



# Volunteer Manual

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction to New Hope.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Guidelines &amp; Policies.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Volunteer Roles &amp; Responsibilities.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Additional Resources.....</b>	<b>29</b>



## Introduction to New Hope

### Welcome!

Thank you for volunteering at New Hope Equine-Assisted Therapy! Volunteers serve a vital role in the success of New Hope. As a volunteer, your support and dedication enable us to reach a diverse population of participants. Your compassion and gift of time add an important dimension to their lives.

Most volunteer opportunities at New Hope do not require previous experience. Abilities necessary for a successful volunteer experience include availability, reliability, strength, endurance, communication skills, and the ability to handle emergency situations. New Hope provides the necessary training and guidance to make your volunteer experience safe and enjoyable. This handbook is designed to acquaint you with New Hope and serve as a guide and resource regarding the various aspects of the program and your volunteer service.

We welcome you as a member of the growing family of individuals whose lives have been enriched by their efforts to help others. Your service is a valuable asset, and you will always be appreciated. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding your volunteer role, please feel free to speak with your instructor, our volunteer coordinator ([volunteer@newhopeequine.com](mailto:volunteer@newhopeequine.com)), or our program director ([skershen@newhopeequine.com](mailto:skershen@newhopeequine.com)).

### Mission Statement

*New Hope Equine-Assisted Therapy provides therapeutic horsemanship services for people with a wide variety of disabilities. Our program is designed to bring hope, healing and happiness through encouraging the horse and human connection.*



## Programs & Services

**Therapeutic Riding:** At the core of the New Hope mission is the therapeutic horsemanship lesson program. Through this program, participants learn mounted and unmounted horsemanship skills such as horse handling, grooming, tacking, riding, and horse care. New Hope serves participants of our horsemanship program on a weekly basis.

**Veterans Program:** New Hope now offers a progressive therapeutic horsemanship program for military personnel, veterans, and first responders with special needs. As Winston Churchill has been quoted numerous times that “there is something about the outside of the horse that is good for the inside of man.” How true that has been: horses have had the ability to read, understand, and relay emotional and physical stresses that people are experiencing. Horses have helped individuals build a stronger sense of security, confidence and strengthening of coping mechanisms. For people with physical limitations or needs, horses have been shown to re-teach and strengthen balance, coordination, and motor functions.

**Hangin' with Horses:** In this program, you'll have the opportunity to groom or walk the horses in the sensory trail area. However, this program will not include horse back riding. It's simply intended for people who enjoy spending time with horses.

## Program Operations

New Hope operates September - July, offering day and evening programs. We are open Monday - Saturday and are closed for most major holidays.



### **New Hope Program Participants**

New Hope serves individuals over the age of 4 years old. An assessment and screening process conducted by staff determines eligibility into our programs. The assessment process provides an opportunity to determine if the program activities would be safe and appropriate for the individual and what resources would be needed such as horse, riding equipment, volunteer, and staffing needs. Once accepted into the program, individual goals are established for the participant and progress is documented each week. Lessons are 60 minutes, and lesson activities may include developing basic riding skills, groundwork, grooming, tacking, exercises, playing games on horseback and riding the sensory trail.

### **Benefits of Equine-Assisted Services**

Physically, it is the horse's movement which has a dynamic effect on the participant's body. The horse stimulates the participant's pelvis and trunk in a manner that closely resembles the normal gait of a human. This movement can be used to produce specific physical changes in the participant including normalization of muscle tone and improvements in posture, balance, coordination, and increased endurance.

Sensorially, the horse and the horsemanship environment offer a wide variety of input to participants. Movement exploration on the horse combined with so many other sights and sounds one encounters in the program contribute to the overall sensory experience.

Socially and emotionally, the success of overcoming fear and anxiety and the ability to achieve horsemanship skills help individuals realize self-worth and increase self-esteem. For those involved with the various activities of a therapeutic horsemanship program, the companion animal bonding and development of new skills are critical components to the success of the experiences offered. Relationships develop between participants, volunteers, horses, and staff and are an integral part of a positive, emotional experience provided by a therapeutic horsemanship program.

Cognitively, the horse provides strong motivation for participants. Equine-assisted services incorporate activities and games on horseback and/or unmounted designed to help achieve specific goals such as following multi-step directions, staying on task, color and number recognition, and reinforcing existing skills as well as learning new ones.



### New Hope Horses

The horse is perhaps the most important part of our horsemanship program. The horses at New Hope come from a variety of backgrounds. Some of their careers have been as champion show horses, dressage and trail horses, or police horses. Some are rescued, some are donated, and others have been purchased. Each has his or her own unique personality and needs.

When selecting and training the horses used in our program, many factors are considered. Horses must meet basic criteria, including possessing an exceptional level of tolerance, be gentle and well-mannered, be in good general health, and offer sound rhythmic movement as this is a key benefit of mounted equine-assisted services. Horses that meet the criteria are accepted on a trial basis where they are placed in an extensive training program to introduce them to their role in the program and the activities they will be exposed to. Mock sessions are conducted prior to having “real” participants on the horses.

New Hope horses receive the very best of care. Each horse is on a schedule to assure good overall health, including veterinarian care, hoof care, tooth care and a rotational deworming program. Additionally, each horse’s work schedule is tracked and recorded in compliance with PATH Int’l. Standards and Guidelines. Volunteers play a critical role in preparing horses for sessions and assisting with their daily care, and we encourage volunteers to gain additional knowledge of our equine friends through a variety of educational opportunities.

See the current New Hope herd here: <https://newhopeequine.com/horses/>

### About PATH Int’l

New Hope is a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl) Member Center. PATH Intl sets standards and best practices for therapeutic riding and horsemanship worldwide. As a PATH Intl Member Center, New Hope strives to hold to the highest standards in the field of equine-assisted activities and therapies.

### The New Hope Team

Board: <https://newhopeequine.com/about/#our-team/>



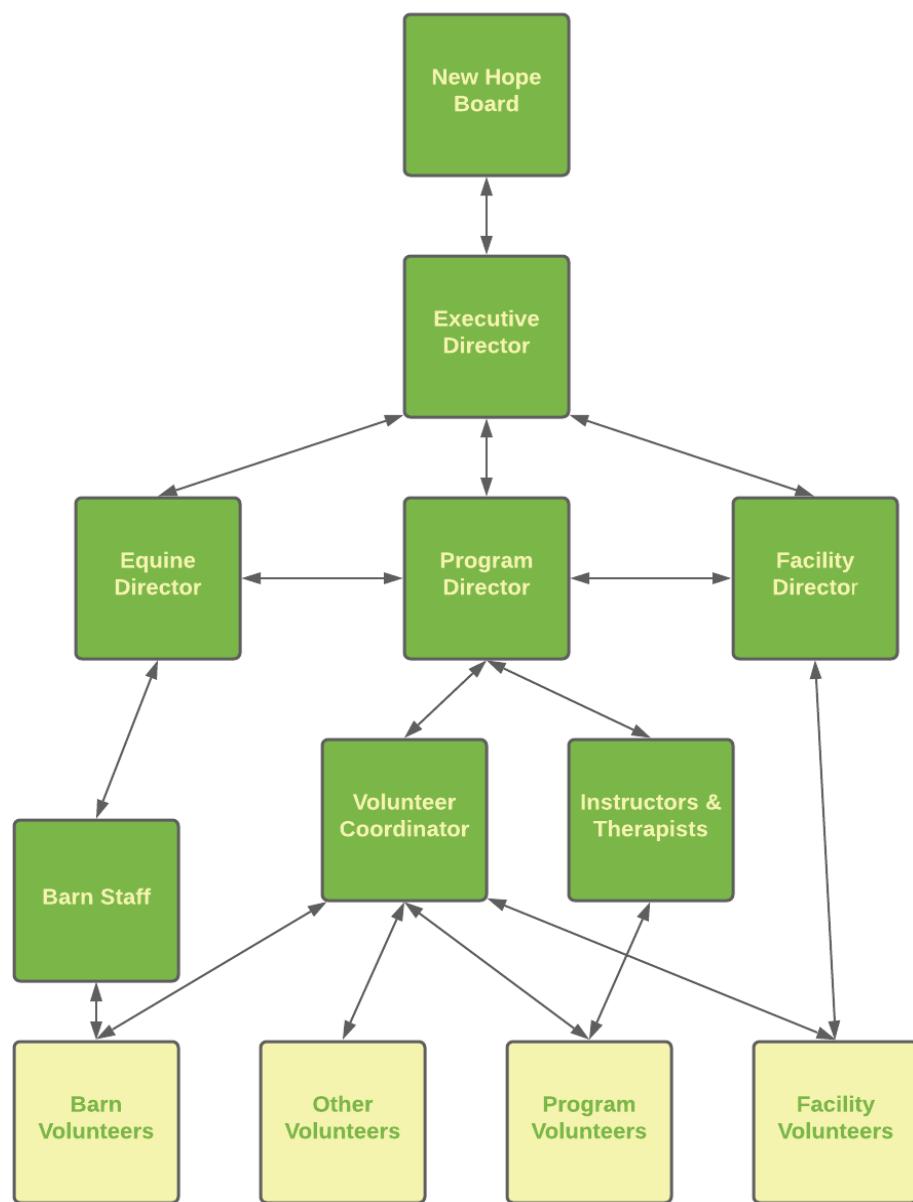
# New Hope

Equine Assisted Therapy

## Staff:

Sharla Kershen, *Director & Instructor*  
Susan Altshuler, *Program Manager/Instructor*  
Kimberly Martin, *Equine Manager*  
Kimberly Mescha, *Instructor-in-Training*  
Torrun Marten, *Instructor-in-Training*

**New Hope Organizational Chart**





## Guidelines & Policies

### Volunteer Orientation & Training

All volunteers must Complete Volunteer Orientation and specialized training for their role prior to assisting in lessons with participants/riders. Orientation will familiarize you with the facility, the lesson process, and our policies, but it does not take the place of reading this manual. After orientation, volunteers sign up for horse leader, sidewalker, and/or other training. Volunteers may only perform roles in which they are trained. Ongoing education will be provided for your success and growth. Non-lesson volunteer positions available and needed.

### Safety Guidelines

- NO SMOKING or vaping anywhere on New Hope property.
- NO WEAPONS including concealed firearms are allowed on the premises.
- Observe and obey all posted safety and restricted area signs, and respect off-limit areas.
- All persons within the horse area must wear protective shoes (no backless or open-toed shoes).
- Volunteers under the age of 14 must have a parent/adult guardian on property.
- Cell phones & car alarms must be turned off as they disrupt class and startle horses.
- The consumption of alcohol prior to and/or while at New Hope is prohibited. The use of illegal substances prior to and/or while at New Hope is strictly prohibited.
- No running or shouting, especially near the horses.
- Please refrain from offering food to participants without permission as they may have a medical condition such as food allergies, diabetes, etc.
- Hand feeding New Hope horses is strictly prohibited to avoid nipping. Please place treats in the “treat” bucket located outside the tack room door.
- No dogs or other pets are allowed on New Hope property. Please leave your pets at home where they will be safe and comfortable while you perform your volunteer role.
- For your safety and the safety of others, please only perform a volunteer role you have been trained for.
- Please do not enter the horse paddocks without staff permission.
- Volunteers must have a staff member present on property at all times.



### Volunteer Attire

- Sturdy, closed-toed shoes or boots (no loafers, sneakers, open-toed shoes, or sandals)
- Clothes suitable for the weather and physical activity
  - Please dress modestly in the warmer months
- No dangling jewelry
- No perfumes or cologne in case of participant reaction or attraction of insects
- Clothing, hats, or jewelry that restrict movement or vision are considered unsuitable

### Helmet Policy

All participants and personnel (staff & volunteers) of New Hope are required to wear protective headgear that is ASTM-SEI approved for horseback riding while taking part in any mounted activity. Any helmet not ASTM-SEI approved for equestrian use must meet PATH Intl lightweight helmet guidelines and must be approved by the physical therapist. Although instructors are responsible for ensuring proper helmet fit for participants, they may train and ask volunteers to fit helmets to their assigned riders. Helmets are disinfected and inspected on a regular basis.

### Volunteer Scheduling & Cancellations

Each weekend, our volunteer coordinator will send out a link to the next week's SignUp via email. Please sign up for the days and times that work for your schedule. Volunteers are critical to the success of the program. When you commit to your volunteer role, your support is truly needed to serve our participants and care for our equine friends. Please reserve canceling your scheduled day and time for emergencies. If you must cancel within 48 hours of your scheduled time, please contact our volunteer coordinator directly ([volunteer@newhopeequine.com](mailto:volunteer@newhopeequine.com)) so that a replacement can be found for your assigned participant.

In the event that New Hope must close due to inclement weather, participant cancellations or other circumstances, we will make every attempt to notify volunteers two hours prior to the class.

### Volunteer Check In & Out

Upon arrival, volunteers are required to check the daily schedule for their assignment, and put on their name-tag. After completing the volunteer assignment, name badges are returned and volunteers are asked to sign both in and out on the posted QR code. It is critical that our volunteers sign in and out so that staff knows who is on property in case of emergency and so that we have documentation of volunteer hours spent at our facility. If you forgot to sign in/out you can do so here: <https://newhopeequine.com/volunteer/#Check-out scroll>

. The information may be used to gain grant money and other financial aid for New Hope.



## Communication

For scheduling and training questions, contact our *volunteer coordinator* ([volunteer@newhopeequine.com](mailto:volunteer@newhopeequine.com)).

During lessons, the *instructor* is responsible for each participant, horse and volunteer. To ensure everyone's safety, it is important to adhere to the instructor's decisions. Please don't hesitate to ask the instructor if you are unclear regarding your volunteer role or responsibilities. Please notify staff immediately of any concerns regarding the behavior of program horses.

Occurrence reports must be filled out in the event of an incident (injury, "near miss," concerning behavior, etc.). Should an incident happen during the time that you are volunteering, please share that information with the *instructor* before leaving New Hope.

When discussing participants, use people-first language.



FIGURE 4.18 PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE  
Adapted from *Communicating With and About People with Disabilities* fact sheet from the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. Retrieved from [http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/disabilityposter\\_photos.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/disabilityposter_photos.pdf)

## Confidentiality

At New Hope, we place great importance on protecting the confidential information of our clients, our staff and our volunteers. "Confidential Information" includes, but is not limited to, personally identifiable information such as surnames, telephone numbers, addresses, emails, etc., as well as the non-public business records of New Hope. In particular, medical information about clients, and information about their disabilities or special needs, must be protected as confidential information. Volunteers shall never disclose confidential information to anyone other than New Hope staff. Volunteers must seek permission before taking and/or posting any pictures or videos.



## Behavior

Participants, volunteers, instructors, and all other individuals involved with the program are expected to conduct themselves in a cooperative and appropriate manner at all times. Examples of inappropriate behavior include but are not limited to: any form of harassment, aggressive or abusive behavior to self, or others including horses. If you are subject to any type of inappropriate behavior, please do not approach the individual. Instead, notify staff immediately. Individuals exhibiting inappropriate behavior will be requested to leave immediately and if determined, additional assistance may be called for (911). Inappropriate behavior may result in dismissal from the program.

## Volunteer Dismissal

New Hope is immensely grateful for the time, effort, and expertise our volunteers share with the program. However, there are several reasons that a volunteer would be asked to leave the program. They include:

- Violation of one of the policies included in Orientation Training and this manual, particularly:
  - Violation of the confidentiality of client records
  - Disrespecting a client or attempting to discipline a client or one of our horses
  - Violation of safety procedures
  - Absence from a shift without procuring a replacement or notification
  - Presence at New Hope under the influence of alcohol or an illegal substance
  - Conviction of a crime or being charged with sexual abuse
  - Disrespectful behavior towards our horses, participants, volunteers, or staff
  - Unauthorized use of New Hope tack or horses
  - Multiple “no-shows” or last-minute cancellations
  - Inability to perform role (may be reassigned)

Should a volunteer be accused of one of the above offenses or face removal from the program for another reason, the volunteer shall receive written or verbal notice of termination. New Hope reserves the right to determine at its discretion that it may be in the best interest of the program to terminate a volunteer's involvement.

## Emergency Procedures

New Hope's intention is to provide a safe environment for all individuals involved within the program. Being prepared in the event of an emergency is part of providing a safe atmosphere. Please review the following policies and procedures on how to handle specific emergencies. It is important to remember in any emergency situation to remain calm, reassure riders, and take direction from New Hope instructors. New Hope instructors are responsible for managing the emergency and applying any first aid required. Volunteers may be called upon to assist.



## Emergency Procedures

- Human first-aid kit is located next to the bathroom.
- Horse first-aid kit is located in the middle cabinet in front of the office.
- Telephone is instructor phone.
- Medical Emergencies:
  - Notify the instructor
  - Call 911 and/or bring first aid kit as directed
- Rider Fall or Injury during Lesson:
  - All activities stop
  - Instructor will apply first aid and will direct volunteers to assist. Assistance may include:
    - Calling 911
    - Retrieving the first aid kit
    - Locating the rider's emergency medical form in the "participant" file drawer
  - Horse leaders halt and head their horses
  - Sidewalkers perform *thigh hold* support
  - Sidewalkers of the fallen rider stay with the rider until directed otherwise
  - No one, including the rider's parents, should enter or leave the arena without direction from the instructor
- Emergency Dismount - as directed by the instructor:
  - Horse leaders halt and *head off* their horses
  - Sidewalkers ensure the participant's feet are removed from the stirrups
  - Place your arms under the participants armpits, or around the participant's waist and move backwards, away from the horse, until the participant is a safe distance from the horse
  - Hands should be balled into a fist or clasped together
  - Horse leaders move the horse away from the participant, taking care that the horse's hindquarters are facing away from the participant
- Spooked Horse:
  - Sidewalkers apply *thigh hold*, staying close to the horse's side as the horse moves
  - Horse leader halt and *head off* the horse. Stay with the horse or be aware that the horse may move quickly forward or side step in either direction
  - Follow instructor directions
- Loose Horse:
  - Send someone to close the facility gate
  - All activities stop
  - Horse leaders halt and head off their horses
  - Sidewalkers perform *thigh hold*
  - Follow instructor directions



# New Hope

Equine Assisted Therapy

- To catch the horse, approach quietly from the side and place the lead rope over the horse's neck then halter the horse. Do not chase the horse or approach from behind. Feed or treats in a bucket can be used as encouragement.
- Severe Weather:
  - Severe thunderstorms, high winds, or threat of tornadoes
  - Horses will be untacked and released into their paddocks
  - People will move into the classroom
- Fire:
  - The fire extinguisher is located to the right of the classroom door, against the same wall as the metal cabinets.
  - Call 911, requesting emergency vehicles turn off their sirens as they approach
  - Pull tack and release horses either to the round pen or top paddock by road
    - Move Beau and Tommy to the round pen
    - Rest of the horses to top paddock by road
  - Evacuate the classroom/office, meeting in the arena
- Handling Bodily Fluids:
  - Treat all bodily fluids as infectious -- use a protective barrier if you come into contact with any (runny nose, saliva, blood, etc.)
  - Wash hands before and after class

## Volunteer Legal Releases

### Liability Release

I acknowledge the risks and potential for risks of horseback riding and working with horses, including grievous bodily harm. However, I feel that the possible benefits to myself are greater than the risks assumed. I hereby, intending to be legally bound for myself, my heirs and assigns, executors or administrators, waive and release forever all claims for damages against New Hope Equine Assisted Therapy, Inc., its Board of Trustees, Instructors, Therapists, Aides, Volunteers, and/or Employees for any and all injuries and/or losses I may sustain while participating as a New Hope volunteer from whatever cause including, but not limited to, the negligence of these related parties. The undersigned acknowledges that he/she has read this Volunteer Registration & Release form in its entirety; that he/she understands the terms of this release and has signed this release voluntarily and with full knowledge of the effects thereof.

### Confidentiality Policy

At New Hope, we place great importance on protecting the confidential information of our clients, our staff and our volunteers. "Confidential Information" includes, but is not limited to, personally identifiable information such as surnames, telephone numbers, addresses, e-mails, etc., as well as the non-public business records of New Hope. In particular, medical information about clients, and information about their disabilities or special needs, must be protected as Confidential Information. Volunteers shall never disclose Confidential Information to anyone other than New Hope staff.



**Photo/Media Release**

Consent or not to the following: 1) New Hope Equine Assisted Therapy, Inc. may use my photograph or image in its print, online and video publications; 2) Release New Hope Equine Assisted Therapy, Inc., its employees and any outside third parties from all liabilities or claims that I might assert in connection with the above-described activities and 3) I waive any right to inspect, approve or receive compensation for any materials or communications, including photographs, videotapes, DVDs, website images or written materials, incorporating photos/images of me.

**Authorization for Emergency Medical Treatment for Volunteers**

In the event emergency medical aid/treatment is required due to illness or injury while being on the property of the agency, I authorize New Hope to: 1. Secure and retain medical treatment and transportation, if needed. 2. Release records upon request to the authorized individual or agency involved in the medical emergency treatment.

CONSENT PLAN (to be invoked in the event that your Emergency Contact cannot be reached I give consent for emergency medical treatment/aid (including x-ray, surgery, hospitalization, medication, and any treatment procedure deemed "life saving" by the physician) in the event of illness or injury while on the property of the agency.\*

If you choose non-consent for emergency medical treatment/aid in the event of illness or injury while on the property of the agency, please request a Non-Consent Form, which requires notarization.



## Volunteer Roles & Responsibilities

### Volunteer Opportunities

- Horsemanship Program Volunteers: Consists of horse leaders, sidewalkers, and horse handlers. Horse leaders are responsible for horses before, during and after lessons. They receive training on how to prepare horses (groom & tack), how to safely & effectively lead horses during lessons, and the process for removing tack and turning out horses following lessons. Sidewalkers are responsible for remaining with their participant during lessons and receive training on how to safely and effectively provide support to their participant. Horse handlers assist and learn how to catch/release, lead, prepare and care for the horses.
- Lead Volunteers: Lead volunteers are typically long-standing volunteers who are responsible for coordinating the activities before and after classes. They also serve as a resource person for other volunteers by guiding and assisting them as needed. This role requires a thorough understanding of the barn, horses and needs of the instructor; therefore, the lead volunteer position is by invitation only.
- Equine Program & Facility Volunteers: Equine program and facility volunteers are responsible for assisting with the general care of the horses, feedings, barn and facility upkeep. In addition to the general orientation, barn & facility volunteers are trained for the tasks which they are assigned. Working in the barn and on the property is more physically demanding.
- Barn Buddies: Barn buddies must have already volunteered consistently at New Hope for at least six months and continue to perform as a sidewalk or horse leader in at least one lesson a week. These horse-experienced volunteers commit to coming weekly to check the herd for injuries, scrub legs clean of “crud” when needed, and to giving at least one horse who needs it a bubble bath or deep grooming. They are required to attend general orientation, horse leader training, and a barn buddy training by invitation.
- Office Volunteers: Office volunteers perform a variety of general clerical duties such as filing, data entry, making copies, assisting with special mailings, etc. Office volunteers receive training provided by the program staff.
- Special Skills Volunteers: Volunteers offering to share a special skill or technical experience that may benefit the program are encouraged to do so. Areas of special skills/experience may include graphic design, public relations, photography, etc. Please contact the volunteer coordinator for more information.
- Special Events Volunteers: Special events volunteers assist with the various special functions hosted by New Hope throughout the year such as the annual horse show, fundraisers, etc. Duties may include assisting with coordinating an event, serving on a special committee, and/or assisting the actual day of the event. New Hope staff will provide special events volunteers with training and information required to perform their duties.



## Job Description

## Sidewalker

The sidewalker's primary role is to walk alongside the rider and provide support as indicated by the instructor. It may be direct physical support, verbal support to reinforce the instructor's directions, or acting as a spotter during sessions. One or two sidewalkers may be assigned to each rider depending on the rider's needs.

When there are two sidewalkers for a rider:

- The **interactive** sidewalker is responsible for...
  - Supporting the instructor by giving reinforcing the instructor's directions and prompts
  - Pulling the rider off in an emergency dismount if requested by the instructor
- The **supportive** sidewalker is responsible for...
  - Additional physical support or spotting
  - Handling activity props during games

### **Sidewalker Duties:**

- Arrive 30 minutes prior to class
- Check in
- Gather riding equipment (tack) prior to class as assigned by instructor
- Set up arena or trail as directed by instructor
- Greet the rider, assist with their helmet, and wait with the rider on the gravel outside the tacking area gate until the instructor indicates it is time to mount
- Assist instructor in mounting the rider as directed
- Move with the rider throughout the lesson. Do not leave your rider's knee without instructor permission
- Provide the sidewalking technique (thigh hold, ankle hold, thigh+ankle hold, spotter) indicated by the instructor. These techniques are described in the "Vital Information for Sidewalkers" section on pg. 17 of the manual.
- Escort your rider out of the arena
- Put equipment/tack away
- Check out

### **Additional Responsibilities:**

- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding our participants
- Follow all safety rules and guidelines

### **Sidewalkers Must Be Able To:**

- Walk for an hour with minimal rest over various terrain (sand, gravel, mulch, dirt/mud) and weather conditions
- Jog for 15-30 seconds at a time over various terrain and weather conditions
- Lift and carry equipment up to 20 pounds
- Hold their elbow at or above the shoulder for up to an hour with minimal rest
- Support the rider's weight during an emergency dismount
- Listen carefully and follow instructions
- Be a positive, supportive presence for the participant



## Lesson Process

## Sidewalker

### Before the lesson:

1. **Put on your name tag** in a prominent position & place your **phone on silent**.
2. **Check the whiteboard** for your role (interactive or supportive), rider, equipment, and rail spot assignments.
3. Bring the **assigned equipment to your rail spot**.
4. **Check-in with the instructor** for information about the lesson and instructions for setting up the arena.
5. **Set up the arena or assist your horse leader** in preparing the horse until your rider arrives.
6. When your rider arrives, **greet the rider, check that they are wearing an ASTM-SEI certified, properly fitted helmet and appropriate riding attire** (long pants, closed toed shoes) and let the instructor know if there are any issues.
7. When directed by the instructor, the **supportive sidewalker will escort the rider** to the mounting ramp. The **interactive sidewalker will assist in mounting** o side. If one sidewalker, escort your rider to the ramp then move into the o side position.

### During the lesson: Your role is to help keep the rider safe and provide support.

- Keep to your assigned role:
  - Interactive sidewalkers reinforce the instructor's directions and interact with the rider while ensuring their safety. They will walk on the offside (right) of the horse.
  - Supportive sidewalkers ensure the safety of the rider and provide physical support. They walk on the near side (left) of the horse.
  - When there is only one sidewalker, that sidewalker assumes both an interactive and supportive role on the offside (right) of the horse.
- Stay at the rider's knee at all times unless directed otherwise by the instructor.
- Maintain focus on your rider. Keep your eyes up and your hands free.
- Do not lean on or put pressure on the horse.
- Ask the instructor which hold(s) to use.
- IN AN EMERGENCY, the horse will halt and you will provide a thigh hold for your rider.

### After the lesson:

1. Escort your rider to the parking area.
2. Put the equipment back in its designated place.
3. Disinfect any helmets and/or boots your rider borrowed for the lesson.
4. Return your name tag.
5. Check out using the QR code



## Vital Information

## Sidewalker

### Quick Tips: Pointers for Sidewalking Success

- Offer support as directed by the instructor.
- Understand what a good riding position and alignment looks like (ear-shoulder-hip-heel alignment) to offer the best support to riders.
- Recognize that the safety feature of a stirrup is placed on the outside of the foot.
- Familiarize yourself with horsemanship terms used in the program (two point, half-halt, post, etc.).
- Learn the proper way to hold the reins for direct and open/leading reining.
- Challenge participants to the best of their ability during activities, and only offer assistance when needed.

### Working with Participants with Special Needs

Working with people who have special needs may be a new experience for some volunteers. Please take time to know your participant and direct questions to the instructors. Physical or mental impairments may be present at birth, or may be due to injury, disease, or aging. Often, a major barrier for people with special needs is not the disability itself, but the lack of awareness and knowledge by others. Above all, please treat individuals with respect, being considerate and sensitive to their needs.

- Wheelchair Etiquette
  - Always ask the wheelchair user if they would like assistance before you help.
  - Be respectful - people's wheelchairs are an extension of their body space. Don't hang or lean on them unless you have permission.
  - Speak directly - be careful not to exclude the wheelchair user from conversations. If the conversation lasts more than a few minutes, sit or kneel to get yourself on the same level as the wheelchair.
- Escorting an Individual with a Visual Impairment
  - If an individual with a visual impairment looks like they need assistance, please ask first if help is needed.
  - Remember that they may only need verbal direction/cues.
  - If physical assistance is needed, allow the individual to hold onto your arm above the elbow and walk one-half step ahead. The individual may also have a specific way that they prefer to have assistance.



# New Hope

Equine Assisted Therapy

- Repeat/verbalize information that may be written/posted.
- If you're uncertain of what to do, ask your instructor how you can be of further assistance.
- Communicating with Individuals with Hearing/Language Impairment
  - Try to maintain good eye contact, looking at the individual when speaking to him/her.
  - Speak clearly, avoid talking slowly or over-emphasizing words and avoid long verbal instructions/conversation.
  - Become familiar with hand gestures/body positions that the participant may be using to represent words and concepts.
  - Provide assistance with communication when needed (i.e., visual cues, gestures, etc).
  - Alert the instructor if the participant is having difficulty with hearing aid (i.e., ringing).
- Non-Verbal or Limited Verbal Expression
  - Many of our participants are non-verbal or limited in their verbal expression. To enhance communication with these individuals, instructors and volunteers may reinforce requests and directions with basic American Sign Language (ASL). There is a sheet of some common signs used in therapeutic riding located in the Additional Resources section of this manual.



## Holds

- **THIGH HOLD:** To provide a thigh hold, the sidewalker grips the front of the saddle near the pommel with the hand closest to the rider. The fleshy part of the sidewalker's forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh as shown in Figure 7.5. This hold is intended for a team of two sidewalkers. If a participant is supported with a unilateral thigh hold (a thigh hold provided on one side only), the rider will be thrown off balance and pushed into an asymmetrical position in the saddle. Take care that the sidewalkers' elbows do not accidentally press into the rider's leg or the equine's side.



FIGURE 7.5 CORRECT THIGH HOLD

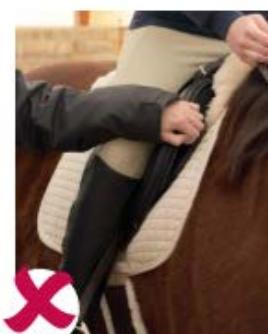


FIGURE 7.6 INCORRECT THIGH HOLD. Pressure is being placed on the rider's knee.



FIGURE 7.7 INCORRECT THIGH HOLD. The sidewalker needs to grasp the front of the saddle. This will help her to move with the equine if he moves unexpectedly.



FIGURE 7.8 CORRECT THIGH HOLDS being provided with even, symmetrical pressure



FIGURE 7.9 THIGH HOLDS being provided in an asymmetrical way, resulting in the rider being pushed off center. This also occurs when a thigh hold is provided on one side but not the other. Note: the leader has stepped out of position to allow both sidewalkers to be seen clearly in this instructional photograph.

Source: PATH Int'l Instructor Education Guide



- **ANKLE HOLD**: To provide an ankle hold, the sidewalker gently cups the back of the rider's heel, fingers closest to the equine's side, with the hand closest to the rider, as shown in Figure 7.10.



FIGURE 7.10 CORRECT ANKLE HOLD



FIGURE 7.11 INCORRECT ANKLE HOLD. The sidewalker is pulling or twisting the rider's leg or foot.

Source: *PATH Int'l Instructor Education Guide*

- **THIGH + ANKLE HOLD**: To provide a thigh + ankle hold, the sidewalker applies a thigh hold as described previously, then gently grasps the rider's ankle area with the hand farthest from the equine, as shown in Figure 7.12.

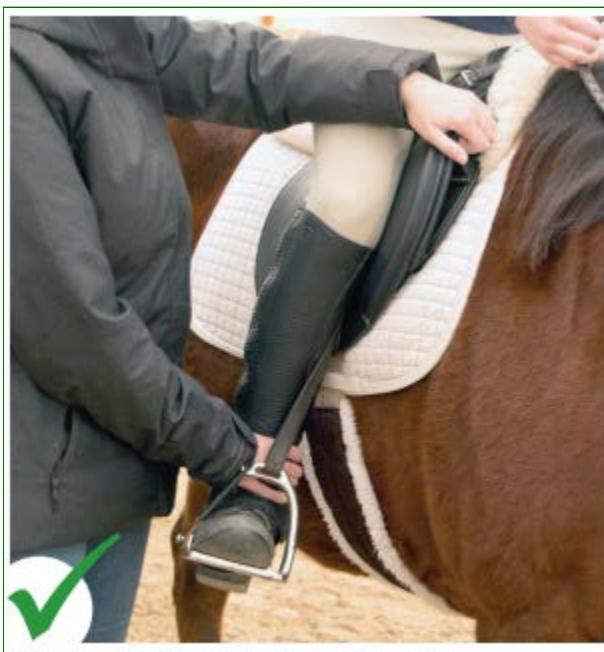


FIGURE 7.12 CORRECT THIGH + ANKLE HOLD

Source: *PATH Int'l Instructor Education Guide*



- **SPOTTING:** The instructor may direct the sidewalker to not use a hold and instead spot the rider. This means that the sidewalker will stay next to the participant's knee at all times with their hands out of their pockets and sleeves so they are ready to assist in case of emergency, as shown in Figure 7.13.



FIGURE 7.13 CORRECT SIDEWALKING when no hold is needed. The sidewalker is next to the rider's knee with her hands out of her pockets and sleeves. She is looking at the rider.



FIGURE 7.14 INCORRECT SIDEWALKING. The sidewalker's left hand is in her pocket. She needs both hands available to assist in case of emergency.

Source: *PATH Int'l Instructor Education Guide*



## Job Description

## Horse Leader

Horse leaders are primarily responsible for the horse and must be alert and aware of the horse's movement and behavior at all times.

### **Horse Leader Duties:**

- Arrive 30 minutes prior to class
- Check in
- Catch & halter horse
- Perform groundwork to ensure the horse is physically and mentally prepared for class
- Groom & tack horse
- Head the horse when mounting, dismounting, or halted for an extended period of time
- Lead the horse throughout the lesson according to instructor directions and rider cues
- Untack & groom horse
- Release horse to paddock
- Check out

### **Additional Responsibilities:**

- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding our participants
- Follow all safety rules and guidelines

### **Horse Leaders Must Be Able To:**

- Walk for an hour with minimal rest over various terrain (sand, gravel, mulch, dirt/mud) and weather conditions
- Jog for 15-30 seconds at a time over various terrain and weather conditions
- Lift equipment up to 20 pounds
- Manage horse behavior safely and humanely
- Maintain focus for extended periods of time
- Read a horse's body language
- Listen carefully and follow instructions
- Be a positive, supportive presence for the participant



## Lesson Process

## Horse Leader

### Before the lesson:

1. **Sign in** using the clipboard located on the large whiteboard.
2. **Put your name tag** prominently on the left side of your body & place your **phone on silent**.
3. **Check the whiteboard** for your horse and rail spot assignment.
4. Bring a **grooming bucket** from the tack room to your **assigned spot on the rail**.
5. Find your horse's halter at its spot near the paddock. **Catch, halter, and lead horse** to assigned rail spot.
6. **Look over** the horse for any injuries (report to instructor if found), **pick hooves & lead horse to the arena**.
7. **Perform pre-flight** as directed by the instructor.
8. At your rail spot, **groom & tack** horse using assigned equipment. **Girths should be kept loose** enough to put your hand between the girth and the underside of the horse's belly. **Instructors must bridle when the bridle has a bit**.
9. **Hold your horse at the rail** until called over to the ramp. A **tack check** will occur between the rail and the ramp by the instructor.
10. **When mounting**, yield the hindquarter and shoulder so that the horse is as close to the ramp as possible. **“Head” your horse** by standing directly in front of her and maintain soft contact.

### During the lesson: Your role is to be aware of and influence the horse's movement and behavior.

- Stay even with the horse's throat latch between the head and neck, so that you can see their eyes and ears.
- Maintain awareness of the horse's body language at all times and perform appropriate countermeasures as necessary.
- Listen to what the instructor is asking of the participant. Wait for the participant to cue the horse before reinforcing the horse's behavior yourself.
- Avoid interaction with the participant to minimize their sensory input and to allow you to stay focused on the horse.
- **IN AN EMERGENCY**, halt and head the horse and await instructor directions.

### After the lesson:

1. Square off and head the horse for the dismount. Ensure stirrups are run up and tucked in. Loosen the girth.
2. At your rail spot, put the reins over the head of the horse. Unbridle the horse (instructor will do this if there is a bit) by undoing the throat latch and noseband and gently sliding the headstall over the ears. Halter the horse, and take the reins over the horse's head. Clip the rail spot's lead line to the horse's halter.
3. Untack and groom any sweat marks, hose if hot/very sweaty, and notify the instructor if there is “crud” on the horse's back legs. Apply thrush medication if the hoof smells bad or has black slime.
4. Return the horse to its paddock and its halter to its spot. Return your name tag and check out on both the whiteboard AND QR code.



## Vital Information

## Horse Leader

### Quick Tips: Pointers for Horse Leading Success

- Maintain focus on the instructor but keep an “ear out” for input from sidewalker(s); they may request that you adjust your pace or spacing from an object.
- Offer smooth transitions between gaits and when halting.
- Know the cues that the equine is familiar with.
- Be familiar with riders’ ability levels and allow them an opportunity to practice skills before cuing the horse to perform the request.
- Always practice good leading techniques by staying at the throatlatch, not pulling or tugging on the horse, folding rather than wrapping extra lead, etc.
- Focus can wane while walking circles in an arena, so try to remain attentive to your leading duties.
- Familiarize yourself with the equine prior to the rider mounting.

### Horse Leader Safety Guidelines

- Never wrap a lead line around your hand or yourself.
  - Hold the lead with your right hand, and fold the excess in your left.
- Horses are led on the near (left) side, unless otherwise indicated by staff.
- Approach a horse from the side, avoiding quick movements, and speaking in a low voice.
- Pat horses on the shoulder, not on the nose.
- Do not “duck” under the horse’s neck; instead, walk behind the horse while patting its hindquarters.
- Never let reins or lead lines hang to the ground.
- Always call “horse” or “door” before entering the arena with a horse.
- Maintain a safe distance between horses.
- Use quiet voices and avoid quick movements.
- When working near the hindquarters, stay close and keep one hand on the horse.



## Leading

An effective horse leader pays close attention to the participant's needs as well as to where the equine is going; this reinforces the participant's attempts to communicate with their mount. Horse leaders should wait until the participant has had time to process the information and make an effort to comply rather than immediately executing a task for the participant.

Figures 7.16-7.17 show the correct position for leaders. The lead is held in the hand closest to the equine, 6-12 inches (15-30 cm) from the snap, allowing free motion of the equine's head. This is more therapeutic for the participant and less irritating for the equine. Two hands should always be on the lead line with the tail end of the lead looped in a figure-eight in the hand to avoid tripping on it. Watch that the rope is never coiled around the hand for safety.



FIGURE 7.16 CORRECT LEADING



FIGURE 7.17 CORRECT LEADING

Source: PATH Int'l Instructor Education Guide

The figures below depict a few faults common among leaders, such as walking in front of the equine or too far back near the equine's shoulder. Instead, horse leaders should walk alongside the equine between his eye and shoulder to help ensure the horse leader can monitor the horse's behavior and responses.



FIGURES 7.18-7.23 INCORRECT LEADING.

Top row: Leader too far back, lead wrapped around leader's hand, leader holding lead in only one hand.  
Bottom row: Leader too far forward, leader holding lead too close to the horse's head and putting too much pressure on the lead, leader walking backwards.

Source: PATH Int'l Instructor Education Guide

## Leading Guidelines

- Always handle the horse in a manner that creates a safe environment for your team of riders and sidewalkers.
- Never release the horse unless instructed to do so.
- Leave a minimum of one “elephant” space between you and the horses in front of and behind you when walking. To create space between you and another horse, there are three options:
  - 1. Circle – make a large circle to the inside of the arena ending in an area that has enough space in front of and behind the horse you are leading.
  - 2. Pass on the Inside – if the horse in front of you is going at a slower pace, pass on the inside (leaving one horse width between the sidewalkers) and saying “passing on the inside” as you do so. Pass the slower horse until you have one horse length between you and then fall back into the pattern.
  - 3. Half-Halt – perform a half halt to create additional space between you and the horse in front of you. This should only be performed if there is more than ample space behind you and won’t create a short space situation for a horse that’s following you.
- At halt, turn to face your horse and maintain position by his head. Maintain 6- to 12-inches slack in the lead.
- **ALWAYS WAIT** for the rider to indicate that they are ready to “walk on.” Not all will verbalize it, but all can cue in their own way.



# New Hope

Equine Assisted Therapy

- If it is necessary to relax the horse, speak calmly, breathe deep and demonstrate with your body language the energy you want your horse to reflect. Touching the horse is not necessary.
- When playing games during a lesson, stand on the side of the horse nearest to the games. This allows you to screen the horse from the action as needed.
- Halt to walk – Rider cues with “walk on,” then and only then begin walking.
- Walk to halt – Rider cues with “whoa!” and leader gradually slows walking speed to a halt.



## Additional Resources

### Equestrian Sign Language



**Walk-on**

Hands are palm down, wrists go up & down



**Saddle**

Fingers of right hand hook over flat, palm-in left



**Trot**

Close fists with thumbs across fingers, motion up and down from wrists



**Ride**

Straddle palm-in left hand with first two fingers of hand, slide



**Halt/Stop**

Side of right flat hand strikes left flat palm



**Sit Tall**

Sign "Sit" and "Tall"



## Glossary of Physical & Cognitive Disabilities

The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of some disabilities and conditions of participants one might encounter in a therapeutic horsemanship 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 horsemanship can be beneficial.

- **Arthritis**: Inflammatory disease of the joints. Types: Osteo, rheumatoid and juvenile rheumatoid. Characteristics: Pain; lack of mobility; loss of strength. Benefits of therapeutic riding: Gentle rhythmic movements to promote joint mobility and to relieve pain; increase strength.
- **Autism & Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD)**: A broad spectrum of disorders ranging from mild to severe which affects thought, perceptions and attention. Characteristics: impairments in social interaction and communication; restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activities; impairments in the use of nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze and facial expressions; lack of social or emotional reciprocity; delays in, or lack of the development of spoken language; impairments in ability to initiate or sustain conversations with others; abnormal responses to senses such as sight, hearing, touch, balance, smell, taste, reaction to pain; deficits in gross and fine motor skills. Benefits: provides sensory input and promotes sensory integration. Promotes communication skills (expressive and receptive). Develops strength, coordination, muscle tone and gross and fine motor skills. Promotes socialization.
- **Cerebral Palsy**: Brain damage occurring before, at or shortly after birth. It is a non-progressive motor disorder. Types and characteristics: *Spastic*: increased muscle tone, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes. *Athetoid*: Extensor muscle tension, involuntary movements, difficulty maintaining upright posture. *Ataxic*: weakened muscles, poor balance, difficulty with quick, fine movements. Benefits: Normalization of muscle tone, muscle strengthening, development of posture, balance and motor coordination, opportunity for promoting expressive skills, socialization and confidence.
- **Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA) – Stroke**: Brain hemorrhage or brain emboli which causes varying degrees of functional impairment. Characteristics: Flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of the body. May impair thought, speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength. Benefits: Promotes symmetry, stimulates balance, posture, motor planning, speech, socialization and confidence.
- **Developmental Disabilities (DD)**: A diverse group of physical, cognitive, psychological, sensory and speech impairments that begin anytime during development up to 18 years of age. Characteristics: varied, but can include processing delays, and delays in physical, motor and social development. Benefits: Increase confidence and self-esteem, stimulates processing, speech and body awareness, provides opportunity for sport and recreation, promotes socialization.
- **Down Syndrome (DS)**: A genetic disorder in which a person is born with an extra chromosome (chromosome 21). Characteristics: Mild to severe learning disabilities, low muscle tone, speech impairments. Benefits: Promotes expressive and receptive language skills. Increases gross and fine



motor skills, balance, coordination, posture and muscle tone. Promotes social skills. Increases confidence and self esteem.

- Emotional Disabilities: Social, emotional or behavioral functioning which is not age appropriate and affects a child's academics, social relationships and self-care. Characteristics: Difficulty coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations, inappropriate affect or behavior responses, depression, anxiety, physical symptoms, difficulty learning, withdrawal, and aggressiveness. Benefits: Increase confidence and self-esteem, provide opportunities for accomplishments, and promote positive socialization.
- Hearing Impairment (HI): Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound. Characteristics: Difficulties in communication or communication through sign language, lip reading or finger spelling. Benefits: Increases confidence, self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Provides recreational activity with opportunity for socialization. Stimulates balance, posture and coordination.
- Learning Disabilities (LD): Neurological disorders that interfere with a person's ability to store, process or produce information. Characteristics: difficulties with reading, writing, speech, computing math. May affect development and social skills. Benefits: promotes processing, language skills and attending skills, increases confidence and self-esteem, provides opportunity for success, increases balance, coordination and posture, provides opportunity for socialization.
- Mental Impairment or Mental Retardation (MR): A disorder in which a person's overall intellectual functioning is below average with an IQ of 70 or less. Impaired ability to cope with common life demands and daily living skills. Characteristics: impairments in learning, communication, social interaction, self-care. Benefits: increases balance, coordination, strength and posture, improves gross and fine motor skills, promotes socialization, increases confidence, reinforces life and vocational skills.
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS): Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation. Characteristics: most commonly occurs in the 20- to 40-year old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity. Benefits: maintains and strengthens weak muscles, maintains balance, increases confidence and self-esteem.
- Muscular Dystrophy (MD): Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males. Characteristics: progressive muscular weakness, fatigues easily, sensitive to temperature extremes. Benefits: provides opportunity for recreational, physical, and social activity. May help slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, allows for movement free of assistive devices.
- Scoliosis: Lateral curve of the spine with a C- or S-shape with rotary component. Characteristics: Shoulder, trunk and waistline asymmetry. May have back pain and postural fatigue. Benefits: stimulates postural symmetry, strengthens trunk muscles.
- Spina Bifida: Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure which results in spinal cord damage. Characteristics: varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss. May also be



associated with hydrocephalus, lordosis, scoliosis and hip dislocations. Benefits: stimulates posture and balance, increases strength, balance and coordination, promotes confidence and self-esteem.

- Spinal Cord Injury (SCI): Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function. Characteristic: paralysis of muscles below the level of injury – can be flaccid or spastic. Fatigue, sensory loss and pressure sores. Benefits: stimulates posture and balance, strengthens trunk muscles, provides opportunity for recreational and social activity.
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Accidental injury to the head resulting in impairment of cognitive, emotional and/or physical functioning. Characteristics: may include deficits in gross and fine motor skills, balance, coordination and strength. May have deficits in language, communication, processing, memory and perceptual skills. Benefits: stimulates balance, posture, coordination, and gross and fine motor skills. Stimulates speech and perceptual skills. Increases confidence.
- Visual Impairment (VI): Moderate to total loss of sight. Characteristics: may include insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity and fearfulness. Benefits: stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture, balance and coordination. Provides opportunity for socialization, structured risk-taking and freedom of movement.



## Glossary of Horse Terminology

**Aids** – signals used by a rider to communicate instructions to the horse. Aids may be natural – hands, legs, voice, seat, or artificial – crop, spurs.

**Bay** – color term for deep brown to blackish colored horse with black mane and tail.

**Bit** – used to control the horse and generally made of metal, bits attach to the bridle and are placed in the mouth.

**Bridle** – The complete outfit of headstall, reins, and bit used to guide the horse when riding.

**Canter** – A three beat gait of the horse, faster than a trot, a bit slower than a gallop.

**Cantle** – back of the saddle behind the seat.

**Chestnut** – color term used for horse with brownish yellow coat color. Mane & tail are usually the same color.

**Conformation** - structure and general make up of the horse.

**Double ended lead** – a lead line with two ends, each end with a snap, to be placed on each side of the bit or halter while leading.

**Dressage Pad** – the largest of the cotton pads which goes under the saddle.

**Farrier** – profession of trimming and shoeing horses.

**Gaits** – various movements of the horse at different speeds; e.g. walk, trot and canter.

**Gallop** – fastest of the horses gaits. A three beat gait.

**Gelding** – a male horse that has been castrated and incapable of breeding.

**Girth** – long strap with buckles on each end, attaches to saddle straps and holds saddle in place.

**Girth Cover** – soft fabric tube that slides over girth to help prevent horse from getting girth sores.

**Gray** – color term used for horses with coat color from white to dark gray in color.

**Ground poles** – wooden pole placed in arena used to school horse and/or practice rider's two-point position.

**Grooming** – caring for horse's coat includes currying, brushing, and picking feet.

**Half Circle & Reverse** – change of direction by turning horse toward the center of the ring and back to the rail.

**Halter** – leather or nylon bitless headstall used to control the horse when leading in or out to the paddock.

**Half seat or Two Point Position** – rider places hands on horses neck and stands up in stirrups.

**Hand** – a standard unit of measure equal to four inches, in determining the horse's height from the ground to point of the withers.

**Hoof or hooves** – horses feet.

**Lead line** – used to lead the horse, a cotton or nylon rope with snap on end which attaches to halter.

**Long line** – use of long reins which run from the bit, through the sides of the saddle or surcingle, to steer the horse from behind.

**Long side** – the longer side of the arena

**Lunging** – exercising the horse by placing it on a long line, and having the horse go around in a circle.

**Mare** – female horse

**Mounting ramp** – area used to mount the rider on to the horse.

**Near side** – refers to the left side of the horse.

**Off side** – refers to the right side of the horse.

**Off side block** – square block used to keep horse next to mounting ramp which sidewalker stands on to assist rider on to the horse.

**Posting** – a rider moving up and down in rhythm with the horse at the trot.

**Rail** – the outside area of the arena along the fence line or wall.

**Reins** – long leather straps attached to the bit held by the rider to steer and control the horse.

**Saddle** – usually made of leather and placed on horses back for rider to sit on.

**Saddle pad** – cloth pad used under the saddle to protect the horse's back.

**Stirrups** – made of iron, they hang from the saddle and rider places feet in them.

**Tack** – term used to refer to riding equipment.

**Trot** – a two beat diagonal gait.

**Walk on** – command to have the horse move forward into a walk.

**Withers** – bony projection between on horse's back between the shoulders.

**Whoa** – command to stop the horse from any gait.



## Horse Body Language

### 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.



**Ears forward but relaxed**  
Interested in what's in front of him



**Ears turned back but relaxed**  
Listening to his rider or what's behind him



**Ears pointed stiffly forward**  
Alarmed or nervous about what's ahead; looking for danger



**Ears pointed left and right**  
Relaxed, paying attention to the scenery on both sides



**Ears stiffly back**  
Annoyed or worried about what's behind him; might kick if annoyed



**Droopy ears**  
Calm and subordinate, horse may be dozing



**Ears flattened against neck**  
Violently angry, in a fighting mood; may fight, bite or kick

### OTHER SIGNS YOU SHOULD NOTICE

- **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 bothersome actions of a rider or another horse.
- **Droopy ears and resting one hind leg on toe.**  
Calm and resting, horse may be dozing.  
Don't wake him up by startling him!
- **Wrinkling up the face and swinging the head.**  
Threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse.  
Watch out for biting or kicking.

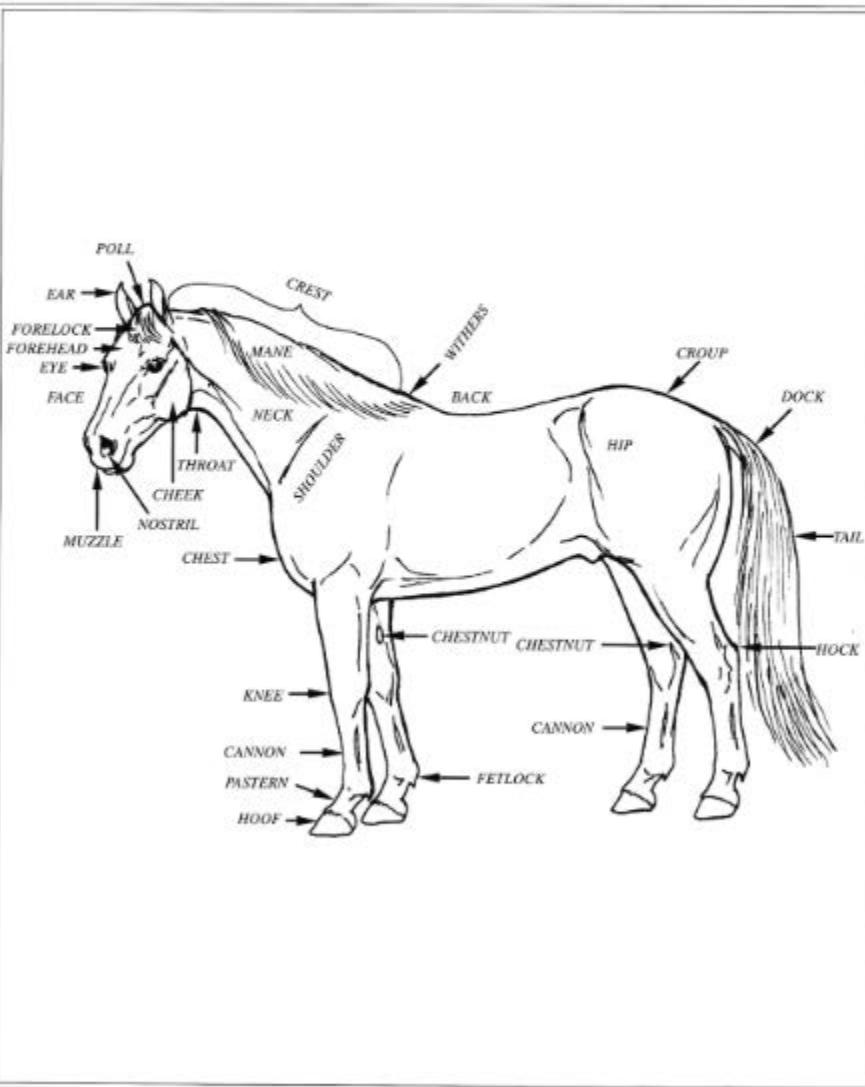
Source: CHA Composite Horsemanship Manual



## Parts of the Horse

### PARTS OF THE HORSE

When working around horses there are some special words and terms that you will need to know. Some parts of the horse are shown below.



Source: CHA Composite Horsemanship Manual



Identifying & Matching Tack

Dressage Saddle  (long, straight flaps)	Dressage Pad  (long, straight edges)	Dressage Girth  (short, black, two buckles)
AP/Jump Saddle  (shorter, forward flaps)	AP/Jump Pad  (curved front edge, shorter)	AP/Jump Girth  (long, brown, two buckles)
Western Saddle  (horn in front, bulkier shape)	Western Pad  (thick, wool)	Western Girth/Cinch  (black or white, single buckle)



## “Getting Ready for Spring! Quick Review of the 9 Points of Saddle Fit”

By Jochen Schleese, CMS, CSFT, CSE

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If you or your horse have been somewhat inactive over the winter months, you will need to ensure that the saddle is fitted properly to allow him comfort and freedom to muscle up again when you begin to ride. As we head into spring, it's time to put our thoughts into ensuring that all of our tack and equipment will work. While it can take four weeks for a muscle to build up with consistent training, it takes only one week for the muscle to regain its original shape (which is negative development). Thus, even if you have taken just a few weeks off from riding, you will find that your saddle may not fit the way it did and the way it should.

A quick diagnostic can be done using our nine points of saddle fit evaluation (videos are available to show you how at [www.youtube.com/c/schleesesaddlery](http://www.youtube.com/c/schleesesaddlery)). Below are very brief points to do a preliminary assessment of your saddle fit, recognizing that perhaps you may actually be sharing both horse and/or saddle with other riders. But even so, you want to make sure that you have the most positive pairing available to you.

### Saddle Balance

A saddle too high in the pommel and too low in the cantle causes pressure on the horse's back. It will be very difficult for your horse to engage his back because too much of your weight is on his last two floating ribs.

If your saddle is too low in the front, it will pinch into the horse's shoulder, which is very restrictive for

your horse. Your saddle is too high in the back so your leg goes forward and you fall into a chair seat to balance which can strain the discs in your lower back. It should sit so that the pommel and cantle are even.



This dressage saddle shows where the center of balance is.



The distance between the top of the withers and the sides of the withers should be 2-3 fingers all around.

### Wither Clearance

The saddle should have 2-3 fingers clearance on the top and around the side of the withers. The saddle must have an opening (clearance) on the sides of his withers to accommodate the shoulder rotation upwards and backwards during movement.

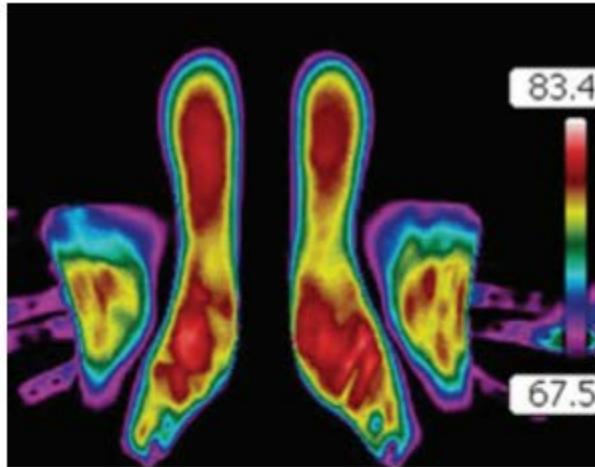
A horse whose saddle pinches his withers may be reluctant to go forward. Other more extreme signs of insufficient wither clearance are patches of white hairs (not scattered individual white hairs) or sores on the top or on one or both sides of the withers.

### Channel/Gullet Width

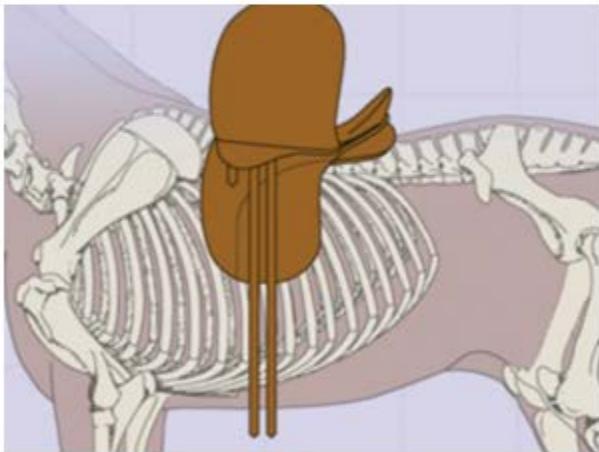
A saddle with a channel or gullet that is too narrow or too wide can cause permanent damage to your horse's back. The width of each horse's spine will determine how wide his saddle's gullet must be,



This saddle has a wide gullet channel with good distribution of the rider's weight on the horse's saddle support area.



This thermographic image shows a saddle with panels that bridge front to back, resulting in greater pressure at the pommel and cantle areas.



This saddle is positioned behind the shoulder, but  
a) it is too long for the horse's back as it extends past the 18th thoracic vertebra, and  
b) the billets are too far back and will pull the saddle onto the shoulder in motion.



This saddle clearly is too long for this horse as it sits and puts pressure beyond the last floating rib as drawn in yellow on the horse. The yellow line drawn on the saddle's panel indicates a more suitable length of panel for this horse.

## Full Panel Contact

Ensure that your saddle's panels make even contact with your horse's back all the way down to distribute the rider's weight over an area that equals approximately 220 square inches and ends in the last rib. Ensure that it doesn't bridge or rock (contact only in the middle.)

## Billet Alignment

Billets should hang perpendicular to the ground in the girth area. If the billets hang too far back, gravity will pull the billets (and the saddle) forward into the girth area. The girth will always find its position at the narrowest point of the rib cage, driving the saddle forward onto your horse's shoulders.

If the billets hang too far forward into your horse's elbow area, they may make him sore in the elbows. Gravity will drag them (and the girth and saddle along with them) back into the girth area. There will now be too much pressure on the panels at the rear of the saddle.



This rider is sitting on a saddle which has shifted to the right, presumably having been moved by the larger left shoulder during movement. Photo courtesy of Dr. Joanna Robson, DVM.



The angle of this saddle is correct as it is the same as the shoulder angle of the horse.

### Saddle Length

The length of the saddle support area will determine how long the panels must be.

The saddle must sit behind the shoulder. A saddle that is too long often will get driven forward into the shoulder. The saddle cannot extend past the last floating rib at the eighteenth thoracic vertebra.

### Tree Angle

The angle of the tree (at the tree points for the gullet plate) must be adjusted to match the angle of the horse's shoulder. As the horse moves, his shoulder rotates upward and backwards. Check if the angle of the piping on the saddle matches the angle of your horse's shoulder. If it does, the angle of your saddle's tree is correctly adjusted for your horse.



## Saddle Straightness

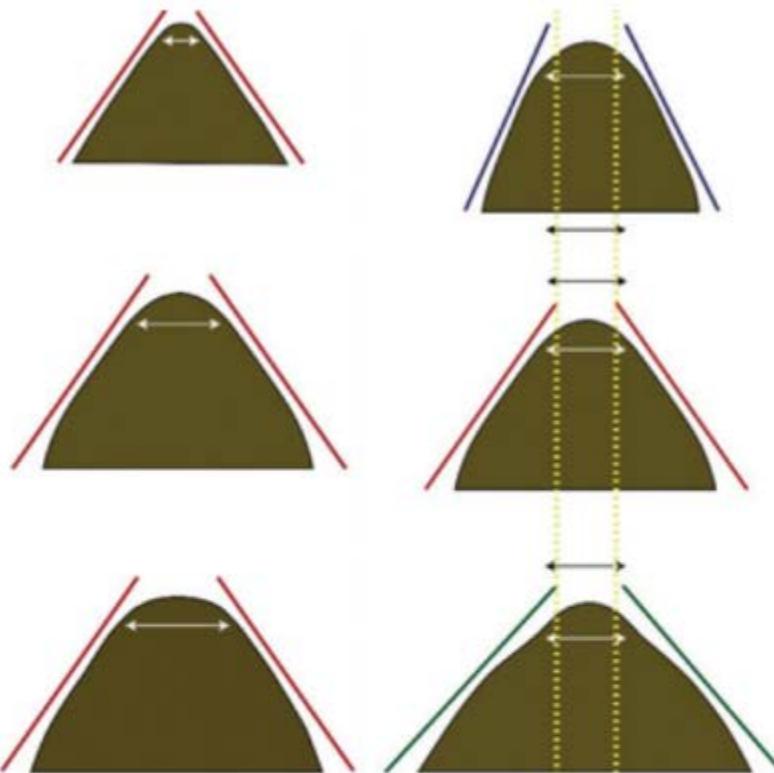
Straightness means that the center of the saddle is in alignment with your horse's spine. Horses are by nature uneven. Most horses have a left shoulder that is larger and more developed than their right shoulder. The larger shoulder kicks the saddle over to the other side during motion.

A rider who sits unevenly can compress the stuffing more on one side of the saddle and drag it over to that side.

## Tree Width

The tree width at the gullet plate must be wide enough for the horse's shoulders to rotate freely under the tree.

If the tree width is too wide, the entire saddle may rock or slip from side to side when it's being ridden, or the back half of the saddle may twist to one side or the other.



The three diagrams above illustrate identical tree angles with different tree widths; the three on the right illustrate identical tree widths with different tree angles (such as can be effected with the 'self-adjusting' trees of various companies, but changing angle without changing width is not always a good thing).

Tree width and tree angle need to be adjusted together. Adding flocking to or removing flocking from the vertical panels of the saddle will not solve the problem - it is the gullet plate that needs to be adjusted. Some of the self-adjustable gullet plates will accommodate angle adjustment, but will not allow width adjustment (over the wither area).

Hopefully these basic tips will help you ensure your horse has the freedom to perform at its potential. When in doubt, call a professional!