

**Bitterroot Therapeutic Riding**

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**Volunteer Information**

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# Volunteer Policies & Procedures

## Leaders

While the sidewalker is mainly responsible for the student, the leader is responsible for the horse. They must see to it that the horse is properly groomed, tacked up, under control throughout the lesson and properly put away.

Should a problem arise during a lesson, all leaders should quietly bring their horses to a halt and then stand directly in front of them, remaining in this position until the instructor directs otherwise.

Please be aware the horse is a professional and needs to be treated as such. This is their job. While at work, please do not play with the horse's head, or distract their attention away from the rider and class.

## Sidewalkers

A student may have one or two sidewalkers. The sidewalkers are responsible for helping to maintain the student's balance and leg/hand position. Sidewalkers must BE ALERT to the student at all times. If the student should start to slip, resist the urge to grab them. Instead, gently push them back into the proper position. The sidewalker is responsible for the comfort and safety of the rider while he is on the horse.

The sidewalker's position in relation to the rider makes it tempting to carry on a conversation. Excessive talking in the arena is very distracting to all concerned. Everyone should keep his or her focus on the instructor. If talking to the student, you may miss important directions from the instructor.

The major support position the sidewalker will probably be asked to maintain is called a "thigh hold". This position requires you placing your forearm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and holding onto the front of the saddle or pad with your fingers. If you push down with your wrist, you then keep the rider's thigh tight against the horse. This allows firm support and keeps you in the correct position next to the rider's leg.

The sidewalker may also be asked to support the rider at the hip. This involves holding your hand and wrist cupped around the rider's hip, on the side you are on. This allows for more support of the rider's pelvis and spine. It is important in this position that you do not rest on the horse's back. The horse needs to carry the rider and can get uncomfortable if it needs to carry you as well.

## Spotters

A spotter is frequently used with independent riders. These are riders that can safely balance and guide the horse by themselves. A spotter will be assigned to a rider and will help that rider from the time they arrive at the center to the time that they leave.

## What to Wear

Remember that you are working in an exciting program and might often be in the public's eye through newspapers, magazines or even TV. Take pride in your job and your appearance.

1. For safety as well as comfort, volunteers should dress in close-fitting clothing. Loose, floppy clothes can get caught and tangled with equipment.
2. Dress in layers that you can shed as you exercise, especially during cooler months.
3. For your protection, ALWAYS WEAR BOOTS or sturdy walking shoes while working around the horses. DO NOT WEAR sandals, slip-ons, or light tennis shoes.
4. Your hair must be out of your eyes at all times. Tie it back or put it under a hat.
5. Gloves are advisable for warmth and protection.
6. Bring a jacket even if you don't need it in town, it's cooler in the barn than you may think!
7. During the summer, be sure you dress coolly and wear a hat that will not fly off.
8. Avoid dangly earrings and bracelets that can hamper your movements, get pulled off by a rider, or distract the horse.

## **Inclement Weather**

BITTERROOT THERAPEUTIC RIDING is fortunate to have an indoor arena, so classes are rarely cancelled due to weather conditions. However, if driving conditions become unsafe, be sure to call (406) 961-2999 or (406) 880-BTRP no later than two hours prior to your scheduled class time. If the class is cancelled, there will be a message on the recorder letting you know.

## **Substitutions**

Volunteers are requested to be available each week for the same classes. This allows for getting to know the same riders and horses and to be able to assist the instructor in a capable knowledgeable way. If you are unable to attend your scheduled class, please call the Volunteer Coordinator at (406) 961-2999 or (406) 880-BTRP as soon as possible so that a substitute can be found for your class. If possible, please give the Volunteer Coordinator at least 24 hours notice of your absence.

If you would like to be on the sub list, you can sign up at the volunteer orientation, mark it on your registration form, or let the Volunteer Coordinator know. Offer to sub only if you want people to call you and you would be able to help out at least occasionally.

## **Sign in Procedures and Recording Hours**

Your volunteer time is important to us for funding purposes and recognizing outstanding volunteers. Please be sure to record your hours each time you come. Sign-in sheets are kept at the arena entrance. Remember to sign out when you leave!

## 101 Ways to Become a More Effective Volunteer ...

1. Consider safety first at all times.
2. Treat riders and horses kindly but firmly.
3. Give instructor feedback about the rider at appropriate times.
4. Do not mistreat or abuse horses or riders.
5. Assist your rider in maintaining the order of activity, the horse's spacing, and positions of hands and body when necessary.
6. Remain calm in an emergency and remember your job.
7. Praise should be given equivalent to the deed accomplished.
8. Smiles say a thousand words...only louder.
9. Acknowledge the efforts of your rider.
10. Consult instructor/staff in praise techniques for each rider.
11. Allowing riders to feel upset helps them to accept their feelings.
12. Do not hang or rest on horse, rider, fencing or rails.
13. Always inform a rider before touching them.
14. Wear sensible clothing and shoes.
15. Minimize the distractions for riders who are easily distracted.
16. First ask the rider to do the task independently, assist if needed.
17. Ensure a rider's feet are out of the stirrups prior to dismounting.
18. At first, offer support at the trot.
19. Always encourage the rider to thank the horse.
20. Maximize, not minimize your rider's capabilities.
21. If you are afraid or apprehensive, the horse will know it.
22. Do not talk through your rider ... talk to your rider.
23. Support your team. Don't criticize or make fun of others.
24. Encourage teamwork.
25. Re-latch all doors and gates behind you.
26. If you're not sure, don't be afraid to ask questions.
27. Notify an instructor immediately if a horse is acting oddly.
28. The riding instructor is in charge of all riding emergencies.
29. Never approach an unsuspecting horse from the rear.
30. Never walk under a horse's neck.
31. Be familiar with your center's emergency procedures.
32. Contact the instructor about all mishaps and their circumstances.
33. Stay attentive to the horse, rider, instructor, and situation.
34. If you are unable to understand a rider, ask for assistance.
35. Never hand feed horses.
36. Park in designated areas.
37. Be reliable, everyone is depending on you to do your part.
38. Be courteous and respect each person's needs.
39. Promptness and reliability are key to a program's success.
40. Greet your rider upon arrival and acknowledge their departure.
41. Notify a volunteer organizer ASAP of scheduling conflicts.
42. Maintain a professional but friendly relationship with a rider.
43. Your genuine friendship and empathy are appreciated.
44. Do not judge a person's abilities.

45. Remain calm in any emergency or stressful situation.
46. Weakness in a rider's neck and trunk require precaution.
47. Give verbal cues prior to change for the visually challenged.
48. Remember that smoke may irritate a sensitive rider.
49. Make new friends while being of assistance to others.
50. Make reference to the person first, not the disability.
51. To further understand a rider, try to observe them. The eyes, mouth, face, and body movements are all key communicators.
52. Accept each individual as they are and respect each person's individual needs.
53. Listen to and help the rider focus on the instructor's directions.
54. Respect everyone's right to confidentiality.
55. Know and respect your center's policies.
56. Encourage the rider to be as independent as possible.
57. Allow a rider to fail as well as succeed.
58. Bring your positive energy, not your problems to the rider.
59. Be attentive to the instructor. Keep talking to a minimum.
60. Allow the rider's efforts to succeed in games, not yours.
61. Allow the rider ample time to process a direction.
62. Help maintain a safe and welcoming environment.
63. Never wrap a lead around your hand, butterfly wrap the excess.
64. Check clothing under rider's legs to make sure it's not binding.
65. Be conscientious about dress and personal hygiene.
66. Remain calm and avoid rushing.
67. Offer physical support only when needed.
68. Be willing to learn and participate in center educational programs.
69. Supervise riders when away from caregivers or parents.
70. Don't suffer through a personality clash. Ask to be reassigned.
71. Treat another as you would like to be treated.
72. Never become so relaxed or distracted as to forget your rider.
73. If using a safety belt, don't pull your rider off balance.
74. Allow riders to share their lives and friendships without prying.
75. Return things to the spot where you found them.
76. Use a halter and lead line when going to and from the stabling areas.
77. If something is broken or needs fixing, let someone know.
78. If a horse is lame or injured tell an instructor immediately.
79. If a rider has fallen, never move them! Defer to the instructor.
80. Pet a horse on the neck or shoulder, not on the face.
81. Any form of injury to yourself or others must be reported.
82. Pay attention to how you move and know your physical limits.
83. When lifting, use your legs, not your back.
84. Do not run or make loud noises around horses.
85. Be aware of the phone and first aid kit locations.
86. Do not bring pets, children, or others without prior permission.
87. Respect your coworkers and their responsibilities.
88. Sign or check in and out every time you volunteer.
89. Check your schedule and get nametag upon arrival.
90. Choose your words carefully; since they can impact other's lives.

91. Call in advance if ill or unable to report for your assignment.
92. Patience + Praise = Success & Results
93. Be attentive to signs of rider fatigue and frustration.
94. Be sincere in the offer of services.
95. Do not force a rider's body parts into desired positions.
96. Alert the instructor immediately if a seizure takes place.
97. Be sober and drug free when you volunteer.
98. Enjoy the pleasure in helping in an assisted riding experience.
99. Share knowledge and experiences with others.
100. Maintain the dignity and integrity of the Center's services.
101. Remember that your dedication and sincerity truly make a world of difference!

## Effective Sidewalking

By Susan Tucker and Molly Lingua, R.P.T.

Sidewalkers are the ones who normally get the most hands-on duties in therapeutic riding. They are directly responsible for the rider. As such, they have the capability to either enhance or detract from the lesson.

In the arena, the sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and to riders who already have perceptual problems, it can be overwhelming. If two sidewalkers are working with one student, one should be the “designated talker” to avoid this situation.

When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process it. If the instructor says “Turn to the right toward me,” and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, “Right,” to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and learn when they need help and when they’re just not paying attention.

It’s important to maintain a position by the rider’s knee. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security if the horse should trip or shy.

There are two ways to hold onto the rider without interfering. The most commonly used is the “arm-over-the-thigh” hold. The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle (flap or pommel depending on the horse’s size) with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider’s thigh. Be careful that the elbow doesn’t accidentally dig into the rider’s leg.

Sometimes, pressure on the thigh can increase and/or cause muscle spasticity, especially with the Cerebral Palsy population. In this case, the “therapeutic hold” may be used. Here the leg is held at the joints, usually the knee and/or ankle. Check with the instructor/therapist for the best way to assist. In the (unlikely) even of an emergency, the “arm-over-the-thigh” hold is the most secure.

Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider’s waist. It is tempting, especially when walking beside a pony with a young or small rider, but it can offer too much and uneven support. At times, it can even pull the rider off balance and make riding more difficult. Encourage your students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.

If the instructor chooses to use a safety belt on your rider, be very careful not to pull down or push up on it. As your arm tires it’s hard to avoid these movements, so rather than gripping the handle firmly, just touch your thumb and finger together around it. This way you are in position to assist the rider if needed, but you will neither give unneeded support nor pull him off balance. When you are ready for relief for your arm, ask the leader to move into the center to stop and trade sides, one at a time, with the other sidewalker. (Instructors: if your rider has serious enough balance problems to warrant a safety belt, you should probably be using two sidewalkers).

During Exercises, pay attention to your student. Sometimes volunteers forget that the riders are to do the exercises and the sidewalkers are to reinforce and assist. The same applies to games. Don’t get so

competitive that your rider doesn't get to use his skills because you do it for him in an all out effort to win.

The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow to be as normal as he can possibly be. You are right at his side, so help the instructor to challenge him to the best of his ability.

Without you, these programs couldn't exist. We thank you for all you give and challenge you to be the best you can be.

## The Role of the Leader

By Susan F. Tucker, NARHA Accreditation Committee

As a volunteer, one of the most challenging duties you could be assigned is the position of leader. A leader's first responsibility is the horse but you must also constantly be aware of the rider, instructor, and any potential hazards in or around the arena. In addition, you must also consider the sidewalkers, making sure there is enough room along the fence and around obstacles for them to pass.

An effective leader pays close attention to the rider's needs as well as to where the horse is going. This attention reinforces the rider's attempts to control the horse. However, you should not execute an instruction for the rider before he has time to process the information and make an effort to comply. Sometimes it may be appropriate to walk into the corner and stand until the student figures out what to do.

Avoid the temptation to talk to the rider and/or sidewalkers. A rider may get confused by too much input and not know who's in charge (Instructors often make terrible leaders because they can't keep their mouths shut!).

Figure A depicts a few faults common among leaders. Here is a leader grimly marching along-head down, one hand on the lead snap, the other inside the coiled end of the rope-dragging a strung-out horse. In a battle with a horse, you lose. You must get the horse to cooperate. Walk alongside the horse, about even with his eye. This position helps keep him in a proper frame, which is more beneficial for everyone.

Talk to the horse; most of them know "whoa", "walk", and "trot", or can learn the words. Watch where you're going and what's happening around you. Do not walk backward to look at the rider. It's dangerous for everyone and the horse isn't eager to follow someone who can't see where he is going.

Figure B shows the correct position for leaders. The lead shank is held with the right hand, 6-12 inches from the snap, allowing free motion of the horse's head. This position is more therapeutic to the rider and less irritating to the horse.

The tail end of the lead should be looped in a figure eight in the left hand to avoid tripping on it. Never coil the rope around your hand. A sudden pull could crush or amputate your fingers.

Use short tugs rather than a steady pull to keep a lazy horse moving. The horse can set himself against a steady pull, but tugs keep him awake. Move out, about 1000 steps per 15 minutes to provide the most therapeutic benefit.

When you halt for more than a few seconds, stand in front of the horse with your hands on the halter's cheek pieces (if the horse permits), or loosely hold the lead or reins. Standing in front is a psychological barrier to the horse and he will stand more quietly than if he has an easy chance to move out. Don't put your thumbs through the snaffle or halter rings; they could be broken with a toss of the horse's head.

If the worst happens and there is an accident, stay with the horse. There are other people to care for a fallen rider. The situation could easily become more dangerous if there are loose horses running around

the arena. Move your horse as far from the fallen student as possible and keep calm. Listen for the instructor's directions.

These suggestions can help you control your horse, be a good aide to a rider and be a valuable assistant to an instructor. You will provide real therapeutic input to your rider, as well as make it safe for them to have fun riding. In short, if you lead, we'll be happy to follow.