



Sidewalker Training Manual

THANK YOU for your willingness to participate in our program. The information below is going to be covered in your training session. This hand out is for you to keep so that you may refer back to any section should you need a refresher. You will also be participating in a hands-on portion of the training which will make the material below easier to understand. Please feel free to ask questions when presented with material that you do not fully understand or seems confusing.

What Is Therapeutic Riding?

Therapeutic riding is for individuals that have a range of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social special needs. Equine-assisted activities help to improve balance, strength, flexibility, fine motor skills, verbal and social development, self-image, and self-confidence. You will see many different kinds of disabilities that may include the following:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| *Cerebral palsy | *Multiple Sclerosis |
| *Down syndrome | *Emotional Disabilities |
| *Autism | *Learning Disabilities |
| *Stoke | *Spina Bifida |
| *Spinal Cord Injuries | *Amputations |
| *Mental Retardation | *Developmental Disabilities |

Instructors and other staff members are always available to answer questions concerning the disabilities of our riders. For more information on therapeutic riding please check out the following website links:

Naples Therapeutic Riding Center: www.NaplesTherapeuticRidingCenter.org

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship: <http://www.pathintl.org>

Background and History of Therapeutic Riding: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equine-assisted_therapy

Check In Procedure:

Please follow the steps below when you first arrive to volunteer:

1. Sign in to let us know that you are here
2. Check the message board for any important changes, safety alerts, or upcoming events
3. Advise our Volunteer Coordinator if you will be unable to attend dates/times that you have signed up to volunteer for in the future
4. Remain in the hospitality area until you are assigned to a rider
5. Find and wear your name badge please.

Rider Privacy

We ask that you be respectful of our riders and their families, especially when you are out in the community. Please keep any information that you learn about our riders confidential. Our riders have bad days just like everyone else and it is important to remember not to be unkind when discussing your activities at NTRC. Please let our Program Administrator or an instructor know if you find that you are not getting along with a rider. We can always assign you to another rider so that your time spent with us will be enjoyable and worthwhile.

Volunteer Dress Code

We ask that you dress appropriately while working with our riders, many who are small children. Please adhere to the following:

1. Wear closed-toed shoes and make sure the laces are securely tied. You may wear sneakers or boots.
2. We recommend that you wear socks so that you do not get blisters from walking in the arena or from sand being kicked inside your shoes
3. Comfortable fitting shirts or tank tops, but please make sure the following does not appear on your clothing:

- a. Symbols relating to drugs, alcohol, or violence
- b. Inappropriate language
- c. Tops that are too revealing in nature

4. Pants or shorts are fine. To avoid tripping, please make sure your pants are not too long and they are secured with a belt.
5. We recommend that you do not wear watches or jewelry while sidewalking. Shiny objects often draw the attention of our riders and they may attempt to pull or take off earrings, watches, bracelets, etc. The same applies for hats and glasses.

Volunteer Tips—Safety First

1. Always be on the lookout for any potential situations that may cause an accident. Horses are creatures of their will at times spook or become startled. We try to minimize this risk as much as possible. We work as a team to keep everyone safe so please advise a staff member if you notice any of the following:
 - a. Bystanders who are standing or sitting on the arena fence
 - b. Siblings or guests who are running around the arena
 - c. Bystanders taking pictures with a flash bulb (some of our horses are camera shy)
 - d. Bystanders making loud noises or screaming into the arena
2. Stay hydrated and drink plenty of fluids, especially in the summer months.
3. Let an instructor know if you begin to feel ill while sidewalking. We will find you a replacement.
4. Let an instructor know if you need to switch sides because your arm is beginning to get tired. DO NOT just switch sides on your own—wait for an instructor.

Sidewalker Abilities

As a sidewalker you must be able to perform the following duties:

1. Walk for 30 to 60 minutes
2. Jog for short distances
 - a. If you are unable to jog beside the horse please let us know and we will assign you to work with riders who do not trot
3. Remain comfortable and calm while working around the horses
4. Be able to hold your arm/s above shoulder height and support modest weight
5. Be able to effectively communicate with the instructors and riders

Passing The Training Session

Safety is our primary concern for our riders, volunteers, and horses. The instructors may ask that you attend more than one training session if they feel you are not quite ready to participate in our riding lessons. Once you have graduated to a sidewalker there may be times when the instructors ask you attend a follow up training to keep your skills updated and fresh in your mind. If at any point the instructor sees a volunteer who can no longer uphold the duties/responsibilities of a sidewalker we may ask for your assistance in other areas of the program. Please do not feel offended by this as it is our duty to maintain a safe environment for everyone in the program.

Sidewalking 101

What is a Sidewalker?

A sidewalker is a volunteer who assists the instructor during lessons and is responsible for the rider and rider only. You will be working up close and personal with our riders and helping them reach their goals throughout each of our riding sessions.

Sidewalker Types:

1. **Designated Sidewalker (DS)**: You are the designated sidewalker if you are the volunteer who takes the child to the ramp or the mounting block. You will be the person responsible for repeating directions, coaching the child through lesson activities, & answering any questions the rider may have
2. **Supportive Sidewalker (SS)**: You are the supportive sidewalker if you are the volunteer on the ground at the ramp or on the opposite side of the mounting block. You are also there to help the rider throughout the lesson, however you may not have much of a speaking role as the DS.

The reason why we have 2 different sidewalker types is to help our riders maintain their focus and concentration during lessons. The majority of our riders do much better responding to lesson tasks when directions are repeated by one person instead of 2 or 3 people talking to them at once. They are able to keep their focus and have a better understanding of what we are asking them to do.

Sidewalker Responsibilities:

1. Directly responsible for the rider and have most of the hands-on duties. You are responsible for the rider only, not the horse.
2. Your focus should ALWAYS be on your rider. Make sure you that you are looking up at your rider at all times & not down at your feet.
3. Do not ever leave your riders side. Remember you are there to help support and maintain the rider's safety. You are compromising your rider's safety if you leave them unattended.
4. Make sure that you maintain your safety hold at all times unless you have been told it is ok to do a relaxed hold. Please don't ever assume that it's ok to remove your safety hold—an instructor will always let you know.

Once Assigned To Your Rider Please Do The Following:

1. Introduce yourself to your rider
2. Introduce yourself to your other team members (the leader and your fellow sidewalker)

At The Ramp or Mounting Block:

1. Mounting is the most dangerous part of riding. A rider is NEVER mounted without an instructor there to assist you.
2. Make sure you have a secure hold on your rider so they are not able to run on, near, or around the ramp/mounting block.
3. As you approach the ramp the rider should be to your inside, away from the edge. If you are approaching the mounting block the rider should be by your side as you assist them towards the block.

Mounting/Dismounting Types & Procedures:

The Straddle Mount from the Ramp

1. The DS will help guide the child up the ramp, keeping them to your inside away from the ramp's edge
2. The DS will guide the child with -hands on hips towards the saddle
3. Cue the rider to place both of their hands on the front of the saddle
4. Cue the rider to swing his/her RIGHT leg over the saddle & make sure the rider SOFTLY sits on the horses back
5. The SS will be on the ground with the instructor ready to catch the rider's leg as they are swinging over the saddle. This will help the riders to keep their balance and maintain a quiet descend onto the horses back.
6. We will make adjustments to stirrups once the rider is away from the ramp.

The Straddle Mount from the Block

1. The DS will guide the rider up to the mounting block. Make sure you keep the rider close to your side as you approach the block.
2. Assist the rider up the 3 steps and cue the rider to place his/her hands on the front of the saddle.
3. Help to guide the riders LEFT foot into the stirrup.
4. The rider will push up and swing his/her RIGHT leg up and over the horse's back and place his/her bottom in the saddle.
5. The SS will need to assist the rider in getting his/her leg over the horse's back if necessary.
6. The instructor will be there to assist you in adjusting the rider's stirrups.

The Straddle Dismount to the Ground

1. Rider will drop the reins and take both feet out of the stirrups
2. The DS will need to hang the stirrup over the front of the saddle so the rider does not hit it on the way down
3. The DS will help the rider lean forward and give the horse a hug & begin to swing his/her right leg up and over the horse's back

4. As the rider begins to swing over the DS needs to place his/her hands on the rider's hips
5. The rider will then slide down the side of the saddle to the ground
6. DO NOT let go of your rider once they have dismounted. Some riders have a tendency to run off.

The Sit Pivot Maneuver (SPM) Mount

1. The approach to the ramp is the same as the normal mount
2. The DS will guide the rider to face them and back up to the edge of the ramp—square with the middle of the saddle—hands on hips for guidance and support
4. Cue the rider to sit down and back as though sitting down in a chair and reach back for the saddle
5. Once in the middle of the saddle assist the rider in taking the RIGHT leg over the neck of the horse and turn into a forward facing position
6. The SS will need to assist with bringing the leg up and over the horse's neck and get the rider into a forward facing position

The Sit Pivot Maneuver (SPM) Dismount

1. Rider will drop the reins and take both feet out of the stirrups
2. Rider will bring the right leg up and over the horse's neck and turn to face the DS. The SS will need to assist the rider in bringing the leg over the horse's neck.
3. The SS needs to have their hands on the rider's hips for support and step into the horse as a support wall while the rider is sliding down.
4. The DS will need to have his/her hands out reached, under the rider's arm. Cue your rider to LEAN BACK & SLIDE DOWN. Make sure you are not taking your rider's weight as that is the horse's job.
5. Once your rider is on the ground DO NOT LET GO! Some riders are very weak and if you let them go they will slide under the horse's belly. The instructor will be there with you to guide you through the rest of the process.

Where to Go Once They Have Dismounted

Once the riders have been dismounted please follow the procedures below to get them out of the arena safely.

1. Sidewalkers should maintain some type of comfort hold on the rider to prevent them from running away.
2. The rider may thank the horse by petting the neck or shoulder. Riders are not to pet the horse's face or bridle area. This is to prevent tiny fingers from being mistaken for carrots.
3. Guide your rider around the FRONT of the horse and out of the gate.

The majority of our riders are dismounted to the ground because it is the safer option. The above procedures are the same for dismounting to the ramp. An instructor will ALWAYS be there to assist you.

The Safety Hold:

Now that your rider is mounted you will need to move into your safety hold position. NEVER remove your safety hold unless and instructor gives you the OK. The steps below are important for you to remember while in your safety hold position.

1. Always done while mounting/dismounting
2. Always done in the trot unless you have been given the OK to release this hold
3. Place your fingers around front of saddle/surcingle and place your forearm across the top of the child's upper thigh—use your arm closest to rider's leg
4. Be mindful of how much support you are giving as you do not want to upset rider's balance or prohibit the rider from doing things on their own.
5. Keep your body in line with your rider's lower leg. Do not drift towards the back of the horse.



Safety Hold at the ramp. Notice the sidewalker is squatting to maintain the proper hold.



Safety Hold with a saddle.

The Relaxed Hold:

Some of our more advanced riders do not need a safety hold the entire time they are riding. An instructor will let you know if it's ok to do a relaxed hold. The steps below are important to remember when performing a relaxed hold.

1. Only proceed to this hold when instructed to do so
2. You will release your safety hold and continue to walk beside your rider keeping your body in line with the rider's lower leg.
3. You may place your hand on the back of the saddle pad if you feel yourself starting to drift away from your rider. Be careful not to place your hand on the horse's belly or girth area as you may accidentally cause the horse to bolt forward.



Example of a Relaxed Hold: The sidewalker is keeping her body in line with her rider's lower leg and keeping her eyes up on her rider.

Ramp Departure:

We do not make any adjustments to stirrups, reins, etc until we are away from the ramp and safely in the riding arena. Please remember the following steps when departing from the ramp.

1. Stay close to your rider and remain in your safety hold.
2. The DS will need to make sure the rider's leg is not going to get crushed between the horse and the ramp.
3. The DS may need to squat while walking down the ramp in order to maintain the safety hold position.

The same steps will apply if you are approaching the ramp.

Communicating With Your Rider:

It is important to remember to allow your rider to do as much as possible on his/her own. The rider will not gain anything from the lesson if the sidewalker does everything for the rider. You will encounter a variety of ability levels & communication levels. The steps below will help you to understand the commands that we teach our riders.

The Verbal Rider

1. To make the horse WALK we say, —WALK ON!
2. To make the horse STOP we say, —WHO! & pull the reins into our belly button
3. To make the horse TROT we say, —TROT ON!. During the trot the rider should be holding the safety handle, unless an instructor has said it's ok not to.

The Non-Verbal Rider

1. To make the horse WALK we have the rider SHAKE the reins.
2. To make the horse STOP we have the riders pull the reins into their belly button
3. An instructor will give you the cue to TROT and the rider will need to be holding their safety handle
4. Even though some of our riders can't speak we still use the appropriate verbal commands with the non-verbal commands so they will see the link between command and response.

Physical Assistance

Some riders may require a bit more assistance in carrying out directions that an instructor has given them. You might be required to physically assist the rider with their given task.

For example:

You may need to use hand over hand assistance if a rider is confused about a particular direction (LEFT/RIGHT). You could also tap the LEFT/RIGHT hand to cue the rider which way is the correction direction.

Color Association: We use color coded reins to help those riders who may not know Left & Right, but know their colors. The —BLACK! rein is on the Left and the —WHITE! rein is on the RIGHT.

Less Is More

Our riders respond much better to directions that are clear & simple. It is important to remember to keep your verbal assistance with the rider to a minimum so they will not become confused with the task at hand. For example:

The task is to turn right at letter E.

The correct direction would be: —Johnny! pick up your reins & at letter E turn right.

The incorrect direction would be: —Johnny! you are going to pick up your reins and then use your right hand to go over to letter E and then once your horse gets there you are going to make him go the right.

Unnecessary Talking

Our riders need to stay focused on the task at hand. Please redirect them to listen and follow directions if you notice they have become distracted. Please also be mindful not to carry on conversations with your fellow team members that are not related to the lesson tasks. Sidewalkers often become engaged in conversations and they accidentally leave the rider out.

Important Things to Check During The Lesson:

As a sidewalker it is very important that you keep your complete focus on your rider so that in the event that something begins to go wrong you will be prepared and ready to help. Listed below are some things that you need to be mindful of when working with a rider.

1. Is your rider in the middle of the saddle/surcingle?
2. Do you notice your rider constantly slipping to one side? (This could mean a positional hold adjustment may be needed)
3. Are both feet in the stirrups & are the stirrups facing the correct direction?
4. Is your rider paying attention and listening to directions?
5. Are you making sure you are engaging the rider and not leaving him/her out of the lesson?

The Safety Equipment We Use:

Safety Stirrups: We utilize 2 different kinds of safety stirrups. These types of stirrups prevent the rider's foot from becoming caught in case of an emergency.



The rubber band should always be on the outside of the rider's foot.



The metal loop should always be on the outside of the rider's foot.

Safety Handle: All of our saddles are equipped with safety handles. The rider should hold the handle during the trot unless the instructor gives the —OK! not to.



Vaulting Positions & Safety Holds:

On some days we will perform therapeutic vaulting during lessons. The safety holds listed below are to be used for vaulting.



For vaulting we use a surcingle and vaulting pad. You may see stirrups attached to some surcingles.

Sitting Forward – The rider should be facing forward and sitting in the middle of the horse's back with legs hanging comfortably. The rider should have one hand on each handle. You will use a normal safety hold with forearm across rider's thigh. Sidewalkers should place a hand on the surcingle handle or on the rider's ankle if they are more advanced. Ask an instructor if you are unsure.



Notice the sidewalker is looking up at her rider. She is performing her safety hold correctly & keeping her body in line with her rider's leg.

Side Sit – Rider has one leg over the horse's neck and resting on handle. The rider should still be facing forward with hips and shoulders and the rider must be holding the handles, one hand on each. The sidewalker by the fence can either do a safety hold with forearm on thigh, or an ankle hold. The sidewalker near the middle of the ring holds rider on the hip with one hand.

Sideways – Rider has both legs facing one sidewalker. Riders legs should be hanging evenly, hips should be above the horse's backbone. Rider should hold handle in front with one hand and have the other hand on the horse's blanket or rump. Sidewalker facing the rider puts one hand on each leg just below the rider's knee. Sidewalker looking at the rider's back holds both sides of the rider's hips.



Facing the Rider



Facing the rider's back

Backwards – Rider sits facing the rump of the horse with seat as close to the surcingle as possible. Legs should be hanging comfortably with a slight bend in the knee. Riders should have hands on each handle of surcingle with palms down and knuckles facing the front of horse. Each sidewalker should be facing forward and have the hand closest to the horse under the rider's ankle to prevent the rider from kicking the horse.



The sidewalker is using the hand closest to rider just inside the ankle. This will aid the rider from accidentally kicking the horse

Kneeling – Rider brings knees together and ankles together, with knees close to surcingle. Rider's hands are on handles. Rider may not sit on his/her feet and he/she must be looking ahead, not down. Each sidewalker puts one hand on the outside of rider's knee and one hand on the outside of the rider's ankle helping the rider to keep his/her ankles and knees together



Sidewalker keeps one hand on the outside of the knee and ankle.



Place your hand under the rider's toe if they have long legs to prevent them from digging into the horse's back

Stretched out kneel – From the kneeling position, the rider slides his/her knees back on the horse so the knees are under the hips and his/her hands are under the shoulders. Riders should be looking ahead, not down. Sidewalkers should hold the on the outside of the rider's knees and make sure the rider's toes are not pressing into the horse's rump. Sidewalker may need to hold under the rider's ankle to prevent this.

Kneel with one leg forward – From the stretched out kneel position, the rider brings one leg close to the front of the surcingle and places one foot flat on the horse's back with toes close to the surcingle. Rider needs to look ahead, not down. Sidewalker should hold the ankle of the leg that is under the rider. The other sidewalker should continue holding the outside of the rider's knee.

Squat - From the kneel with one leg forward position, the rider brings the other leg forward and places the his/her foot flat on the horse's back next to the other foot. Riders must keep their bottom just above the horse's back, they may not sit. They must also be looking ahead. Sidewalkers should hold the rider's ankle and, if needed, the back of the rider's leg, just below the rider's knee.



The sidewalker's hand placement is correct and her eyes are up on her rider.

Half stand – From the squat position the rider raises his/her bottom into the air, almost straightening the legs. There should still be a slight bend in the knees. Riders should keep their feet flat on horse's back and be looking up. Both sidewalkers should be holding the rider's ankles and back of the riders knees.



Half Stand



Complete Standing Position

Stand – From the half stand, the rider takes the rope that is attached to the surcingle and stands straight up. The rider needs to keep tension in the rope, knees bent and eyes up. Sidewalkers need to continue holding the ankles and the back of the legs, just below the knees.

Corrections Made During Lessons

During a lesson it may be necessary for an instructor to correct you in the way you are assisting a rider. The instructors try to be discrete and make corrections on the sly so that volunteers do not feel offended or embarrassed. However, there may be a time when an abrupt change is required in order to maintain the safety of the rider and volunteer team. Due to time constraints the instructor may not always have time to clarify why they are making a change or correction. Please always feel free to speak the instructor on the side and they will be happy to explain in further detail.

Emergency Situations:

We hope that every lesson goes off without a hitch and everyone remains safe. However, in the event of an emergency it is important that you know what procedures to follow. Horses will be horses and at times accidents can and will happen. All volunteers must always be on their toes and stay alert to potential safety issues. The most important thing to remember is STAY CALM.

Calling 911 / Retrieving the AED/Fire Prevention

An instructor or other NTRC staff member may call upon you to assist during an emergency. If you are asked to call 911 please adhere to the following procedures.

Phone Locations: NTRC Tack Room & Volunteer Hospitality Area

Emergency Call Procedure: There is a call procedure posted by each of the phones that will help you give EMS important information about what is happening. These call procedures give the location, address, phone number, etc at NTRC & will assist in getting EMS to the scene in a timely manner.

AED Location: The AED is located in the NTRC office on the wall shelf directly in front of the door. If you have been asked to get the AED simply take it off the wall and bring it to the staff member who requested it.

Fire Extinguisher/s Location:

Barn:

- *1 at the entry and exit doors of the barn
- *1 in the Feed Room
- *1 in the Tack Room
- *6 upstairs in the Hay Loft

NTRC Office:

- * 1 by entry door
- * 1 outside Admin Offices

You Feel the Horse Is Becoming Unsafe

The horse is the leader's responsibility only, but if you notice something that the leader is not aware of please let him/her know. Ask the leader to —WHOA and ask for an instructor. DO NOT take the rider off the horse unless you are asked to do so by an instructor.

The Rider Becomes Difficult To Handle

Some riders may reach points of frustration, which will make it difficult to communicate with them. Please ask the leader to —WHOA! and ask for an instructor if you are unable to handle an escalating situation. Even though our riders may be having a bad day they still must respect your personal space. Please ask for an instructor if you notice any of the following behaviors:

1. Kicking/hitting
2. Biting
3. Hair Pulling
4. Any other aggressive/inappropriate behavior

You Become Dislodged From Your Rider

Please follow the steps below if you ever lose hold of your rider.

1. The instructor will have noticed this occurring and will have asked the leader to whoa.
2. WALK back towards your rider's side approaching the horse from the SIDE and NOT BEHIND. The horse cannot see behind itself and you may unintentionally cause the horse to spook.
3. Get back into your safety hold position

A Rider Falls from the Horse

Please follow the procedure listed below if a rider falls from their horse:

1. DO NOT MOVE THE RIDER! This is very important in order to avoid causing further injury to the rider.
2. Stay with the rider until an instructor arrives
3. Try to keep the rider calm and still
4. Do not worry about the horse as this is the leader's responsibility
5. Be ready to follow any additional directions the instructor may ask of you

Emergency Dismount (ED)

An emergency dismount is only performed if an instructor has made the request. ED's are done only under extreme circumstances where the rider's safety is in immediate danger. The following cases could elicit an emergency dismount:

1. The horse becomes unsafe or is misbehaving
2. The rider is having a medical emergency such as a seizure

DO NOT take a rider off the horse unless you have been instructed to do so. We will ask one person to be the designated volunteer to perform the emergency dismount. Please remember that you are responsible for the rider only as the leader has been trained to deal with the horse.

Please follow the procedures below if you are the sidewalker responsible for the ED.

1. Grab the rider on both sides of the hips.
 - i. Grab the back of the pants, shirt, belt, etc if you unable to reach the hips.
2. Pull the rider into your chest as you step back and away from the horse.
3. They will begin to slide towards you and it is a possibility that you may fall or the rider will fall on top of you
4. Please advise a staff member immediately if you no longer feel comfortable performing ED's so that we can find a replacement.

It may be possible that the unassigned person may be required to step in and carry out the ED procedure. In cases where the rider is already coming off in the direction of the unassigned sidewalker we would not want to push them back to the center and then dismount them from the assigned side. Both sidewalkers should always be alert and ready to step into action.

Volunteer Questions & Input

Please ALWAYS ask an instructor if you are unsure of what to do. We will always be there to help you in any situation. We are here to help you understand and clarify any procedure. We hope that you will always come to us should you have a rider question or concern as well as any creative input to help us better our program.