



**VOLUNTEER**

**HANDBOOK**

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You have chosen to give some of your valuable time to volunteer and help improve the lives of the special needs individuals at Rides and Reins Therapeutic Riding Center. We hope that in doing so, you will find that your own life has been enhanced as well. All of us at Rides & Reins are proud of the work we do and the extraordinary results that we see.

**Thank you** for being a part of our organization.

This manual has been developed to provide you with some guidelines for working with our horses and riders. Please read it carefully. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

We want you to know that every person you are helping at Rides & Reins is aware of and grateful for your help. Without you, this program could not exist. You are valuable to us and we appreciate all that you do.

**Reaching for the stars . . .**

**RIDES & REINS THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER**

Virginia Zignego, Executive Director, 262-370-3993 cell/text

Renee Elias, Co-founder, Board President 262-305-6273 cell/text

# RIDES & REINS VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

## Purpose

Rides and Reins Therapeutic Riding Center is a community-oriented, non-profit 501c3 organization. Our mission is to help those with special needs experience physical, cognitive and emotional benefits through horse-assisted activity. Rides and Reins is committed to improving the lives of our riders through the use of the horse.

Our motto, "Hearts, Hands, and Hope together changing lives! "

## History

In 1998, Mequon stable owners Don and Renee Elias leased their arena and some horses to a group of therapists to work with special needs children and adults. Don saw how the horses helped those with a variety of challenges to improve their strength, balance, mobility and outlook on life. A number of children and adults were turned away because of their inability to pay for this service. In 1999, Don and Renee sold their Mequon farm and moved to the Town of Polk, to a 45-acre farm outside of Slinger. With the lower taxes, and lots of pasture for the horses, Don was able to start up Rides and Reins with the purpose of providing therapeutic riding for a fee parents could afford. In May 2017, when Don passed away, Renee chose to continue the program in honor of Don's vision and legacy.

## Who do I call if I can't come? Or have questions?

Call or text Virginia at 262-370-3993 or Renee at 262-305-6273.

## General Guidelines

### What do I do when I arrive?

There is a sign-in book in the Viewing Room. Sign in each time you come, and please indicate the future dates that you will be available to help as that is very helpful with arranging sufficient staffing. If you are getting school credit, etc., for volunteering, we need documentation that you were here. Your hours are also noted for use in volunteer recognition and for funding.

- Please dress neatly and wear closed shoes (no sandals) to prevent foot injuries. Hard shoes are preferred. Tall rubber boots are recommended when it's wet or muddy. Unless it is extremely hot, please wear long pants. Avoid loose clothing and jewelry, as they can be obstructive and cause injury. Whenever possible please wear your R&R T-Shirt/sweatshirt (ask about them!).
- Cell phones must be silent in the arena. **CELL PHONES ARE NOT TO BE USED DURING THERAPY.** Cell phones take your attention away from your most important job - the safety of our riders. Please refrain from reading and/or sending text messages in the barn (while grooming, etc.)
- Eating or chewing gum is discouraged in the arena. This is both for your safety and the safety of the riders.
- We depend on you to be here. If you can't come, please work to find a replacement and let us know ahead of time so that we can arrange for additional volunteers. We really appreciate your consideration.
- We treat our horses GENTLY. Never use force or hit a horse. If you think there is a problem with a horse, please notify staff or a senior volunteer immediately.
- We treat our riders with RESPECT. Talk to them appropriately for their age and never yell. Use positive rather than negative reinforcement. Be patient. Count to 30 before repeating a request. He or she might need extra time to process what you asked. Be understanding of fear, but if you can't handle a problem with a rider, please ask for help.
- RESPECT rider's privacy. Keep what happens at the farm 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 riders. They have a right to privacy.

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- If you have a long break, there are plenty of things you can do to help out. There is a list of barn chores posted at the barn entry. Clean up the tack room or viewing room, wash out buckets, clean the toys, pull weeds, groom a horse that isn't being used, muck the stalls, pick up rocks from the arena, or ask us how you can help.
- Have fun! Smile, laugh and enjoy yourself. Your enthusiasm is contagious!

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

- In the case of an emergency in the arena the RIDING INSTRUCTOR is in charge.
  - In the case of an emergency outside of the arena, the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR is in charge.
  - If the Instructor should become incapacitated the Executive Director will be in charge. If the Executive Director is incapacitated the Instructor will be in charge.
1. All horses will be halted.
  2. The horse 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 if necessary, verbally and physically.
  5. In the event that a rider must be removed from the horse quickly, i.e. a spooked horse, the instructor is responsible for guiding the rider to dismount, utilizing side walkers for assistance.
  6. If circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated, the riders will be escorted out first by their sidewalkers and the horses will be removed by their leaders to an appropriate place, after the riders are out of danger.
  7. The parent/guardian of the client will determine if medical personnel are required and will request assistance in contacting specific personnel.

### **Facility safety**

**Fire** is an ever-present danger at a farm. **Rides and Reins has a no smoking or vaping policy on our property.**

**FIRE:** Remove all occupants from structures. Lead all people to the front of the property as 911 is called. If possible, use fire extinguishers to stop the fire without putting self in danger. Move horses to a safe location. Move all vehicles that may hinder fire personnel's access or that may be near to or in path of fire. Ensure that no one re-enters the area that has been on fire until fire personnel give the okay.

If a fire is observed on or near the property, when no personnel or riders are present, the following fire procedures should be implemented:

1. Call 911 (phone is located in the office on top of the refrigerator); the physical address is on "Emergency Information" on the wall by the phone.
2. Assess the immediate danger. If a building is involved, evaluate if an adjoining structure is threatened.
3. Call appropriate members of Center to assist with fire procedures, record/equipment removal, horse evacuation, etc.

**Drinking and drug use** do not mix with horses. If you are taking any medications that will impair your reflexes or judgement, it is better to refrain from volunteering until you are no longer using them. If you are driving on the property, please drive SLOWLY. The farm speed limit is 5 miles per hour. Horses spook at fast-moving cars, and there are animals and children around that you may not see.

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**Running is not allowed**, for your safety and the safety of the horses. No yelling or loud talk. The same is true of any other emergency. Dogs can frighten horses, and many of our students may be afraid of them. Please don't bring dogs to the farm without permission.

**LIGHTNING/THUNDERSTORMS/TORNADO:** If determined to be close and a dismount is necessary, instructor and side walkers will assist with dismount and all humans should move to shelter in the tack room. The horse should be immediately put in an indoor stall by the horse handler, who will then take shelter in the tack room as well.

**WILD ANIMALS (eg, snake, groundhog etc):** Notify the riding instructor immediately when the animal is spotted. Halt the lesson and await instructions from the instructor. Side walkers should remain with the rider and horse handler should keep the horse calm.

**ELECTROCUTION:** If electrocution occurs, immediately call 911 and clear the area. Follow instructions from the 911 dispatcher and keep calm.

**EQUIPMENT USE/INJURY:** Safety is the highest priority. The use of all motorized equipment, including but not limited to items such as the Toolcat, lawn mower, arena dragging tool, etc shall be operated only with specific permission and direction of the Executive Director, Barn Manager or Renee Elias. These people only will determine the ability and responsibility of each person to operate equipment. The operator will comply with the equipment use policy and be well instructed in its safe use. Every effort should be made to use equipment only when someone else is on the premises, in case help is needed. In the case of any injury, check the severity of the injury, administer First Aid, call 911 if necessary and consult emergency medical information before the arrival of EMS.

**EQUINE HEALTH EMERGENCY:** The Riding Instructor and Executive Director should be notified for advice and/or management of equine injury or emergency. The Barn Manager and Renee Elias can be contacted if neither of these are available.

**INJURY TO PERSON BY EQUINE:** The injury shall be evaluated and receive appropriate medical attention. An incident report form shall be completed. Horse(s) will be evaluated for continued use in the program.

**LOOSE HORSE:** Stop all riding activities until loose horse is secured. Never run at a loose horse. Get help, get a lead rope and halter, quietly repeat "whoa" and then walk up slowly and put the halter on. The arena doors will be closed until all horses are secured.

**TREATS:** Horses are to be given treats only in the feed bowl, not on the hand. Horses can mistake fingers for carrots and chomp down quickly.

**Visitors/Siblings/friends** must be supervised by an adult at all times. Children are expected to walk and speak softly in the barn and while playing in the viewing room. Permission/supervision by Rides & Reins staff is required. Rides and Reins staff and volunteers are only allowed in the horse paddocks; contact staff immediately if **Visitors/Siblings/friends** attempt to enter the paddocks or give horses treats as this is a safety concern.

### **Where are the fire extinguishers?**

A fire extinguisher is located on the side of the barn closest to the exit door. There is another extinguisher in the Viewing Room. Also, there are extinguishers by the east and west overhead doors in the arena. There are first aid kits in the Viewing Room and in the Meeting Room.

## When Around Horses

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 rider can be seriously injured. Approach the “danger zone” with caution.
  - a) If you must walk behind a horse, approach from the side, touch and speak to the horse. Continue to do so as you walk very closely around the horse.
  - b) Warn a horse that you are approaching. Use your voice and a gentle touch. Approach from the side, NEVER from the rear.
  - c) When standing next to a horse, stand close. If the horse kicks, he/she can't kick very hard if you are close.
  - d) Keep your feet away from the horse's hooves and from beneath the horse to avoid getting stepped on.
  - e) Never walk under a horse or under a horse's neck. You might not be that short, but some children are.
  - f) Never stand directly in front of a horse except to hold the horse for a rider, or to give treats. Never stand behind a horse for any reason. To brush the tail, stand next to the horse's hip and pull tail to the side.
  - g) 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. ALL horses could bite! All treats/food should be given to a horse in a feeding pan.
  - h) Don't yell, run, or make sudden movements near a horse. Be slow and gentle.
2. Keep horses well away from each other at all times. Fighting horses are a danger to everyone nearby. Keep an eye on their heads and rear ends. If a horse's ears are flattened, the horse is upset. Beware!
3. Never tie a horse to a gate. Use a quick release knot with the rings in the stall, grooming stall, or hold the horse.
4. Always use a halter to tie a horse in the crossties. NEVER tie a horse by his reins.
5. If a tied horse rears or pulls back, or otherwise acts upset, STAY AWAY. Let the instructor/leader handle the problem. A panicked horse can be dangerous.

## Warming up a horse before each riding lesson

1. Make sure you have reins already attached to the horse's halter when you come to the arena (if the rider uses reins).
2. Check tack during and after warm up. Check where reins are attached; check the saddle and saddle pad.
3. Walking the horse around the arena gets their joints and muscles moving.
4. While walking the horse around, see if there is anything in the arena that might scare the horse.
5. If you become aware of anything that seems “off” with the horse, please tell the instructor before the lesson begins.

### Why 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. A loose girth will cause the saddle to slip when mounting or 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 below.

- **Mounting safety.** All riders must be mounted by the instructor or under the instructor's supervision. When mounting from the ground, the leader stands at the head of the horse and holds the lead rope. One of the sidewalkers 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. Always mount on the horse's left side, unless medically required otherwise.

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.

If a rider is mounting with a "leg up", be sure that both the rider and the person giving the leg up know what they are doing. Do not use your knee as a mounting block, even for a small rider. You could get hurt.

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 under supervision of the instructor. You may be asked to assist on the opposite side of the horse.

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

- **Leading.** Lead the horse on your right/the horse's left. Use both hands - the right hand should be about six to eight inches below the snap, and the left hand holds the FOLDED (not coiled) end of the lead rope. Do not 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 around your neck.

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.

- **Tack.** Always check the girth for tightness before mounting or helping a rider to mount. Check that the saddle and halter are placed properly on the horse, the stirrups are the correct length and are down, and that nothing is broken or worn.

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## General Safety

- 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.
- When leading a rider in the arena, always walk on the horse's left side, between the shoulder and head.
- As a side walker, it is very important to pay attention to the rider and instructor. Don't chat with riders or other volunteers while the lesson is in session.
- You may reinforce what the instructor is saying by showing the rider or touching the appropriate area.
- Do not yank on the lead rope to stop the horse. Pull slowly and steadily on the lead rope. 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.
- If the horse or rider you are working with is nervous or upset, 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.
- When dismounting to the ground unassisted, make sure the rider takes BOTH feet out of the stirrups before lowering themselves to the ground. Assisted dismounts should always be done by the instructor.

## Rules for the tack room

The tack room is where we store saddles, bridles, reins and other horse-related equipment, collectively known as "tack". A well-organized tack room makes the job 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. All boarders tack, grooming equipment, etc. is off limits to volunteers and therapy riders taking lessons.

- Saddle pads must be allowed to dry out before putting them away.
- English and Western girths are stored separately from the saddles. DO NOT leave them attached to the saddles.
- The halter that goes on the horse's head to lead the horse is stored in the tack room. Halters are hung by the corresponding horse name and photo. Each halter is customized for the horse it belongs with; please use the right halter for the horse!
- Reins are stored on their own rack. DO NOT leave them attached to the halter.
- Grooming tools are kept in grooming boxes. There should be at least one body brush, rubber curry, mane comb, and hoofpick in each box. After you use a tool, please put it back in the same grooming box.

## How to lead a horse

The responsibility of a horse leader is to control the horse. For this reason, a horse leader should be someone with some experience in horsemanship. The rider has a leader because he or she is unable, at this time, to control the horse fully. 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.

1. The leader usually stands on the left side of the horse, 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 right hand. The remaining rope is folded, not looped, and held in the left hand. Be careful not to allow the lead rope to drag on the ground or to be looped around the hand.
3. When a rider is mounting at the mounting stage, lead the horse as close as possible, then move to the front of the horse and walk backward, leading the horse close to it. Remain standing in front of the horse and keep him as still as possible during the mounting.
4. 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 side walker 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 should slow them down.
5. Trotting the horse: After the rider asks 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.
6. 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 whoa. The leader needs to hear these commands so as not to interfere with the rider's efforts, and to supplement them if needed.
7. 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.
8. 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 and side walkers will take care of the fallen rider.

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**How to side walk:** The responsibility of the side walker, first and foremost, is the safety of the rider. Side walkers assist the riders to the degree necessary. Riders on taller horses should, if possible, have tall side walkers. Riders on ponies should have short side walkers.

1. As needed, a consultation will be conducted for the client between the instructor, coordinator for the day, and the client's parent(s)/caregiver to determine whether side walkers will be needed to help the client with maintaining balance, offering emotional support, and ensuring safety. Depending on the client's individual needs the number of side walkers assigned can range between none, one, or two.
2. The side walker 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 tips, a gentle downward pressure with that arm will support the rider in place.
  - b. **Gait Belt:** This is used for riders who need core support. Gait belts are stored in the tool box in the viewing room. The gait belt should be put on, with a comfortable snug fit, prior to mounting the horse. A rider with a gait belt will need a side walker on each side, supporting the rider with a firm hold on the gait belt.
  - 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 tips, 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.
3. Be aware that it may be necessary to change sides if your arm gets tired. If this happens, ask the leader to stop, and tell the other side walker that you need to change sides. Ask the other side walker 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 side walker moves to the opposite side. When the other side walker has indicated that he or she is ready, inform the leader that you can resume walking.
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 side walker on the side of 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 helps to prevent the side walker from being injured in an attempt to save/support the rider.
5. Once a rider has fallen, the side walkers 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 (in Viewing Room), and where the emergency numbers are (in Therapy Folder on Viewing Room table).
6. Other responsibilities of the side walkers 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, and providing encouragement and enthusiasm for the rider's efforts.
7. It is important the side walkers pay attention to the instructor at all times. Conversations should be non-existent when instruction is taking place. Side walkers reinforce, but do not teach, so restrain the urge to tell the rider what to do and how to do it unless the instructor asks you to do so.

## Horse-Related Volunteer Opportunities

Several opportunities are available for those volunteers wishing to do more than (or instead of) volunteering as leaders, side walkers or instructors. If volunteering at the farm doesn't work out, but you want to promote our cause, consider volunteering for one of the "non-horsey" projects. All volunteers are encouraged to spread the word about Rides & Reins to friends, clubs and organizations who would be interested in providing financial support, volunteers, or riders. If you have a contact you would like us to follow up on, please tell a staff member and he or she will get in touch with the right person.

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

**Schooling** 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 dressage movements (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. These people will be contacted by Renee or a senior volunteer.

**Assorted Service Projects** Tack cleaning and repair, carpentry, painting, electrical or plumbing services, poster design, videotaping and photography, and website maintenance, are just some of the opportunities currently available. Clean-up and workdays are held periodically, generally prior to a special event, to give the property a major "sprucing up".

## ("Non-Horsey") 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 Rides & Reins 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 Rides & Reins 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 Rides & Reins, 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 riders 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 therapeutic 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.

**Greeter** During therapy, greet each family, check in riders, take payment, help fit helmet, confirm future ride dates/times.

## DONATIONS

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DONATE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS, PLEASE CALL RIDES & REINS AT 262-644-8324, OR DROP THEM OFF AT THE FARM.

Old towels • Hay • Safety stirrups • Paper towels • Toilet paper • Brooms and rakes  
• Garden hoses and heavy-duty sprayer nozzles • Bean bags • Liquid soap  
Liquid disinfectant, Lysol • Plastic trash can liners • Windex, 409, Fantastic, Ajax, Pine Sol, Mr. Clean, etc.  
Copier paper • Tack sponges, saddle soap, or any tack cleaning supplies • Balls, any size