



VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES

Special Spirit Inc.

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Welcome!

Special Spirit Inc., The Learning Ranch is a non-profit 501c(3) organization dedicated to promoting wellness and learning practical life skills through the horse and human connection. We envision a community where all individuals have access to the healing benefits of caring for and working with animals in the outdoors.

You have chosen to give some of your valuable time to volunteer to help provide a unique experiential service connecting horses and humans at Special Spirit Therapeutic Riding Center. Seeing the joy and benefits of the students and their families through equine-assisted activities make the commitment of a being a Special Spirit volunteer very rewarding.

We rely on the weekly participation of our volunteers to provide safe and effective lessons for our mounted and unmounted students. Without the dedication and commitment of volunteers, the center and its programs would not be possible.

Most of our students have a need for consistency and most of them have difficulty with change. We encourage volunteers to have a consistent schedule in the day(s) and the hour(s) they volunteer. The staff understands that your time is valuable, and we are willing to be flexible with scheduling in order to facilitate our program needs.

Special Spirit is proud of its accomplishments and invites you to become part of our team. Thank you for becoming a part of our growing organization. This manual has been developed to provide you with some guidelines for working with students of all abilities.

Please read it carefully.

The information this handbook contains is important, and will improve the quality of your work. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. Without you, this program could not exist. You are valuable to us, and we appreciate all that you do!

To be the best that we can be - we must dream of being more. Our dream is the promise of all we can become.

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Overview of Special Spirit

Purpose

Special Spirit was founded to improve the lives of individuals with physical, cognitive, emotional, and social challenges through horsemanship. Horseback riding helps people to achieve a quality of life that is improved, enhanced and enriched through contact with horses and activity in the outdoors. A student's individual goals for equine-assisted activities or therapeutic riding can be designed with input from parents, teachers, therapists, and/or doctors. The benefits of therapeutic riding include the following:

- Physical: Because horseback riding rhythmically moves the rider's body in a manner similar to a human gait, riders with physical disabilities often show improvement in flexibility, balance, posture, coordination, and muscle strength.
- Emotional: Connection with horses promotes self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Horses can be mirrors for a student's feelings and help them to recognize how their emotional state impacts themselves and others.
- Cognitive: Contact with horses and horsemanship training provides a nurturing setting for learning. Acquiring new skills related to working with the animals improves a student's concentration, organizational skills, ability to follow directions, and implementing a plan with goal setting.
- Social: Students will be encouraged to work collaboratively with instructors, volunteers, and other students with diverse needs and backgrounds. Additionally, students will experience the nonjudgmental presence of our amazing animals. The connection students build with our animals promotes trust, a healthy bond, and communication skills. A friendly, collaborative environment is highly valued at Special Spirit and this positivity is contagious. Riders may, for the first time in their lives, experience some independence and a sense of being a part of a team. Horse shows and play-days give riders an opportunity to demonstrate the skills and progress they have made in a noncompetitive atmosphere.

History:

Special Spirit was founded in April of 2008, as a non-profit corporation by Eva Lund and Mary K Hughes. Eva & Mary K brought to Special Spirit 20+ years of experience as volunteers with therapeutic riding programs. Beginning with two horses and two instructors, today Special Spirit has grown and has many horses and volunteers, serving over 25 students each week. Special Spirit volunteers have logged many hours. Internships have been a strong part of Special Spirit. One of our goals is to support other programs with a similar mission. Special Spirit welcomes interns from around the world. After being open for one year, Special Spirit applied for and received accreditation by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) as a Certified Riding Center. NARHA certification ensures that the programs meet the highest standards for safety, instruction and management. Our instructors hold PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) and EAGALA (Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association) certifications.

Who Do You Call?

Who do I call if I can't come?

If you know ahead of time that you can't come, call our staff (listed below). If you find out you can't come on the day of the class, call us at the ranch.

Who do I call if I need more information or if I have questions? You can call either Lainie Baydian at (818) 421-9940, Cassie Hurlbut at (808) 497-2970, or Eva Lund at (323) 428-5005.

Who do I call to find out if classes are cancelled due to weather or holidays? Call a staff member to confirm if classes cancelled due to weather/holiday.

How do I sign in?

There is a sign-in book on the volunteer table (next to tack room). Please fill out one sheet for yourself (blank sheets are in the back of the book) if you haven't already done so. Sign in each time you come, and estimate the number of hours you will be at the ranch.

We also recommend logging your volunteer hours on Equus Foundation. This enters you to be eligible for rewards such as Ariat products and grants to donate to your favorite charity (such as Special Spirit ☺). Sign up to start logging hours here:

<https://equusfoundation.org/join-us/join-us-individual.php>

Where is the fire extinguisher?

There are 5 fire extinguishers located on the ranch. See map for location.

Where is the phone? TBD

There is a phone in a gray box next to the office in the wooden barn. It is for local calls only. If you need to use it to make long distance calls, you will need to call collect or use a credit card or phone card.

What do I do in an emergency?

Follow the directions of the instructor of the class, a senior volunteer, or the program director. Stay calm until the situation is under control.

General Guidelines

Please dress neatly and wear closed-toed, sturdy shoes to prevent foot injuries (boots with heels preferred, no sandals, flip-flops, crocs). Please wear long pants. Avoid loose clothing and jewelry, as they can get caught and cause injuries. Wear sunglasses and/or a hat to protect your eyes.

Cell phones are not allowed in the arena. If you are expecting a call, please leave your phone with one of the volunteers or parents who is not in the arena. Answering a call or text takes your attention away from your most important job – the safety of our students.

Chewing gum, eating, and drinking are not allowed in the arena. This is for everyone's safety.

Don't forget to sign in. This is very important so that we can provide you with support letters for your community service hours, and also so we can ensure ongoing grants and funding for Special Spirit programs. Your hours are also noted by us for use in volunteer recognition and awards.

We depend on you to be here. If you can't make it for your volunteer shift, please let us know ahead of time so that we can arrange for a substitute. We really appreciate your consideration.

We treat our horses GENTLY. Never kick or hit a horse. If there is a question or concern about the safety of a horse's behavior, please inform the instructor immediately.

We treat our students with RESPECT. Talk to them appropriately for their age and cognitive level. Please never yell. Use positive rather than negative reinforcement. Be patient. Count to 30 before repeating a request, especially if the student has a learning disability. He or she might need extra time to process what have you asked. At Special Spirit we expect our volunteers to have compassion and to understand students may arrive with different comfort levels around horses. If the volunteer is unsure how to respond to a student's reactions to the animals or activities, please ask the instructor for help.

Keep what happens at the ranch confidential. We know you are excited about what you do here, and want to share it with others. Please do so in a way that does not identify the students. It is the responsibility of Special Spirit, our staff, and volunteers—as a certified therapeutic equine facility—to provide confidentiality and privacy for our students and their families.

Keep busy. If you have a break, there are plenty of things you can do to help out. Clean up the tack room or grooming tools, wash out buckets, clean the toys, groom a horse, hoof-pick feet, muck the stalls, pick up rocks from the arena, or just ask us how you can help! We have a Chore List by the tack room 😊

Have fun! Smile, laugh, and enjoy yourself. Your enthusiasm is contagious!

Mounted Activity Emergency Plan

If there is an emergency while a lesson is in session:

1. All horses will be halted.
2. All leaders will position themselves in front of the horse. The leaders are responsible ONLY for the horse, not the riders.
3. All side walkers will stabilize their riders (arm over leg support). The side walkers are responsible ONLY for the rider, not the horse.
4. The instructor will supervise the dismounting, either verbally or personally.
5. In the event that a rider must be removed from the horse quickly, as in a seizure or a spooked horse, the side walker on the left is responsible for dismounting the rider.
6. If circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated, the riders will be escorted out first by their volunteers and the horses will be removed by their leaders to an appropriate place, after the riders are out of danger.
7. The instructor will determine if medical personnel are required and will request assistance in contacting specific personnel.

Keeping Our Program Safe

RANCH SAFETY

Fire is an ever-present danger on a ranch. Please do not smoke when you are here. If you need a cigarette break, notify the instructor in charge, and smoke off the property.

Drinking and drug use do not mix with horses. Please do not drink before coming to volunteer. If you are taking any medications that will impair your reflexes or judgment, it is better to refrain from volunteering until you are no longer using them.

If you are driving on the ranch property, please drive SLOWLY. The ranch speed limit is 5 miles per hour. Horses spook at fast cars, and there are dogs and children around that you may not see.

Running is not allowed, for your safety and the safety of the horses. If a horse is loose, WALK over to catch them. The same is true of any other emergency.

Dogs can frighten horses, and many of our students are afraid of them. Please don't bring dogs to the ranch.

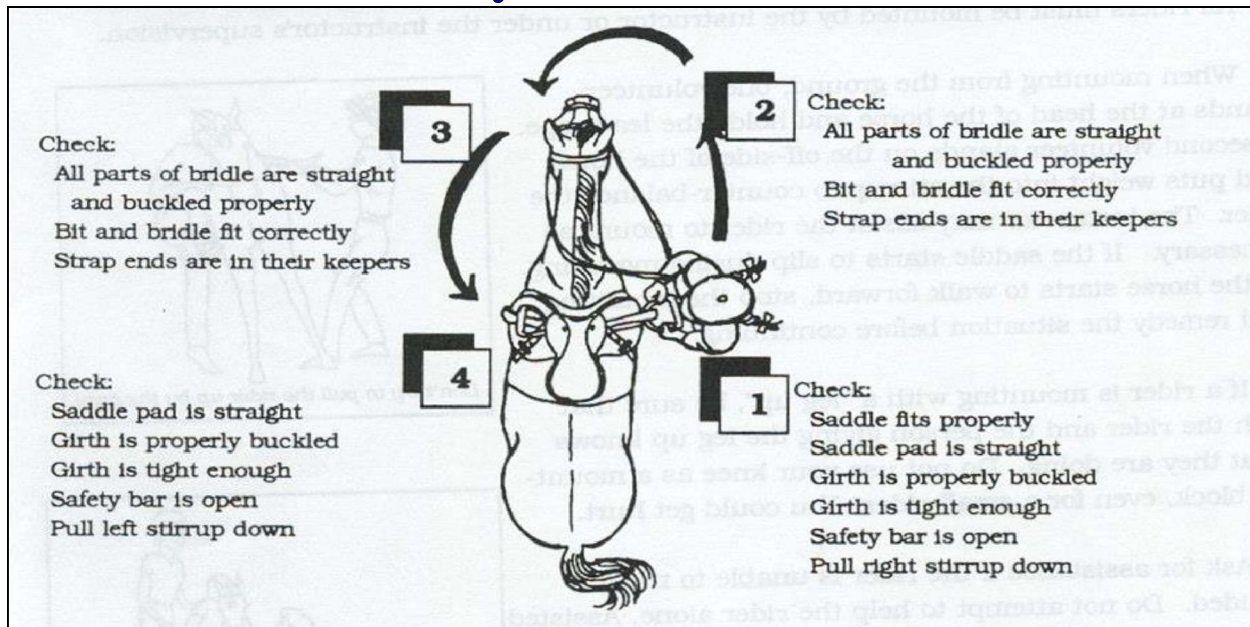
SAFE TACKING AND UNTACKING

1. Think of a horse as having a 6-foot "danger zone" surrounding it. Within 6 feet, the horse can kick, buck, cowkick (kick to the side), bite, or rear – and you or a student can be seriously injured. Approach the "danger zone" with caution.

- If you must walk behind a horse, approach from the side, touch the horse and speak to it. Keep touching it as you walk very closely around the horse.
- Warn a horse that you are approaching. Use your voice and a gentle touch. Approach from the side, NEVER from the rear.
- When standing next to a horse, stand VERY close. If the horse kicks, he can't kick very hard if you are close.
- Keep your feet away from the horse's hooves and from beneath the horse. You might get stepped on. Never walk under a horse's neck (it might rear from fright). Never walk under a horse. You might not be that short, but some children are.
- Never stand directly in front of a horse except to hold the horse for a rider. Never stand behind a horse for any reason.
- Hand feeding is an invitation to have your fingers bitten. After the food is gone, your fingers still carry the smell. A horse can't tell the difference between a carrot and a finger that smells like a carrot. Keep your hands away from the horse's mouth. Horses can bite!
- Don't yell, run, or make sudden movements near a horse. Be slow and gentle.

2. Keep a respectful space between each horse when leading them/during sessions.
Fighting horses are a danger to everyone nearby. Keep an eye on their heads and rear ends. If the ears are flattened, the horse is about to fight. If he lifts his leg, he is getting ready to kick. **DO NOT ALLOW HORSES TO SNIFF EACH OTHER.**
3. Never tie a horse to the arena or fences. Use the tie rails or hold the horse.
4. Always use a halter to tie a horse in the crossties. **NEVER** tie a horse by his bit. **NEVER** tie a horse by his reins.
5. Always lead a horse by his lead rope and halter, not by the reins.
6. If a tied horse rears or pulls back, or otherwise acts upset, **STAY AWAY**. Let the instructor handle the problem. A panicked horse can be very dangerous.

How To Do A Safety Check



Why do we do a safety check before we mount?

No matter how carefully we check when we saddle the horse, or how many times we have done it before, there is always the possibility that we overlooked something. An incorrectly fitted saddle or saddle pad can irritate or hurt the horse, and an unhappy horse may hurt the rider. A loose girth will cause the saddle to slip when mounting or riding. If the bridle is not properly fitted and buckled, it may come off while riding. An extra minute is all it takes to do a safety check by walking around the horse before mounting and following the steps shown above.

Mounting

Never mount a horse while the horse is tied. If the horse pulls back, the rider and the horse could be injured. Never mount next to a fence, car, another horse, or any solid object that the rider could be thrown into. Never mount on pavement.

Lead an unmounted horse on your right. Use two hands – the right hand should be about 6 inches below the snap, and the left hand holds the FOLDED (not coiled) end of the lead rope. Don't let the lead rope drag on the ground. It could trip you or your horse could step on it. Don't throw it over your shoulder. It could get tangled and choke you.

Always check the girth for tightness before mounting or helping a student to mount. Check that the saddle and bridle are placed properly on the horse, the stirrups are the correct length and are down, and that nothing is broken or worn. **MAKE SURE THE RIDER HAS HELMET ON SECURELY.** Don't assume that someone else will do this. Better to check twice than not at all.

All riders must be mounted by the instructor or under the instructor's supervision.

When mounting from the ground, one volunteer stands at the head of the horse and holds the lead rope. A second volunteer stands on the off-side of the horse and puts weight into the stirrup to counter-balance the rider. The instructor may assist the rider to mount as necessary. If the saddle starts to slip or the horse starts to walk forward during mounting, stop the mounting and remedy the situation before continuing.

Ask for assistance if the rider is unable to mount unaided. Do not attempt to help the rider alone. Assisted mounting from the mounting ramp is always done by the instructor or therapist. You may be asked to assist on the opposite side of the horse.

When assisting at the ramp, stand on the block, not on the ground. It is dangerous to be standing between the block and the horse, especially if the horse spooks or moves.

In the Arena

Students should never be in the arena other than when mounted except to mount or dismount and leave the arena, or as part of a supervised activity.

The arena gates must be closed and latched at all times when there are horses in the arena.

If you are leading a horse, walk between the horse's head and shoulder, NOT in front of the horse.

When leading or holding a horse with a mounted rider, always inform the rider BEFORE moving or changing directions. Avoid sharp turns or sudden stops. Allow the rider to initiate all movement if possible. Give the rider time to give commands to the horse. ALWAYS let the rider do as much as possible.

Help your rider if he or she needs it, but first allow plenty of time for the rider to perform independently. Responses often take longer than we expect. Allow the rider to perform at his or her own pace. But do make sure the rider understands the instructor. Riders should always stay at least 2 horse lengths apart from each other, whether moving or standing still. If your rider's horse gets too close to another horse, ask the rider to circle or cross to the other side of the arena.

When passing another horse, always pass on the inside (the side closest to the center of the arena) and at least 6 feet away from the horse being passed.

Do not circle a horse near another horse. Watch that no other horses are in the way.

All horses should be going in the same direction. If one rider reverses, all riders must reverse. A reverse is always made by turning in toward the center of the arena.

Never trot a horse up to or past a walking horse. Never canter up to or past a walking or trotting horse.

It is very important to pay attention to the rider and instructor. Don't chat with riders or other volunteers while the class is in session. Be friendly, answer direct questions from the rider briefly, but keep your ears on the instructor and your eyes on the rider.

You may reinforce what the instructor is saying by showing the rider or touching the appropriate area. Try not to talk. If you are talking, you might miss an emergency instruction.

Never *yank* on the reins or lead rope to stop the horse. Pull slowly and steadily on the lead rope or reins. Yanking frightens the horse and can cause rearing or backing up. If a horse pulls back, do not resist. Move with him, holding the lead rope. The harder you pull a horse, the harder he will resist you.

NEVER HIT OR KICK A HORSE. If a horse is misbehaving, call the instructor for help.

If the horse or rider you are working with is nervous or upset, walk the horse to the center of the arena and ask the instructor if you should dismount the rider. Horses should be calm and riders should be alert. If this is not the case, bring it to the instructor's attention immediately.

If you aren't comfortable for any reason with your horse or rider, tell the instructor immediately. You are often the first person to be aware of a potential problem. Trust your instincts.

During classes, horses should not stand at the rail (fence) except under the instructor's directions. If your rider needs to stop, come off the rail and move to the center of the arena so you don't block the movement of other riders.

If a horse is running away, (with or without a rider) **STAY CALM**. Do not yell and do not run. Halt *your* rider and stay with him/her. Wait for instructions from the instructor. If you are not with a student, but are spotting, walk slowly toward where the horse is running to and wait for instructions.

If another rider has a problem or a fall, **DON'T** rush to assist. Stay with your rider and listen for instructions. The instructor will handle the problem and ask for assistance if needed. The rider you are assisting is **YOUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY**.

If your rider falls, the horse leader is responsible for the horse, not the rider. A loose horse is a danger to every rider in the arena. Stop the horse, get it away from the rider and call for the instructor. The sidewalker stays with the rider until the instructor arrives, and then follows the directions of the instructor.

When dismounting to the ground unassisted, make sure the rider takes **BOTH** feet out of the stirrups before lowering himself to the ground. Assisted dismounts should always be done by the instructor.

The Tack Room

The tack room is the building where we store saddles, bridles, reins and other horse related equipment, collectively known as “tack.” A well-organized tack room makes the jobs of the volunteers easier. Knowing your way around the tack room and keeping things in order is vital to the smooth running of the program.

Rules for the tack room:

All saddles are numbered, as are the saddle racks. Saddles are to be stored on the same numbered rack. They are placed on the rack facing the wall, with the rear of the saddle facing you. Saddles can be covered by dry saddle pads to keep them free of dust.

Saddle pads must be allowed to dry out before putting them away.

English and dressage girths are stored separately from the saddles. DO NOT leave them attached to the saddle.

All girths are numbered. Please put them back on the girth rack in numerical order. EG girths are English Girths and are stored on the top rack. DG girths are Dressage Girths and are stored on the bottom rack.

Each horse has his own halter/bridle combination and bit. They are stored on bridle racks on the wall. Each rack has a horse’s name above it. Halter/bridles and bits also have the horse’s name on them. Please be careful to put the halter/bridles and bits away under the correct name.

The halter and lead rope used to put away the horse is stored on the horse’s stall. Extra lead ropes and halters are on a rack in the tack room.

Reins are stored on their own rack. DO NOT leave them attached to the halter/bridles.

Grooming tools are kept in grooming boxes. There should be at least one body brush, rubber curry, mane comb, and hoofpick in each box. The tools are shared by all the horses. After you use a tool, please put it back in the grooming box. Many volunteers put the hoof picks in their pockets and accidentally take them home. Please check your pockets before you leave.

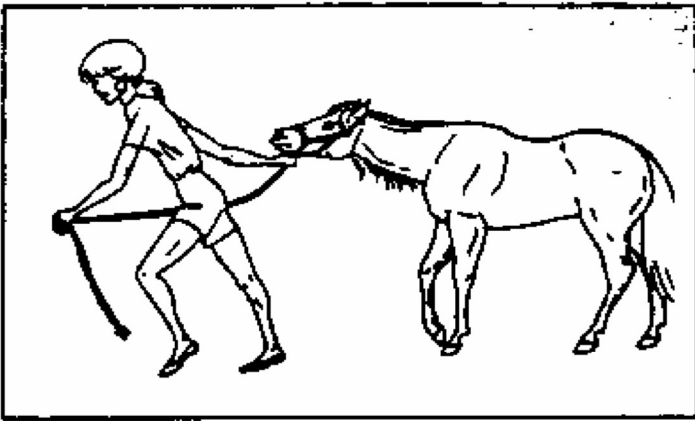
Thank you for keeping our tack room neat and clean!

Horse Leading

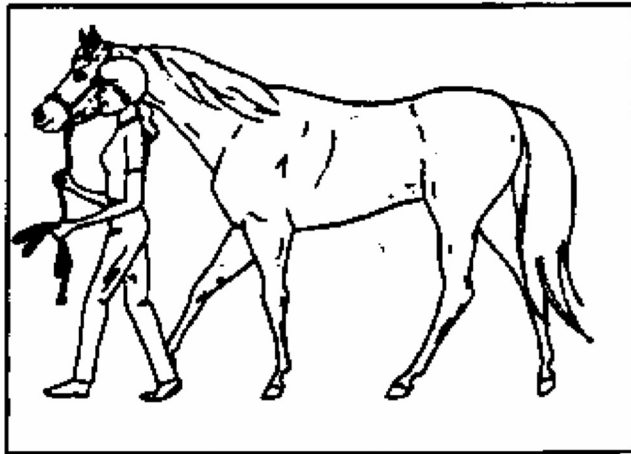
The responsibility of a horse leader is to lead the horse. For this reason, a horse leader should be someone with experience in horsemanship. A leader is used when a student cannot ride independently. The goal is to allow the rider to be as independent as possible. Although the leader is responsible for guiding the horse, stopping and starting, the leader should allow the rider to do as much of this as possible, assisting only when necessary.

How to lead a horse:

1. The leader usually stands on the side of the horse closest to the center of the arena, next to the horse's neck (between the head and the shoulder).
2. The leader holds the lead rope, six to eight inches from the horse's head, in the hand that is closest to the horse. The remaining rope is folded, not looped, and held in the free hand. Be careful not to allow the lead rope to drag on the ground or to be looped around the leader's hand.
3. When the horse is stopped for more than a second or two, the leader should stand in front of the horse. The lead rope is held folded in one hand, and the sides of the bit or halter are held gently with both hands to prevent the horse from moving forward. Do not hold the bit or halter too strongly, or the horse will resist and start to move around or pull its head back. You can calm the horse by holding the halter with one hand and stroking the horse below the forelock (on the forehead) with the other hand.
4. When a rider is mounting at the mounting ramp or block, lead the horse to the start of the ramp, then move to the front of the horse and walk backward into the ramp corridor, leading the horse as close to the ramp as possible. Remain standing in front of the horse and keep him as still as possible during the mounting.
5. Walking the horse: Walk next to the horse's neck, between the horse's head and shoulder. DO NOT drag the horse or walk ahead of it. If necessary, slow your speed to that of the horse's. The sidewalker can gently prod the horse on the barrel to encourage a faster pace. If the horse is walking too fast, a gentle tug on the lead rope will slow it down.
6. Trotting the horse: After the rider cues the horse to trot, gently tug the lead rope and move into a gentle trot (not a run) next to the horse. Remain alongside the horse's neck during the trot. Control the speed with a tug backwards on the rope if the horse goes too fast.
7. Pay attention to the instructor at all times. It is important that you not engage in conversation when leading, as this will interfere with your knowing what is going on. The instructor will tell the riders to walk, trot, turn right or left or halt. The leader needs to hear these commands so as not to interfere with the rider's efforts, and to supplement them if needed.
8. Be aware of other horses in the arena, and do not let the horse you are leading approach another horse too closely. There should be a two-horse distance between riders at all times. Horses must NEVER be allowed to put their noses together.
9. If a rider should fall, the leader is responsible for the horse ONLY. Keep the horse calm and move it away from the fallen rider. Stay with the horse. The instructor will take care of the fallen rider.



There is a wrong way.....



...and a right way to lead a horse.

Sidewalking

The responsibility of the sidewalker, first and foremost, is the safety of the rider. Sidewalkers assist the riders to the degree necessary.

How to sidewalk:

1. The sidewalker walks next to the rider's leg, helping to support the rider's balance if necessary. The Instructor will inform you if you need to use a support hold. There are three support holds, as follows:
 - a. Arm-Over-Leg support: This position provides support for the rider without interfering with the rider's trunk control, allowing the rider to build up strong trunk support. Facing toward the rider's head, the hand closest to the horse holds the front of the saddle, with the arm resting lightly across the rider's thigh. In the event that the rider slips, a gentle downward pressure with that arm will support the rider in place.
 - b. Crutch support: This is used for riders who have no upper body control. Facing the front of the horse, the hand closest to the horse forms a crutch under the armpit of the rider, with the thumb in front of the shoulder and the fingers behind it. Resting the elbow on the saddle will increase the support and help prevent fatigue on the volunteer's part.
 - c. Ankle support: This is the least restrictive form of support, allowing the rider to use all muscles to provide his or her own support. Facing the front of the horse, the hand closest to the horse encircles the rider's ankle lightly. In the event that the rider slips, a light tug will bring the rider back into alignment with the saddle. **DO NOT** yank on the ankle. **DO NOT** keep constant pressure downward on the ankle. If the rider loses balance forward, gently moving the leg forward will counterbalance the rider. If the rider loses balance backward, gently moving the leg backward will also counterbalance the rider.
2. Be aware that it may be necessary to change sides frequently if your arm gets tired. If this happens, ask the leader to stop, and tell the other sidewalker that you need to change sides. As the other sidewalker to support the rider as you move around to the other side. Take the support position on the new side and support the rider while the other sidewalker moves to the opposite side. When the other sidewalker has indicated that he or she is ready, inform the leader that you can resume walking.
3. At the trot, the sidewalkers must trot alongside the rider at the rider's leg. If providing support, use the arm-over-leg position, holding firmly to the front of the saddle. Additional support may be provided by gentle downward pressure on the rider's ankle with your free hand. Riders using the crutch support should not trot.
4. If a rider starts to fall, try to push the rider back into the saddle. If this is not possible, the next best thing to do is to try and break the fall. To do this, the sidewalker on the side of the horse that the rider is falling toward turns and puts his or her back against the rider and goes down to the ground with the rider. This not only slows the fall, it prevents the sidewalker from being injured in an attempt to save the rider.
5. Once a rider has fallen, the sidewalkers stay with the rider while the horse leader moves the horse out of the way. **DO NOT** attempt to help the rider – this is the responsibility of the instructor. Be

prepared to go for help at the direction of the instructor. Know where the first aid kit is, where the phone is, and where the emergency numbers are.

6. Other responsibilities of the sidewalkers include encouraging the rider to pay attention to the instructor, helping the rider to follow directions, showing the rider which side is right and left, assisting in games, demonstrating to the rider where to place the legs and how to keep heels down, encouraging the horse to keep moving (by gently prodding the horse in the side) and providing encouragement and enthusiasm for the rider's efforts.

7. It is important that the sidewalkers pay attention to the instructor at all times. Conversations should be non-existent when instruction is taking place. Sidewalkers reinforce, but do not teach, so restrain the urge to tell the rider what to do and how to do it unless the instructor tells you to do so.

8. If there is only one sidewalker and no leader, the sidewalker takes on the additional responsibility of control of the horse in the event that the rider has trouble controlling his mount. This is only done when the rider's balance is sufficient to not need support and the rider is beginning to ride independently.

Glossary of Disabilities

The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of some disabilities and conditions of participants one might encounter in a therapeutic riding setting. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability. Rather, it is a general overview with an explanation of how therapeutic riding can be beneficial.

Arthritis

Inflammatory disease of the joints.

Types: Osteo, rheumatoid and juvenile rheumatoid.

Characteristics: Pain, lack of mobility, deformity, loss of strength.

Benefits (of therapeutic riding): Gentle rhythmic movement to promote joint mobility and relieve pain.

Autism

A self-centered mental state from which reality often tends to be excluded.

Characteristics: Unresponsiveness to the presence of others; withdrawal from physical contact; severely delayed and disordered language; self-stimulating behaviors; unusual or special fears; insensitivity to pain; unawareness of real dangers; hyperactive; passive; unusual behaviors such as smelling/tasting/licking or mouthing all objects; ritualistic behaviors; developmentally delayed; unusual response to sounds; clumsiness; social withdrawal; resistance to change.

Benefits: Interactions in a group setting stimulates interest away from self and toward others and the horses. Postural and verbal stimulation.

Cerebral Palsy

Brain damage occurring before, at, or shortly after birth. It is a non-progressive motor disorder.

Types and Characteristics:

Spastic – hypertonicity with hyperactive stretch reflexes, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes.

Athetoid – extensor muscle tension, worm-like movements, abnormal posturing and slow and deliberate speech.

Ataxic – poor balance, difficulty with quick, fine movements and are often described as having a “rag doll” appearance.

Benefits: Normalization of tone, stimulation of postural and balance mechanisms, muscle strengthening and perceptual motor coordination.

Associated Problems: Seizures; hearing defects; visual defects; general sensory impairment; perceptual problems; communication problems; emotional disturbance; learning disabilities.

Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA or Stroke)

Hemorrhage in brain, which causes varying degrees of functional impairment. **Characteristics:** Flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of body. May cause mental impairment, impair speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength. **Benefits:** Promotes symmetry, stimulates balance, posture, motor planning, speech and socialization.

Developmental Disabilities (DD)

A general term applied to children functioning two or more years below grade level.

Characteristics: Varied, but can include slow physical, motor and social development. **Benefits:** Provides arena for success, opportunity for sport and recreation, stimulates body awareness.

Down Syndrome

Condition in which a person is born with an extra chromosome, resulting in mental and physical challenges.

Characteristics: Broad flat face, slanted eyes, neck and hand are often broad and short. Usually Hypotonic, have hypermobile joints and tend to be short and slightly overweight. Prone to respiratory infections.

Benefits: Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance, muscle tone, and coordination.

Emotional Disabilities

A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies.

Characteristics: Trouble coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia and schizophrenia may be exhibited.

Benefits: Increases feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness, and provides appropriate social outlet.

Epilepsy

Abnormal electrical activity of the brain marked by seizures with altered consciousness.

Types and Characteristics:

Petit Mal: Brief loss of consciousness with loss of postural tone. May have jerky movements, blank expression.

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

Hearing Impairment

Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound.

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

Benefits: Stimulates self-confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

Learning Disabilities (LD)

Catch-all phrase for individuals who have problems processing, sequencing and problemsolving, but who appear to have otherwise normal intelligence skills. **Characteristics:** Short attention span, easily frustrated, immature.

Benefits: Effects depend upon the particular disorder. Stimulates attention span, group skills, cooperation, language skills, posture and coordination.

Intellectual Disability

This is a term used to describe a person with certain limitations in cognitive functioning and other skills, including communication and self-care.

Benefits: Stimulates group activity skills, coordination, balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Provides a structured learning environment.

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation.

Characteristics: Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40 year old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Fatigues easily. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity. **Benefits:** Maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides opportunities for emotional therapy.

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

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 group activity, may slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, and allows movement free of assistive devices. **Associated Problems:** Lordosis, respiratory infection.

Polio

Infectious viral disease.

Characteristics: Flaccid paralysis, atrophy of skeletal muscle, often with deformity. **Benefits:** Strengthens non-paralyzed muscles, stimulates posture.

Scoliosis

Lateral curve of the spine with C or S curve with rotary component. **Characteristics:** Postural asymmetry. May wear scoliosis jacket or have had stabilization surgery.

Benefits: Stimulates postural symmetry. Strengthens trunk muscles.

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

Spina Bifida

Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure with resultant damage to spinal cord. **Characteristics:** Varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss.

Benefits: Stimulates posture and balance, improves muscle strength and self-image. **Associated Problems:** Hydrocephalus, incontinence, urinary tract infection, , lordosis, scoliosis, and hip dislocations.

Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function.

Characteristics: 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, is an option for sports participation and recreation.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Accidental injury to the head resulting in intra-cranial bleeding with death of brain cells.

Characteristics: Gross and fine motor skills deficits. Often have impaired memory, speech and/or vision. May have psychological effects.

Benefits: Stimulates balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, speech and perceptual skills.

Visual Impairment

Moderate to total loss of sight.

Characteristics: Insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity, fearfulness and developmental delay.

Benefits: Stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture and coordination. Provides social outlet, structured risk taking and freedom of movement.

NARHA 2000

Volunteer Opportunities

HORSE-INTERACTION VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

SENIOR VOLUNTEER: A senior volunteer helps train new volunteers at orientation and during the session, helps coordinate volunteers for special events, and meets with the instructors each quarter to evaluate the program from the volunteer's point of view.

Requirements include at least 20 volunteer hours at Special Spirit, good working knowledge of tacking, grooming, and how to help with the riders.

SCHOOLING VOLUNTEER: Our horses need periodic "tune ups" to keep them interested and responsive in their work in the therapeutic setting. Experienced riders capable of performing elementary equitation (leg yields, turn on the forehand, etc.), getting the horse in a round frame, and bending through turns, in addition to smooth gait transitions, are eligible to apply for the riding privilege 😊

ASSORTED SERVICE PROJECTS: Tack cleaning and repair, carpentry (finishing our classrooms, building shelves, jumps and ramps, etc.), painting, electrical or plumbing services, poster design, videotaping and photography are just some of the opportunities currently available. Clean-up and workdays are held periodically, generally prior to a special event, to give the ranch a major "sprucing up". Contact a staff member for details.

PROGRAM GROWTH VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

If you have a special interest or ability in any of the following, please let us know.

FUNDRAISING: Interested individuals are welcome to join the fundraising committee and help Special Spirit to meet their financial needs. The fundraising committee plans and executes our annual fundraising drive, contacts clubs and organizations interested in offering financial assistance, helps with getting donations for special events, and contacts vendors to donate needed items, thereby reducing Special Spirit expenses.

GRANT WRITING: Experienced grant writers or those people interested in learning are needed to help identify foundations or grants with a potential for donating to Special Spirit, and to write these grants.

PUBLIC RELATIONS/MARKETING: Submit periodic press releases as needed. Obtain media coverage, striving for higher community visibility. Assist in writing proposals and other written material.

RIDER AND VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT: Solicit new clients to maximize the utilization of the program and help create community awareness. Notify colleges, universities, schools and organizations of our need for volunteers. Place volunteer ads in the newspapers.

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR: Arrange and oversee volunteer support for the riding program, special events and office needs. Ensure that each session has sufficient volunteers. Act as liaison for volunteers needing to cancel or reschedule their volunteer hours.

OFFICE HELP: Filing, answering phones, and answering questions or referring them to the appropriate staff members.

Wish List

If you would like to donate any of these items, please call Special Spirit at (323) 428-5005

Misc Supplies:

Old Towels	Copier paper
Paper towels	Latex gloves
Toilet paper	Tack sponges
Outdoor toys	Balls, any size
Brooms and rakes	Laptop computer
Garden hoses and heavy-duty sprayer nozzles	Projector
Liquid soap	
Liquid disinfectant	
Plastic trash can liners	
Cleaners (Windex, 409, Fantastic, Comet, Ajax, Pine Sol, Mr. Clean or other cleaners)	

Horse Supplies:

Large Items:

Carrots	Pick-up truck
Horse supplements	Roof for arena
Hay	Plants
Shavings	Sand and arena footing
Leather cleaner	
Horse Shampo and Conditioner	
Stall mats	
Safety stirrups	
Rainbow reins	