed by the instructor. Some situations may require the

leader to lead from the right side or position themselves to encourage the horse to move sideways, move the hindquarters, etc.

Make turns softly. Allow space for side walkers when next to a fence or obstacle.

When the horse is stopped, the leader stands facing the horse at a 45 degree angle to keep the horse stationary. Allow the horse to move his head and stretch, but keep him quiet and calm.

To halt, say “whoa” or “ho”, move shoulder back and give the horse 1-2 seconds to respond before gently pulling back on the lead rope. If the horse does not stop, tug backward on the lead a little stronger, and when the horse stops, release the pressure. If the horse does not respond immediately, repeat with several small tugs.

Students are urged to control their horses to the maximum of their abilities. A horse leader must never take the place of the student, but should be there to assist as directed to keep the horse in control. Check with your instructor before the lesson regarding your rider’s level of ability in controlling his mount.

When the rider is controlling the horse, allow a little more slack in the lead (12 inches from end of rope) so that you will not influence the horse unless this becomes necessary for safety reasons. The horse may become confused if he feels a tug both on the lead line and the reins and may not attend to the reins as he should.

When changing pace, have the horse follow your pace rather than you following the horses. Move from a walk to a fast walk into a trot and from a trot down to a fast walk, then to a walk. This will make the transition smooth and will not throw the rider off balance.

Be sure to hold the horse’s head straight, especially at the trot. This is particularly true when you are on the inside, between the horse and the center of the ring.

Never discipline a horse while a rider is mounted.

If a horse steps on your foot, count “101, 102” while leaning against his shoulder to unbalance him. This way you will not frighten the horse or rider with a big “OUCH”.

Always keep the horse away from possibly dangerous obstacles such as mud holes, broken fences, trash, wire, etc.

If the horse should suddenly shy or pull, release the lead in the right hand, but maintain contact with your left hand on the end of the lead rope to control the horse. **When a rider is mounted on the horse, never totally let go of the lead under any circumstances.**

When a horse is frightened of an object, let him stop, face the object, look at it, and sniff it (don’t let the horse spin and try to flee). Give the horse time to overcome his fear. Reassure him and help to calm him in a slow, soft voice.

When the lesson is finished and the rider dismounts, loosen the girth a few holes until the horse is used again or unsaddle. Your rider may do this himself. If he does, make sure he walks in front of the horse to get to the other side.

## SIDEWALKER GUIDELINES

The sidewalker(s) help the rider with balance and reinforce instructions during the lesson. If there are two sidewalkers, the inside sidewalker (one closest to the center of the ring) will clarify instructions. Too many people talking to the rider can be confusing.

Check to see that your rider is prepared to ride. All riders must wear a safety helmet. Helmets will be fitted to each rider the first day of class and sizes recorded. Check to make sure that the rider's helmet fits properly and that the chinstrap is fastened. Sidewalkers are to stay with their riders at all times while mounted.

Different methods are used with individual riders, depending on their needs.

For example:

1. Place your arm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle.
2. Walk beside rider's leg to assist when needed (i.e., at the trot or to reinforce directions).
3. Simply hold on to the foot while it is in the stirrup.

Do not offer any more support than the rider needs.

If a rider has a leader and one sidewalker, the sidewalker should walk on the offside.

Observe the rider with your front or side vision at all times. Never become so relaxed that you are not totally aware of the rider, horse, leader, instructor, and activities around you.

Be sure not to lean on the horse or rider since this pressure may unbalance the rider or irritate the horse.

When the rider is using body and leg aids and does not need to be supported, do not touch the horse, saddle, or pad since this may interfere with the aid applied by the rider.

You may need to reinforce the instructor's directions, assist the rider in carrying out instructions, or direct the rider's attention to the task.

Listen to the instructor's directions so you can be ready to reinforce when necessary, BUT allow the rider plenty of time to process the information before you begin to assist. For example, if the instructor says, "Pull the right rein towards me," and the rider seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say "Right."

Talking to the rider while having a lesson is not recommended since it interferes with the communication between the rider and the instructor. Many disabled riders have difficulty focusing on instruction, so all talking should be kept to a minimum. If you

are on a trail ride or playing a game, talking is just fine unless the rider cannot hear any special directions.

Refrain from talking to the other sidewalker or leader during lesson unless it has to do with the rider's position, balance or the horse. Be sure that you do not talk with other teams as they pass you. **Any unnecessary talking distracts the rider, shows disrespect for the riding lesson and diverts the attention of the team.**

Riders who need moderate support, especially support to the back, will need more attention. Side walkers will be specifically instructed as to how to support their rider during mounting. Be sure you are at ease with the method of support, both mentally and physically, before moving into the riding arena.

Little strokes and tickles on shoulders or back to encourage good posture can be used.

#### GUIDELINES DURING LESSON

Leaders and sidewalkers should work together:

1. Keep the horse far enough away from the fence so as not to "trap" the outside sidewalker; and
2. Keep conversation VERY minimal so that the rider can listen to the instructor.

Volunteer should aid the rider only if needed:

1. Riders need to develop independence, but not at the expense of an accident.

Keep a safe distance from other horses:

1. Maintain a minimum of 2-horse lengths between you and the horse in front of you; and
2. Make a circle or cut across the arena to avoid getting too close. Please advise rider and sidewalkers before turning.

Always stay with your horse and riders unless otherwise instructed.

Horses should stand still when asked to stop:

1. The leader should stand facing the horse at a 45 degree angle; and
2. Try not to hold the horse's head too tight – this is a good time for the horse to relax.

Horses should not make any quick movements:

1. Make a gradual transition to the trot and back to walk. Avoid making a transition on a turn;
2. Make large circles instead of small ones, unless otherwise instructed; and
3. Do not make quick starts or stops.

Horses should keep their heads level:

1. If the head is too high, the horse will hollow his back and unbalance the rider.
2. If the head is too low, the horse will pull the rider forward.

ASK THE LEADER TO STOP IF:

1. The rider is off balance and cannot regain it while horse is moving;

2. The saddle pad has slipped or the girth is loose;
3. The stirrups need adjusting;
4. The rider's helmet needs to be adjusted;
5. The rider is fatigued, in pain, or needs to stop for other reasons; and
6. You need to change sides or are having some difficulty and cannot carry out your job in comfort or efficiency. When changing sides, have one volunteer change at a time so that you never leave the rider un-supported.

## **POSTURE AND MOVEMENT**

It is the responsibility of the PATH INTL. Certified Instructor, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Pathologist, etc. to evaluate a rider's posture. This information is provided to the volunteer to enhance your understanding of the basic principles of "ideal" riding position.

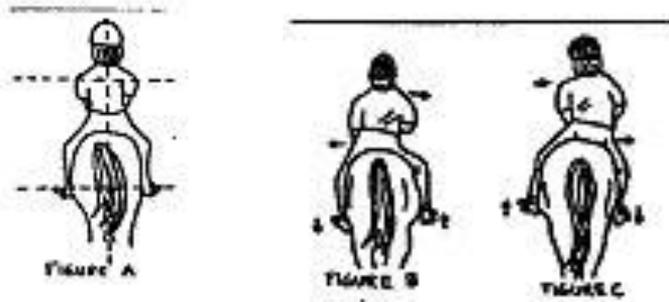
Position of the Rider (by Lorrie Renker and Martha Biery)

All riders strive toward the "ideal" riding position. It should be no different for riders with disabilities. Yet, instructors often appear afraid to make position corrections. So, while not all riders will be able to achieve the ideal position, that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. The rider's position has little to do with looking good and everything to do with being in balance and moving in harmony with the horse. The better the body alignment the better the therapeutic benefits follow.

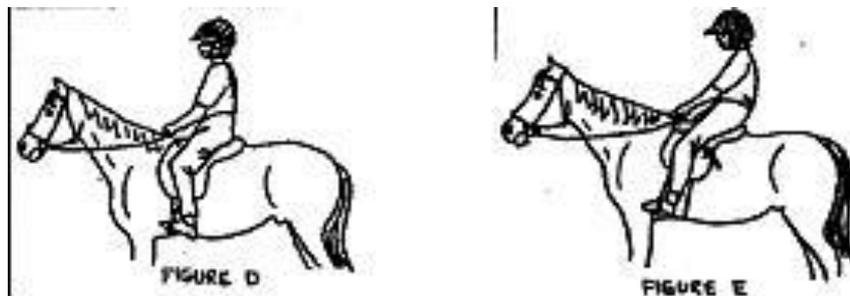
The best way to evaluate the rider's position on the horse is to step back and view the rider from all angles. The rider may look great from the side but could be off center when viewed from behind. Don't be afraid to make corrections.

Videotapes often show a rider in a poor position for the entire lesson with no attempt made to improve the position. Here are some common problems to look for:

1. When viewed from behind, the rider should sit as straight as possible (Figure A). Many riders sit to one side and then have to make corrections in the rest of the body to maintain balance. When this imbalance happens, one foot will appear lower than the other. Figure B shows a rider with the left foot lower, the pelvis leaning to the left and the upper body correcting to the right. Figure C shows just the opposite – the right foot lower, the pelvis leaning to the right and the upper body correcting to the left. Neither of these positions helps the rider strengthen muscles evenly. Correcting this position usually requires aligning the rider's base (get the butt square in the saddle).



2. When viewed from the side the rider should sit as straight as possible (Figure D) Videotapes often show riders in the “sofa seat” or C curve (Figure E). Often the rider will sit up if asked. Sometimes the position will reflect the rider’s posture off the horse. Encourage elongation of the leg usually improves the posture. To achieve a better position, it may be necessary to evaluate the type of saddle being used. Is the saddle level on the horse so that it will encourage a good posture? Just placing a bounce pad or lollipop under the saddle does not insure a level saddle. Often the weight of the rider compresses the pad completely, resulting in a backward-sloping saddle. It is literally impossible to keep the leg positioned under the rider’s pelvis in these circumstances. Use of a foam pad with more density will help. Ideally, the saddle should be fitted correctly to the horse and the rider.

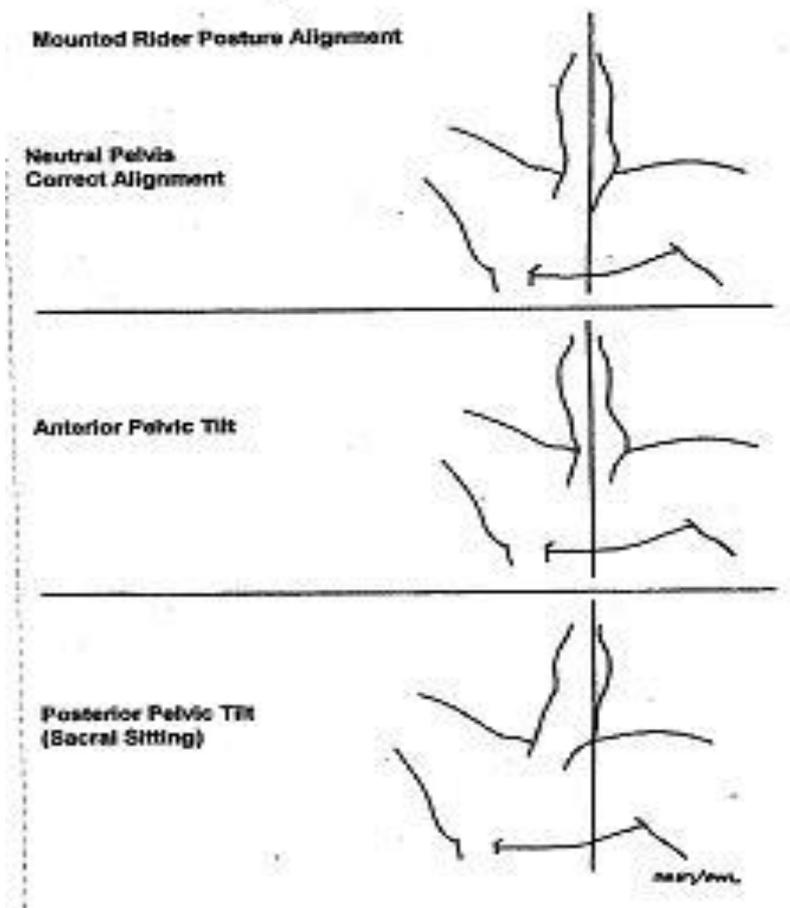


3. Figure F shows a rider with a toe down and the leg pinched up. This position could indicate a rider with tight adductor muscles, an extreme forward-seat saddle or stirrups that are too short. The rider should be encouraged to lengthen his legs. This lengthening could be achieved by riding without stirrups or by trying a different style of saddle.



The important thing to remember is to constantly evaluate the rider's position. Consider all factors, such as disability, limitations, posture off the horse and equipment used. Then work toward improving the rider's position.

### Mounted rider posture alignment pictures



### SPECIAL NOTES

Riders falling off horses are rare, but it can happen. Don't panic! Leaders stop all horses in the class and each volunteer tend to their rider and horse. **DO NOT** leave your post. Stop where you are and wait for instruction as to where to move. The instructor is responsible for the fallen student. Safety is all-important, and we need to take our jobs very seriously, but we are also here to have fun and falling off a horse is always a possibility when riding.

Be patient with your riders; give them time and a half to respond, to try, and to do the task. The rewards, no matter how small or large, make your volunteer work very worthwhile. Without volunteers, we would have a tough time making this program a reality.

### AFTER CLASS

The leader or rider may lead the horse back to the barn. If the rider leads the horse, the leader should walk on the right side of the horse to assist if needed.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Grace Lake staff makes every effort to maintain confidentiality regarding individual participants and their personal information. This can be difficult, since many participants are very open about their disability, medical history or personal challenges.

During riding lessons and therapy sessions you may be told information about participants in order to safely and effectively assist a person. This information generally is confidential.

Try to be discreet about confidential information you are told by a participant or their family members and absolutely do not pass on information you may be told during a session. Keep things to yourself even with other volunteers. It is very easy to start to discuss what medical problems “little Susie” has to cope with, but that really is not appropriate. If you are asked, “What disability does Mrs. Jackson have?” by a center visitor, it is not appropriate for you to discuss it. Be friendly, but explain that confidentiality is part of your volunteer role at the center and that this question should be best put to Mrs. Jackson herself, or may be taken to the center leadership.

### **Limits of Confidentiality:**

There may be situations where you feel it is necessary to reveal confidential information in order to keep someone safe. For example, a rider may tell you that she has a severe medical problem that day, but she really wants to ride. You may question the safety of that decision. Discreetly sharing the information with the center staff is really your responsibility; you are not bound by confidentiality in this case. Your primary role is to keep the participants safe. Use your common sense. If anyone at the center tells you something that is troubling to you, such as threatening suicide (even in a flippant manner) it is your responsibility to tell an instructor or person in charge in a confidential manner.

(The following is an excerpt from the book entitled *Therapeutic Riding I Strategies for Instruction Book 1*, by Barbara T. Engel, 1998:)

## **THERAPEUTIC RIDING: ITS BENEFITS, PROFESSIONS AND DIVISIONS**

Therapeutic horseback riding is similar to all horseback riding. It is a *strenuous sport* involving all the muscles in the body with risk factors. It gives the rider the opportunity to bond with a large responsive animal. It provides a team sport – the horse – the rider that focuses on self-improvement and not necessarily competition with other humans. All riding provides the rider a physical activity which increases general health in the same manner as tennis, golf, running, biking, or swimming might do (swimming or riding do not require strong legs). Riding can stimulate the cardiovascular system and strengthen muscles. It provides weight bearing and

increases balance, coordination and body awareness. Because it is a leisure sport with the companionship of an animal, horseback riding has a soothing mental and social effect which may provide the rider with a feeling of well being.

The term therapeutic horseback riding is an umbrella term referring to riding in a setting, which is specially equipped to handle people with special needs. The instructors and assistants are trained not only in horsemanship but also:

- To understand problems presented by each disability and are comfortable with them
- To develop teaching techniques that will accommodate special needs
- To train horses for disable riders
- To use special equipment to compensate for disabilities
- To be concerned with safety factors unique to persons with disabilities

There are many aspects of riding that have brought people to the stable, but it is the horse who is the major focus. The horse has a unique nature and provides a rich assortment of movements which can do wonders for the human mind and body.

Therapeutic effects from riding may include:

**Exercise:** Children and adults with disabilities ordinarily have little access to the quality of exercise that riding provides. Riding involves all of the muscles in the body and, in addition, stimulates all body systems. A strong cardiovascular system and a strong set of lungs are required to make a person function. Many children and adults with severe physical problems have poorly developed lungs due to their limited ability to challenge their cardiovascular systems. Exercise can be like giving the system a whole new set of batteries. Many instructors have been impressed with the great changes they see in clients in their practice even after a month of therapy or riding. This change is due to increased exercise which is imposed on the client as part of the treatment as well as the “therapeutic” intervention.

**Three Dimensional Swinging Gait:** The gait of the horse causes the rider’s pelvis, trunk and shoulder girdle to react in ways very similar to those produced by the normal human adult walk. On a horse, a non-walking person can actually feel what walking is like without the need for weight bearing through the legs. You will hear riders state, “the horse is giving me long legs and walking for me” as they sat on the shoulders of a horse. One frequently hears therapeutic riding instructors mention riders who began to walk more easily after riding. The horse has provided the rider with the upper and lower body sensation and mental images of walking.

**Balance:** The side to side, back and forth, and up and down movements of the horse have the effect of gently shifting the rider off balance to the right, off balance to the left and back to the center. This constant shifting helps develop balance in the rider. Many people with physical disabilities have difficulty with balance which causes major problems in normal function.

**Stimulation:** The undulating movements from the gait of the horse are transferred to the rider providing neuromuscular stimulation while increasing cardiovascular output and respiratory excitation. This offers the rider a rich source of sensation. Rhythmic movement on the horse has been found to be relaxing and soothing to the human mind and body.

**Bonding:** The horse is a social creature who will readily bond with humans. The horse will accept a rider with no prejudice. He will tolerate behavior from a rider that humans find difficult to accept. He immediately returns kindness and affection and will respond to the rider's commands. Bonding has been found to be basic to the development of communication.

**Respiration:** Exercise increases respiration which in turn increases the ability to vocalize. Speech requires strong lungs. The lungs pass air over the vocal cords to produce sound. Further, the increase in respiration also increases alertness (Oetter, 1989). As a result of both the bonding and the effects of movement on speech, one may see increases in social language and speech.

**Happiness and Pleasure:** Norman Cousins (Cousins, 1989), with his physician, has documented the healing effect of positive emotions and laughter upon the human body. Certainly, the horse brings us pleasure and the environment gives us determination, hope, faith and purpose: all the elements which Cousins feels will heal the mind and body. Most of the clients in a therapeutic riding program are not "sick," but may be recovering from illness or injuries due to accidents. Even the child with cerebral palsy is attempting to gain motor control. Every therapist and anyone working with children have observed that when the client is happy and motivated, progress comes more easily. A good attitude does seem to help when one is working to regain the body's functional abilities.

## GETTING TO KNOW THE RIDER WITH A DISABILITY

### GENERAL APPROACH AND INTERACTION

It is important to remember that every child or adult is an individual and wants to be treated with that understanding, regardless of having a disability or not. Each has his own learning rate, style of learning, unique personality and temperament. One must always look beyond the disability into the person. Provide them an enriched experience with warmth and a favorable environment in which to learn and grow. All people, disabled or not, want to feel that they are not different from the rest of their fellow men.

### HOW TO RELATE TO THE PERSON WITH A DISABILITY

Being around disabled people may be a new experience for you. You may be overwhelmed at first with things you have never seen or do not understand. This is natural for most people. Allow yourself time to get used to being with the person who is disabled. Do not give up on being a part of the program without a fair try, for your experience can be very rewarding. At first you may want to do jobs that are not in direct contact with the riders. Feel free to talk to a staff member about this. This is a common problem. If working directly with our riders is a hardship for you, consider helping us in some other way.

### SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU RELATE TO A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY:

Each of us has to learn how to relate to others, especially if it requires new skills. Here are a few suggestions to assist your relationship with the disabled person.

1. **Be yourself.** Relate to a person with a disability the same way you relate to other people. Use conversation and social behavior that you might use in any new situation.
2. **Allow the person with a disability to be himself/herself.** With or without disabilities, each of us is a unique individual.
3. **Appreciate what a person with a disability can do.** Once you get to know him/her, his/her interests and his/her abilities may surprise you. Remember that the difficulties the person may be facing could stem from society's attitudes and barrier rather than from the disability itself. Disabled people generally do not view themselves to be as disabled as society perceives them to be.
4. **Explore mutual interests in a friendly way.** Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally, but don't try. Develop a friendship by showing an interest in the person, not his/her disability. Most people prefer to have someone ask them about their disability rather than receiving stares.
5. **Be patient.** Let the person with the disability set that pace for walking, talking and other activities. Be considerate of the extra time it might take to accomplish something or respond to something.
6. **Do not separate a person with a disability from a wheelchair, crutches or other aids unless he/she asks.** These aids may need to be near by.

7. **Offer encouragement but not pity.** The person with the disability wants to be treated as an equal in all things. Give him/her a chance to prove himself/herself.
8. **Respect a person's independence.** He/She may prefer to do things for himself/herself. Wait until help is needed or requested. Do not overwhelm the person with help or insist upon helping when he/she is managing alone.
9. **Enjoy yourself.** Do not be afraid to laugh and have fun. You will be developing a friendship with a person from whom you may learn a great deal about life and how to live it.
10. **Relax.** Let the rider put you at ease if you do not know what to say.
11. **Speak directly to the person with the disability.** Your attention should be to them and not to someone with them.
12. **Children and adults will be glad to talk about themselves.** They prefer to have someone ask them about their disability instead of staring at them. They would rather discuss other things like TV shows, movies, sports, foods, and other things we are all interested in.
13. **Use conversation** and social behavior that you might use in any new situation.
14. **Offer assistance when asked or when the situation obviously requires it.** Do not overwhelm the person with help or insist upon helping when they are managing alone. When a person is trying to increase their physical ability, effort is necessary.
15. **Do not hinder** the rider's ability to expand their skills and independence, even when their movements may appear awkward to you.
16. **Respect the person's right to independence** and their request for the kind of assistance they request.
17. **Be guided by the wishes of the person with the disability.** Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally, but don't pry.
18. **Do not be afraid** to say to either a child or an adult, "I'm sorry I cannot understand you. Please say it again."
19. **Communicate with your heart** and see each person from his heart.
20. **Acknowledge that every person has the opportunity for vast potential in his life.** Share the feeling that each person's potential is found in the present moment.

### **CHOOSING WORDS WITH DIGNITY**

When talking about a person with a disability, make reference to the person first, not the disability.

AVOID: afflicted with blindness  
 USE: person who is blind

AVOID: crippled  
 USE: person with disabilities, person who is physically challenged

AVOID: stricken with...  
 USE: person who has...

AVOID: confined or restricted to a wheelchair, crutches, etc.  
 USE: person who uses wheelchair, crutches, etc.

The preferred terms focus attention on the uniqueness and worth of the individual rather than emphasizing the disabling condition. The connotation of “dis-ability” is very important to avoid. Words such as defective, deformed, invalid, lame, maimed, spastic, and crippled imply pity, infirmity, and a general lack of competence. People are neither invalid nor defective. People aren’t spastic, muscles are. By choosing words carefully, positive images can be conveyed about persons with disabilities.

## **GLOSSARY OF PHYSICAL & COGNITIVE DISABILITIES**

The following are brief non-medical descriptions of some of the 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 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/mouthing all objects; ritualistic behaviors.

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** Interaction 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 (of therapeutic riding):** 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 disturbances; learning disabilities.

### **Cerebral Vascular Accident – Stroke (CVA)**

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 impair mentation, speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength.

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** 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 (of therapeutic riding):** 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 hands are often broad and short. Usually hypo tonic, have mobile joints and tend to be short and slightly overweight. Prone to respiratory infections.

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance, posture, 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 or schizophrenia may be exhibited.

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** 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 expressions.

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

### **Hearing Impairment**

Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound.

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

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

### **Learning Disabilities**

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 (of therapeutic riding):** Effects depend upon the particular disorder. Stimulates attention span, group skills, cooperation, language skills, posture and coordination.

### **Intellectual Disability (new word for MR)**

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 (of therapeutic riding):** 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 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 (of therapeutic riding):** Maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides opportunities for emotional therapy.

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

### **Muscular Dystrophy (MD)**

Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degradation of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males.

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

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** 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 virus disease.

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

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** Strengthens non-paralyzed muscles, stimulates posture.

### **Scoliosis**

Lateral curve of the spine with a C or S curve with rotary component.

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

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** Stimulates postural symmetry, strengthens trunk muscles.

(Note: Severe scoliosis is a contraindication for therapeutic riding).

## **EQUINE SENSES**

When developing relationships and working with horses, communication is key. It is critical to provide a safe environment in a therapeutic riding setting. Beginning a process of understanding the horse senses, instincts and implications is a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks and increasing positive relationships.

### **SMELL:**

The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and it allows him to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations.

#### Implications:

1. Allows horses the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment by smelling.
2. It is recommended that treats are not carried in your pocket since horses may desire to go after them.
3. Volunteers should be discouraged from eating or having food in the arena.

### **HEARING:**

The horse's sense of hearing is also thought to be very acute. The horse may also combine their sense of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds. "Hearing and not seeing" is often the cause of the fright/flight response. Note the position of the horse's ears (pictures following). Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest. Ears that are laid back often communicates that they are upset and/or showing aggression towards another horse or person.

#### Implications:

1. Horses are wary when they hear something but do not see it. If your horse is acting nervous, talk to him in a quiet and calm voice for reassurance.
2. Avoid shouting or using a loud voice. This can be frightening to a horse.
3. Watch your horses' ears for increased communication. Stiffly pricked ears indicate interest. Dropping ears indicate relaxation, inattentiveness (easily startled), exhaustion or illness. Flattened ears indicated anger, threat or fear. Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest.

### **SIGHT:**

The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head; there is good peripheral (lateral) vision, but poorer frontal vision. A horse focuses on objects by raising and lowering its head. The horse's visual memory is very accurate. Horses are thought to see quite well in the dark, due to the large size of their eyes. There is still controversy as to whether or not horses see in color.

#### Implications:

1. The horse may notice if something in the arena or out on a trail is different. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects. Introduce new props that the horse may be unfamiliar with.
2. The horse has better peripheral vision; consider a slightly looser rein, enabling him to move his head when taking a look at objects.
3. Although the horse has good peripheral vision, consider two blind spots: directly in front and directly behind. The best way to approach a horse is to

his shoulder. It may startle him if you approach from behind or directly in front. The horse may be unable to see around the mouth area, which is a safety consideration when hand feeding.

### **TOUCH:**

Touch is used as communication between horses and between horses and people. Horses are sensitive to soft or rough touch with a person's hands or legs.

Implications:

1. Handlers should treat the horses gently but firmly.
2. Each horse has sensitive areas, and it is important to be familiar with them (i.e. flank and belly areas)
3. Watch rider leg position. Riders may need appropriate assistance to reduce a "clothes pin" effect with their legs. Ask the instructor/therapist what is the best handling technique.
4. Horses will often touch or paw at unfamiliar objects. For example, a horse may paw at a bridge or ground pole before crossing over it.

### **TASTE:**

Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects.

Implications:

1. Taste closely linked with smell and touch; therefore, a horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people. Be careful, as this could lead to possible biting.

### **SIXTH SENSE:**

Horses do have a "sixth sense" when evaluating the disposition of those around him. Horses can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for their sensitive response to the rider. At times there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and horses. It is important that the instructor/therapist know if you're having a difficult time relating or getting along with a particular horse.

### **THE HORSE'S LIFESTYLE:**

In addition to understanding the horse's sixth sense, we need to appreciate and increase our awareness of the horse's lifestyle. This will assist us in responding appropriately to his reactions to situations.

### **FLIGHT AS A NATURAL INSTINCT:**

Horses would rather turn and run away from danger than face and fight it.

Implications:

1. At a sudden movement or noise, the horse might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly.
2. A frightened horse that is tied up or being held tightly might try to escape by pulling back. Relax your hold or untie him quickly and usually he will relax. Be sure not to stand directly behind the horse.

3. If flight is not possible, the horse could either turn to kick out or face the problem and rear, especially in a tight area like the stall. A halter with a lead rope may assist with maintaining control while working around the horse in a stall.
4. If a horse appears to be frightened or fearful (note the position of the horse's ears in pictures following article), may be helpful to allow a more experienced horse to lead.
5. Most horses chosen to work in a therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee. The horse may look to you for reassurance. It is helpful if the volunteer remains calm and talks to the horse in a soothing voice.

### **HERD ANIMAL:**

Horses like to stay together in a herd or group with one or two horses dominant, with a pecking order amongst the rest.

#### Implications:

1. Be aware that a horse may not like being alone. This is a consideration when horses are leaving the arena or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride.
2. Be aware that if the horse in front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also attempt to trot or canter.
3. If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected.
4. For safety, it is recommended to keep at least one horse's length between horses when riding within a group to respect the horse's space and pecking order.

Being aware of horse behaviors is one of the best safety precautions that can be used in your facility. Knowing how to read your horse can prevent an accident and increase the quality of your "mutual" relationship.

## READING HIS EARS

The horse's ears and actions are the key to his emotions. He can tell you what he is paying attention to and how he feels by the way he uses his ears and the way he acts. Following are some tips to his emotions.

		
<b>Ears forward but relaxed</b> Interested in what's in front of him	<b>Ears turned back but relaxed</b> Listening to his rider or what's behind him	<b>Ears pointed stiffly forward</b> Alarmed or nervous about what's ahead. Looking for danger
		
<b>Ears pointed left and right</b> Relaxed, paying attention to the scenery on both sides	<b>Ears stiffly back</b> Annoyed or worried about what's behind him; might kick if annoyed. Other signs you should notice are: • Tucking the tail down tightly. Danger to the rear. Horse may bolt, buck or kick. Watch out if ears are flattened, too! • Switching the tail. Annoyance and irritation: at biting flies, stinging insects or licking bothersome actions of a rider or another horse. • Droopy ears and resting one hind leg on top. Calm and resting, horse may be dozing. Don't wake him by startling him! • Winkling up the face and swinging the head. Threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse. Watch out for biting or kicking.	<b>Droopy ears</b> Calm and resting, horse may be dozing
		
<b>Ears flattened against neck</b> Violently angry, in a fighting mood. May fight, bite or kick.		
Information and Illustrations provided by RDA		

(The following is an excerpt from the book entitled *Lyons on Horses* by John Lyons with Sinclair Browning, 1991)

### LYONS ON HORSES My Philosophy on Horses

I want my horse to be my partner. To me, that means someone who helps me, who isn't a nuisance, and who makes my job easier. Someone I can trust and who trusts me; someone I don't have to force to do something.

In order to have a true partner, I have to let go of him and trust him. As I let go I have to understand that he's going to make mistakes. I don't need to reprimand my horse for his mistakes; instead I need to show him why I want him to do certain things. I know that if I can avoid fights with him, I'll end up with a better partner.

In many ways, dealing with horses is a lot like dealing with kids. There are times when in order to teach them you simply have to let go. For instance, a lot of people want their horses to stand by them or to follow them, but they never let go of the reins. If they do and the horse walks off, they're inclined to think, "What a dumb horse, he has to be tied up!" If I let go of my horse and he takes off, I think, "I'm a

lousy teacher.” His walking off tells me I need to teach him more in order for him to stay with me.

If I can't get my horse to overcome a problem, it's my lack of knowledge, not the horse that is at fault. If I can't get him to load in a trailer, it's not because his eyesight is bad, or that his mother was an Appaloosa, or that he's having a bad day; it's because I haven't taught him right.

If you see a problem in a horse, or a training area in which he needs improvement, don't ignore it. For instance, if you have a head-shy horse you know that overcoming this problem is a priority before you attempt to mount him. If you don't correct the problem, you run the risk of being injured or even killed if you accidentally get close to his head. In such cases ask yourself which training problem comes first.

I don't care what the horse has done before or what's happened to him. From here on out we'll deal with today only. We can't change the fact that someone may have hit the horse over the head five thousand times, or that little kids may have thrown rocks at him. There is no way any of us can change what has already happened, so it's futile to spend any time thinking about the horse's past experiences. It's his problem now that's important, not the history of the problem. Sometimes we get so involved with that history that we can't concentrate on correcting the problem.

The past can also cloud our thinking as we begin making excuses for the horse's poor conduct, rather than asking the horse to change his behavior.

The horse is a very adaptable animal. He is fully capable of changing his behavioral patterns; especially if he is given time to make his own decisions.

I personally don't believe any horse is either vicious or beyond being able to be trained.

Horses are never too old to learn or to change bad habits. The good thing about a horse is that whatever behavior we'd like to change, we can. We don't have to accept any behavior from the horse that we do not like. We just have to concentrate twice as hard on training him to do those things we want to, to get him to change.

The bad things about a horse is that everything I like about him today probably won't always be there, unless I continue to practice the things the horse is doing that I like. I also never want to lose sight of the fact that my horse is always learning.

You must decide what it is you want your horse to do. Obviously some breeds do certain tasks more gracefully than others. A draft horse or a thoroughbred can do a sliding stop, but neither does it as prettily, or holds it as long, as a horse that has been bred to do it. My point is that all horses are capable, to some degree, of jumping, sliding stops, barrel racing, trail riding, or any other task you wish them to perform.