

# **Our Heroes, Inc. Volunteer Handbook 2018**



Horseplay Farms, LLC  
1757 Clemmons Rd. SE  
Bolivia, NC 28422  
(910) 253-7722  
[www.ourheroesinc.org](http://www.ourheroesinc.org)  
[www.horseplayfarms.net](http://www.horseplayfarms.net)  
(rev. 1/18)

## Welcome to Our Heroes!

Dear Volunteer,

We are excited that you are looking for ways to serve the community through getting involved with Our Heroes, Inc., the therapeutic riding program at Horseplay Farms. We know the unbelievable benefits of the human-horse interaction and the need for Our Heroes in Brunswick County. We hope the work you put into volunteering here is reflected in the joy you bring to the children and adults participating in our program! Working together to combine our resources, passion, experience and dedication, we can begin to address the pressing needs of our participants and their families.

Our Heroes was founded in 2013 by Phillip and Ruth Jenkins to recognize and serve what we call Our Heroes: veterans and wounded warriors, people of all ages who battle physical, emotional, intellectual and/or developmental challenges and their families, at-risk youth, and horses who have been neglected, abused, or are just facing the challenges of age. The program is a unique opportunity to pair horses in need with people experienced in overcoming life's obstacles. Phillip is a retired Army Vietnam Veteran. Ruth, a Brunswick County native, is a retired civilian who worked for the Department of the Army. She was working at the Pentagon on 9/11; they both lost many friends and colleagues that day. The Jenkins currently live in Fairfax, Virginia and visit the farm regularly.

The mission of Our Heroes is to help individuals find strength and independence through the proven, positive power of the horse. This is accomplished through our therapeutic riding program and equine-assisted activities creating a safe, rehabilitative environment for the healing of those in need in our community. This work can only be accomplished when we have a terrific team of volunteers like you! Thank you for joining the team at Our Heroes and making our mission come alive!

Please take the time to read through the Volunteer Handbook. This is an important resource to help you know what to expect during your time of service on our farm. Don't hesitate to ask questions. We are all here to help and learn from one another. We value the diversity and abilities in each and every person.

All volunteers will need to complete a Volunteer Application and attend a Volunteer Orientation Session prior to working with Our Heroes. All volunteers supporting our Equine Therapy Program are also required to successfully complete a Certified Therapeutic Volunteer Training.

Welcome to the family and thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

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## **Who's Who at Horseplay Farms & Our Heroes**

### **Staff**

**Ruth Jenkins**, CEO and Founder

ruth@horseplayfarms.net; ruth@ourheroesinc.org; 703-608-8288 (cell)

**Kirsten Crook**, Director of Operations, Assistant Therapeutic Program Director, Riding Instructor

kirsten@horseplayfarms.net; kirsten@ourheroesinc.org; 770-633-0880 (cell)

**Allie Sabo**, Therapeutic Program Director, Riding Instructor, Trainer

allie@horseplayfarms.net; allie@ourheroesinc.org

**Carolyn Weinzapfel**, Office Manager, Volunteer & Events Coordinator

carolyn@horseplayfarms.net; carolyn@ourheroesinc.org

**Lisa Edinger**, Farm Director

lisa@horseplayfarms.net

**Ericca Latza**, Barn Manager

ericca@horseplayfarms.net

### **Our Heroes Board of Directors**

President –Ruth Jenkins

Vice-President- TBD

Treasurer- TBD

Secretary- TBD

### **Advisory Board**

Member -TBD

Member - TBD

Member - TBD

### **Volunteers**

Once you have completed the volunteer application, you will be added to our email list. If you have any changes to your contact information, please tell Carolyn.

When you arrive on the property, please go to the office to sign in. We keep a record of volunteer hours and need to have a count of who is on the property in case of an emergency.

### **Non-Discrimination Policy**

Our Heroes at Horseplay Farms accepts clients regardless of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, age, gender identity/expression/orientation, disability, marital status, family/parental status or military or veteran status.

## **Our Programs**

**Therapeutic Riding Lessons** - Supervised riding lessons, up to one hour, using horse leaders and side walkers when appropriate, occurring as individual lessons or in a group

**Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)** - sessions conducted on the ground as opposed to in the saddle; EAL offers experiential communication, team building and personal growth experiences, tailored to the participants needs!

**Junior Horsemanship Club** - sessions held every Saturday from 10 – 11:30am, alternating weekends between “Minis” (ages 5-10) and “Mustangs” (ages 11-15). Children learn appropriate horsemanship skills and participate in activities that promote leadership, inclusiveness, and fun!

**Farm Volunteering & “Angel” (Horse Care Volunteer) Program** - For those that want to help with the operations of our farm, we always need it! Whether barn chores, feeding, building and repairing structures, or many other things to do, we can always use extra hands! If you would like to help with horse-specific farm work, see the “How to be an Angel” section on page 11!

**Fieldtrips**- Farm visits and equine assisted learning activities including riding experiences open to all local preschools, school districts, groups and programs.

**Children’s Camps** - day camps held during the summer and school breaks, full of activities that include arts, crafts, horse activities and games.

## **Introduction to Therapeutic Riding**

Therapeutic riding can benefit people of all ages facing emotional challenges (e.g., PTSD or depression) or cognitive, intellectual, physical and/or developmental challenges (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorders or Cerebral Palsy). Therapeutic riding involves horseback riding sessions where individuals are able to challenge themselves and experience sensory feedback in a safe and supportive environment that can’t be duplicated in a doctor’s or therapist’s office. Sessions are provided by a PATH certified instructor with the assistance of volunteers as needed. Riders may engage in games from horseback, trail rides, arena riding or other mounted activities that align with each rider’s goals and abilities. Riders are supported in gaining independence through riding activities designed to meet the individual needs of each rider.

Unlike other types of physical therapy, horseback riding provides rhythmic, repetitive motion that most closely matches a human’s gait while walking. These movements help strengthen muscles in the pelvis, spine and legs which lead to improved joint mobility, posture and coordination. The process of riding also assists in the stretching and relaxation of muscles helping to improve movement patterns. Parts of the brain that control vocal skills are also stimulated by the three-dimensional movement of the horse. This stimulation improves speech and language skills.

*Social benefits* to riders include recreational enjoyment, improved self-esteem, improved communication skills and increased self-discipline. Riders also learn to respect animals as they develop patience and trust.

*Educational benefits* include improved eye-hand coordination, sequencing, and patterning, among many others!

There are many more benefits of therapeutic riding that you will learn about in your time volunteering with us! Not only do the riders benefit from therapeutic riding, volunteers often share the joy of the experiences our riders have.

## **Know Your Rider**

Riders of varying abilities may participate in therapeutic riding once cleared by their physician and documented through appropriate enrollment paperwork. Some of the abilities you may encounter being addressed include physical, emotional, social, cognitive, visual, auditory, behavioral, communication and other learning abilities in children and adults. Safety is always in the forefront of any riding lesson and it is important to know the responsibilities of the role you are filling and to follow them carefully.

Regardless of the abilities of the rider, everyone on the riding team is a unique individual. We all have different personalities, likes, dislikes, learning, and communication styles. While we are unique, no participants want to feel limited or singled out for their differences. If you have questions about something you have seen or heard it is always acceptable to talk with the Program Manager afterwards. Your openness to working with people with special needs is important in making their experience enjoyable. You will likely feel more comfortable as you have more exposure and begin to build relationships with riders with special needs. When we work as a team, we help each other, and everyone succeeds.

## **Ways to Help and Show Respect**

Children and adults with special needs are PEOPLE FIRST. This should be reflected in the language we use, both when talking to our clients or talking when they are present. Remember, people are not defined by their disabilities or what they cannot do: every person is differently abled from every other person in the world, and those differences are chances for us to learn and grow. We should speak to all people in a respectful way. For example, greet our riders the same way you would greet anyone you are meeting for the first time. If a family member or friend is present with them and you think they could help you communicate with the rider, ask the rider for permission to speak with their companion instead of ignoring the rider and directing all communication to the people around them. If you ever need any guidance or have any questions, ask your lesson leader for clarification or ask any other employee. We are all happy to help!

If you are working with someone who uses adaptive equipment (crutches, wheelchairs, walkers, etc.) it is appropriate to let them try things for themselves. We want to encourage strength and independence in our riders. It is appropriate to offer help after they have had the opportunity to try it for themselves or obviously need it. Be careful not to assume that all riders want your help. Learn to be patient and give riders the time they need to process, attempt and master new skills.

Physical touch, including hugs or pats on the back, are not always welcomed or considered signs of affection to people. Sometimes people have past trauma or sensory issues that make these types of touch uncomfortable. Always let the rider initiate touches and signs of affection with you. Please refrain from asking riders for hugs. If you are a side walker who is responsible for providing physical support to a rider, it is important to tell them what you are about to do before you do it. For example, "I am going to place my hand on your leg to help you sit in the saddle".

Remember that wheelchairs, crutches or other adaptive equipment are often viewed by people as an extension of their body and should not be touched or moved without their permission. When talking with people in wheelchairs it may be helpful to get down at their level for a comfortable conversation. This helps to alleviate neck strain and the impression that you are talking down to them.

If a rider is trying to tell you something and you don't understand, it is acceptable to let them know by saying something such as "I don't understand what you are trying to tell me. Can you show me or tell me again?" Don't just smile and ignore them. This is a learning experience for our riders, but it is also a great experience for our volunteers to learn new and effective ways of communicating with a variety of people!

## **Schedules for Volunteers**

We encourage our volunteers to attempt a regular schedule, if possible. This provides you with enough time to learn about our program, its horses and the operations of the farm, creating a better experience for you and the riding team. Also, if you plan to volunteer as an assistant for riding lessons, regularity in attending those lessons helps the rider immensely!

Please sign in and log your hours in the Volunteer Sign In/Out Sheet found in the Administrative Building. This helps us account for hours needed to fulfill our mission statement. This is important information for our funders!

If you are unable to attend your scheduled volunteer time, please contact us as soon as possible so we can arrange to cover your session. We must cancel lessons if we do not have enough volunteers, and our riders depend on the commitment you have made to Our Heroes to help make their lessons happen. We realize that there will always be extenuating circumstances, do your best to fulfill your commitments or help us make other arrangements if necessary.

It is considered a "no show" if a volunteer does not call ahead of any schedule changes or misses a session.

Sometimes sessions are cancelled due to inclement weather or client cancellations. There are always other things to help with on the farm and we encourage our volunteers to still come and help out!

## **When You Arrive**

- Please allow yourself plenty of time to prepare for your volunteer session - arrive 20 minutes before your time begins. This will allow you to check in, use the restroom, and find your assignment.
- Be sure to dress appropriately for the weather. Hats, jackets and clothing should not flap in the wind.

- Horseplay Farms has t-shirts available if you'd like to purchase one, but are not required. No offensive or inappropriate clothing!
- Sunscreen, sunglasses and hats are recommended on sunny days.
- Comfortable shoes or boots are necessary – CLOSED TOE!
- Jewelry such as necklaces or dangly earrings are not recommended.



**Thank you  
for not  
feeding  
treats**

### Important Farm Rules

- The speed limit on the property is 15 MPH. Please drive to the right of the road. This preserves the grading of the road.
- Feeding of the dogs and cats is **strictly prohibited**. All dogs and cats are privately owned. Most have diet restrictions and/or food allergies.
- Treats for the horses must be regulated. Some have dental or health issues. We welcome the treats for the horses. Please feel free to donate apples, carrots or approved treats. They can be given to Ericca or Allie.
- For safety reasons volunteers are not allowed to bring their dogs (or other types of pets).



### Barn Safety Rules

- The speed limit on the property is 15 MPH. This helps ensure that riders and horses are safe.
- Follow all safety signs that are posted throughout the farm and barn
- Do not lean or climb on fences or gates
- Arena gates must be closed at all times, except when a horse is entering or exiting
- Always return tack and equipment to its appropriate place
- Always clean up after yourself and your horse – in the barn AND in the office. If you use something in the kitchen, wash and put it away!
- Listen to and follow directions of instructors and managers
- Appropriate attire must be worn when riding or working with horses
- Use the designated observation areas to watch lessons.
- Cell phones ringers should be on silent mode (not vibrate) so as not to distract horses and riders.
- All children under 14 must be DIRECTLY monitored by an adult at all times while on the property
- Instructors and volunteers must not bring children to the farm when volunteering
- Pet barn cats at your own risk; they may bite or scratch.
- Do not feed the horses without explicit instruction - treats may only be given under the supervision of a manager or owner and fed from the horse's feed bucket.
- Stay where the horse can see you and you can see its eyes.
- Horses should only be petted on their neck and back; avoid patting.
- Don't sit, kneel or lay on the ground near a horse – always stay on your feet, squatting if necessary
- Never duck under the neck of a tied horse or under a horse's stomach, ever
- If walking behind a horse, walk close to the horse and keep one hand on the horse's hips at all times or walk far enough around to avoid startling the horse and/or being kicked
- Avoid sudden movements around horses; they can spook easily – do not run, rough house, scream or yell

If you have questions, please ask and someone will be happy to help you!

## **Code of Conduct and Confidentiality**

The taking of photographs of participants is NOT PERMITTED. Violation of this policy will result in action ranging from reprimand, alteration of responsibilities, termination or legal action.

Horseplay Farms/Our Heroes recognizes the right of clients/participants and their families to privacy and control of any information that may be shared publicly. Information that is considered confidential (either written or verbal) no matter how obtained, includes all medical, family, social, personal and financial concerns of participants and their families. Important information may be shared with you by an instructor, manager or families in order for riders to have a safe experience; it is strictly confidential.

Focus on the strengths of a rider during the lesson. Use tact when asking questions about a person's disability. It is best to go to the program manager at a later time when the rider and/or family are not present to obtain that information. We are here to help you understand the rider better for your educational needs at the same time preserving the dignity of people with differing abilities.

All confrontations will be handled by staff in a private setting out of view of the public when possible.

Other reasons for dismissal include:

- Mistreating any person or animal
- Failure to follow safety procedures
- Failure to follow farm rules
- Disruptive, abusive or dangerous language or behavior
- Being under the influence or possession of drugs or alcohol
- Being consistently late or absent from assigned volunteer time without prior notification

Law enforcement may be contacted if deemed necessary under threatening conditions.

## **How to Work as a Team**

Communication and respect are the keys to any working team. Comments should always be made in a positive and respectful manner. We are role models for those with whom we work!

Offer a helping hand to each other. Many hands make easy work. The one exception is when you are a leader or side walker and need to stay focused only on your job responsibilities.

If you say you will do it, be prepared to follow through and do what you have committed to doing as part of the team. This includes showing up for your schedule and doing routine work while at the farm. We depend on each other.

## **Job Descriptions**

Volunteers will be assigned to positions based on their horse experience, interest level and demonstrated ability. There are many jobs to be done which make operating Our Heroes possible. All volunteers who assist with lessons must be at least 14 years of age. Other jobs exist around the farm for those younger than 14 who have parental supervision. There is a three-month probationary period for all new volunteers. If volunteers are unable to fulfill the responsibilities of their assignment they may be reassigned to another responsibility. All work provided to Our Heroes through the volunteer program is not eligible for compensation or benefits and is provided as a free, charitable service.

### **Position: Lesson Volunteer**

Reports to: Program Director, working under the direction of a riding instructor

Requirements:

- Fully complete volunteer application and background check
- Attend Volunteer Orientation and read Volunteer Handbook
- Successfully complete PATH Therapeutic Volunteer Training
- Ability to contribute to a team environment
- Follow barn rules, safety practices and confidentiality policies at all times

Physical Abilities:

- Ability to work outdoors in including working in weather extremes
- Ability walk for 45 minutes, with occasional jogging, in arenas and on trails
- Ability to assist riders weighting up to 200 pounds
- Ability to follow directions from instructors in a fast-paced environment

Duties:

General:

- Prepare horses for lessons by gently grooming and tacking
- Inform riding instructor if horse seems lame, lethargic, agitated or injured
- Assist in promoting a safe lesson and assisting in emergencies
- Inform riding Instructor of all safety and health concerns
- Promote independence and success of riders
- Works as part of the team to ensure a safe equine experience for all

Horse Leader:

- Focus on movement of horse and be responsible for horse's control and safety
- Lead from the left side of the horse with the lead rope attached to the bottom ring of the halter.
- Lead the horse with right hand held about a foot from the snap; hold folded lead line in left hand (never wrap the lead line around any part of your hand or body)
- Maintain a distance of at least two horse length between your horse and the horse in front of you
- Be able to hold horse at a halt for extended periods of time
- Be able to control the horse at a walk and trot without force and pulling
- Listen carefully to the riding instructor's directions given to the rider; wait for the rider to initiate the action with the horse. This isn't a pony ride.
- Allow space for side walkers when next to fence or obstacles in arenas or on trails
- Communicates horse-related questions or concerns to riding instructor
- Communicate effectively with side walkers to clarify instructions

#### Side Walker:

- Focus solely on rider; be responsible for the rider's safety
- Never leave the rider; provide aid to rider during a fall
- Assist instructor during rider's mounting and dismounting
- Escort rider back to a guardian
- Provide physical assistance to rider when necessary or as directed by riding instructor
- Provide verbal and non-verbal communication with rider. If two side walkers are needed one will provide communication/encouragement and one will remain silent to avoid confusing the rider.
- Avoid touching the horse or influencing it in any way
- Be aware of surroundings and entire riding team: horse, leaders, rider and instructor

#### **Position: Facilities & Grounds Volunteer**

Reports to: Farm Manager

##### Requirements:

- Fully complete volunteer application and background check
- Attend Volunteer Orientation and read Volunteer Handbook
- Able to contribute to a team environment
- Follow barn rules, safety practices and confidentiality policies at all times

##### Physical Abilities:

- Able to work outdoors including working in weather extremes
- Able to stand for 60 minutes
- Able to lift 50 pounds repeatedly
- Able to follow directions from Program Managers
- Able to pass driving test to operate tractor or mowers as needed

##### Duties:

###### General:

- Safely use power tools, lawn equipment and/or large equipment
- Assist in maintenance of landscaping, paddocks, barn or office repairs
- Assist in the cleaning and proper storage of tools and equipment
- Inform Farm Manager of any safety and health concerns
- Work as part of the team to ensure a safe farm experience for all



#### **How to be an Angel (Horse Care Volunteer)**

The horses that belong to Our Heroes, our 'program horses', are a wonderful herd! Unlike our boarder horses, though, each program horse does not have one particular owner to shower them with love, so we started the Angel program to assign volunteers to the program horses to show them one-on-one attention and care. This also provides our volunteers an opportunity to spend time with our horses in a non-working environment.

Angels can:

- Groom their horse
- Give their horse a bath (if the temperature is above 75 degrees and the horse is dirty or needs to cool off)
- Graze their horse on the sides of the office or around the barn

If you are interested in being an angel to one of our horses, please talk to Ericca, our barn manager!

Requirements:

General

- Fully complete volunteer application and background check
- Attend Volunteer Orientation and read Volunteer Handbook
- Ability to contribute to a team environment
- Follow barn rules, safety practices and confidentiality policies at all times

Physical Abilities:

- Ability to work outdoors including working in weather extremes
- Ability to stand for 30 minutes (or be assisted as needed with aid)
- Ability to follow directions from Barn Managers

Horse Knowledge & Abilities:

- Know your horses assigned paddock
- Catch & Release your horse safely
- Lead, stop, start, and turn your horse
- Maintain control of your horse
- Clip to wash rack
- Hold a lead rope properly
- Know where grooming supplies are
- Know proper grooming skills
  - Proper use of brushes
  - Brush tail without standing directly behind horse
  - Pick hooves
  - Use a sweat scraper

**Angels should always be under the supervision of a barn manager; the barn manager on duty should always know which horse you are with and what you are planning to do!**

**If you ever have a question, need help, or just want some extra assistance, never hesitate to ask a staff member!**

## **Emergency Procedures**

The most important thing you can do during an emergency is to **STAY CALM**. Volunteers should only help if explicitly directed by a staff member. Human needs will be addressed first followed by animal needs. No one is allowed to leave the property during an emergency situation until safely directed by staff: this allows us to account for everyone's safety.

All incidents need to be immediately reported to the closest staff member and office manager. The office manager will fill out an incident report as soon as possible and provide the report to the CEO.

**\*VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT PERMITTED TO TREAT HORSE INJURIES UNLESS THEY ARE CLEARLY DIRECTED TO ASSIST A STAFF MEMBER OR OWNER. IF A HORSE IS INJURED, INFORM A STAFF MEMBER IMMEDIATELY. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO TREAT, MOVE, OR OTHERWISE INTERFERE WITH THE HORSE \***

### **HUMAN INJURY**

- Remain calm
- Follow the instructions of whichever staff member is present at the activity
- Only assist if clearly directed by the staff member: do not move the injured person unless they are directly in harm's way
- A staff member will designate a volunteer to remove the uninjured people from the area and to stay with them
- Volunteers may be asked to provide input for an incident report while witnesses are still available, if possible.

\*\*\*\* Emergency numbers are posted in both offices and tack rooms. \*\*\*\*

### **FIRE EVACUATION PLAN**

Dial 911 (we are located at 1757 Clemmons Rd SE, Bolivia NC)

#### **ALL AREAS:**

- Walk to the nearest exit—DO NOT RUN!
- Do not attempt to fight the fire!
- Cover your nose and mouth to prevent smoke inhalation
- Students (escorted by volunteers), volunteers, families and staff are to assemble at the end of the driveway by the gate. Staff will take a roll call as quickly as possible
- Staff may evacuate horses by leading – staff will obtain the horse emergency binder in the main office if possible

#### **Arena:**

- The riding instructor is in charge
- Students, horses and volunteers exit through the nearest outside exit using caution as emergency vehicles may be approaching
- If still mounted, dismount at a safe distance from barn
- Horse handlers take horses to the nearest outdoor fenced area, remove all tack and lead lines and turn horses loose. Secure the gate so that the horses *do not attempt to return to the barn.*

### **TORNADO SAFETY PLAN**

- Be alert to signs of a possible tornado:
  - Severe weather conditions: thunder, lightning and severe winds, hail
  - Coloration of the sky—gray orange hues with dark cloud formations
  - High winds then stillness for about 2-3 minutes, then a roaring sound as if a train were approaching

#### **Tornado Procedure:**

- Riding Instructors will stop all classes and dismount students
- Release horses outside the building, if time permits remove bridle/reins
- If inside: Find areas on the lowest level of the facility: the bathtub, under desks in the Administrative Offices, or a doorframe in the main building.

- If outside: Dismount, turn horses loose and lay flat (covering small children) in the lowest spot you can find (i.e. ditch, swale or behind pile of dirt).

**Hurricane Procedure:**

- **All non-essential staff, volunteers and clients will be sent home and/or notified of the closure of the farm if deemed necessary due to an approaching storm. Preparations for the farm and horses will be conducted by official staff. Please be mindful of leaving personal belongings at the farm during hurricane season as we cannot guarantee your ability to retrieve your items from the property in the event of an evacuation or other weather-based facility closure!**

**Physical Fitness and Safety**

Safety is important in everything we do on the farm. This includes your safety while volunteering. Many of the volunteer jobs are physically demanding. It is important for you to know your physical limitations. Pay attention to how you move. **Be sure to lift with your legs and not with your back.** If an injury occurs to you or someone around you it is important to report it to staff. We want to make sure proper first-aid is administered and an incident report is completed. We are happy to find you another assignment if you request it. There are many jobs to be done and all hands can be used! Just like our therapeutic riders, there are as many opportunities as there are different abilities. If you aren't comfortable volunteering in one area, we will be happy to work with you to find another way to help!

**Equine Liability Law**

**WARNING** Under North Carolina law, an equine activity sponsor or equine professional is not liable for an injury to or death of a participant in equine activities resulting exclusively from the inherent risks of equine activities.

Chapter 99E of North Carolina General Statutes

The nature of working with and around horses or any animal comes with inherent risks. You will see signs posted on the farm like the one on the left.  
 ← This posting on the property is required by law. Each employee, volunteer and rider also must sign a liability waiver stating they understand and accept this risk. If for some reason you are not comfortable working around horses, there are other, volunteer jobs that need to be done at Our Heroes!

## Handling Horses during Leading, Mounting and Dismounting

- When leading a horse from a paddock, walk on the left side of the horse with your right hand two feet from the halter and the rest of the lead line folded in your left hand with your palm facing down. **Never wrap the lead rope around your hand** so your hand does not get stuck in it if a horse bolts.
- For mounting purposes, the horse leader walks the horse into position near the mounting platform. It is important to make sure the horse's feet are square so that the horse is balanced on all four hooves to avoid moving while receiving a rider. The leader stands directly in front of the horse to form a visual barrier. The horse should stand in its space and you should stand in yours. Never hold the horse by the bridle. Instead, hold the rein to one side and the lead line to the other in order to gain head control. If the horse pulls back on the lead rope, release the pressure by taking a step back with the horse. If the horse is getting agitated it is important to let the instructor know by giving a small verbal warning that the horse may move so as not to panic or scare the rider. It is the horse leader's responsibility to watch and interpret horse behavior at all times. Stay in front of the horse until the instructor says "ok" and then step aside. For everyone's safety you must work as a team.
- **RIDERS ARE NEVER TO DISMOUNT WITHOUT INSTRUCTOR.** When the rider is ready to dismount, if they are physically able they should dismount in the regular way: be sure the rider takes both feet out of the stirrups, leans forward and places hands on the horse's neck, positions head and shoulders to the right side of the horse's neck while the right leg swings up and over the horse's rump. Rider then lies across the saddle to balance and then slides to the ground, landing on their feet.

Riders that are not physically able to dismount as described above will use a crest dismount. The rider's legs are brought up to the front, above the horse's neck and the rider is pivoted to lie across the saddle. The volunteers then assist the rider to the ground and/or into their mobility device(s).

When working with people with varying physical limitations, **communication is key** to making sure everyone is safe and comfortable. Never touch a rider without explaining to them what you are doing and why, and make sure you get their consent before you touch or move them.

The riding instructor will be responsible for deciding if the need for an emergency dismount arises. It is important to stay calm and listen to directions. It is also important to communicate any potentially dangerous situations with horse or rider to the riding instructor by announcing "stop". Your informed reaction can help to avert an emergency situation. During an emergency dismount the side walker on the left tells the rider they are going to take them off the horse. Both side walkers quickly remove the rider's feet from the stirrups. The side walker on the left then wraps arms around the rider's waist and pulls the rider off the horse. The leader holds the horse as still as possible during the emergency dismount and then moves the horse away from the rider. If other riders are in the same area it is important that they halt their horses until the emergency dismount is completed.

- One side walker always escorts the rider out of the riding area and into the care of a guardian.

### **Proper Helmet Fit**

All riders must wear ASTM-SEI Equestrian helmets. If the riders do not have their own helmets the barn has several helmets to choose from. When a helmet is fitted properly the front sits only 1 ½ to 2 inches above the rider's eyebrows and the helmet does not rock forward, backwards or side to side. Be careful when fastening the chinstrap so as not to pinch rider's skin in the buckle. Only two fingers should fit between the strap and chin when tightened properly. Proper helmet fitting is important to provide a protective factor and keep the helmet in place in case of a fall.

### **Preparing for Class**

- Keep in mind what is known about horse behavior and their senses. Make sure to dress appropriately with clothes that are secure to your body so as not to scare them with sudden movements. Avoid wearing perfume or scented lotions that confuse or tempt horses. Gum and candy should not be eaten when working around horses.
- Horses will mirror your mental state and mood. They sense your feelings. If you are afraid, angry, relaxed or sad, they will know it. They will respond to who you are when you walk into their presence. Try your best to be in a peaceful state of mind when you show up to volunteer. Arriving at least 20 minutes before your scheduled session will allow you to relax before engaging with a horse. The horse's job is to respond to the riders during the sessions. Riders with special needs may have less control of their movements, sounds and emotions. A horse will be happier if they don't have to be concerned with their handlers in addition to their riders.

### **Round Pen and Arena Procedures**

- The farm conducts boarding, private lessons and Our Heroes lessons. Priority is always given to Our Heroes lessons. A schedule of lessons is posted in the office and barn.
- Horses should not be tied inside the arena. If horses need to be tied outside the arena, they may be tied to the vertical posts only with a quick release knot. If you are unsure ask an instructor.
- Gates are opened and closed by the riding instructor. Gates are to remain closed at all times unless a horse is actively entering or exiting.
- Our Heroes lessons take priority when using the arenas. A schedule of lessons is posted in the office. If you are not sure, ask a riding instructor. When multiple riders are in the arena, it is important to focus on your job of either leader or side walker and listen to the instructor so that you can keep the rider, yourself and the horse safe.

### **Trail Procedures**

- During trail activities, it is important for everyone's safety to keep at least two horse lengths between you and the rider in front of you. This helps prevent crowding and gives you space to react if a horse decides to move in an unexpected way.
- An easy way to make sure a horse's length of space is between you and the horse in front of you is to make sure that you can always see the horse in front of yours' hooves on the ground between your horse's ears. If you can't see them, you are too close!

## Understanding Horse Behavior

- Horses are herd animals and feel most comfortable with other horses. They may not be happy when being caught and led away in the paddock or field. They often respond to each other's behaviors. If one horse frightens or takes off running, the other horses may follow suit. Horses also have a pecking order they have established among themselves. There is usually a dominant horse in the bunch. When having several horses out at the same time it is important to know that order to discourage competition among horses.
- Horses are also considered prey animals and are hard-wired with a fight or flight response. When scared they may take off running. Horses can scare at strange or loud noises, sudden movements, unusual objects and other unexpected environmental stimuli. It is always important to know where a horse is in relation to your body. Always stand to the side of a horse when leading it on a lead line. Be sure to leave space between two or more horses when they are being ridden or led in the same areas such as arenas or trails. Talking to the horse in a calming tone of voice may help them gain composure.
- Horses rely on their senses to understand their environment. They have keen senses of smell, hearing, sight and touch which alert them to potential dangers. When being around horses it is important to be calm and quiet. Sudden movements and loud noises easily spook horses. Let them smell the brushes before you groom them. Be sure they see the saddle before you put it on them. Touch a horse gently but firmly. A horse's skin is sensitive enough to feel a fly landing on it. Light touches can be an irritant to a horse. Pet your horse to reward it, never pat it. Taking time to involve the horse in what is about to happen will help them build trust with you, and keeps everyone safe.

Pay attention to the horse's ears as they tell you where the horse's attention is. You will notice if they are listening in front or behind. If the ears are pinned back they are angry. If you see the whites of the horse's eyes there is likely to be a kick or a bite.

If a horse's tail is switching back and forth it is a sign of irritation from flies, the rider or people around the horse. If the tail is clamped down tight the horse is likely upset or scared which could lead them to kick, rear, buck or bolt.



## Grooming 101

For your safety never stand directly behind the horse. Always stand to the side and gently reach around for the horse's tail. Be sure to talk with the horse during grooming so it knows where you are, remember- horses can't see directly in front or behind themselves. Watch the horse for signs of stress including fidgeting, moving their head or pinning their ears. A horse enjoying being groomed will relax, lower its head, sigh a big breath or cock its back leg and rest. Each horse prefers a different amount of pressure and have areas sensitive to touch. Watch their body language to learn what each horse likes.

There are several types of brushes for grooming a horse. Brushes are used in the following order:

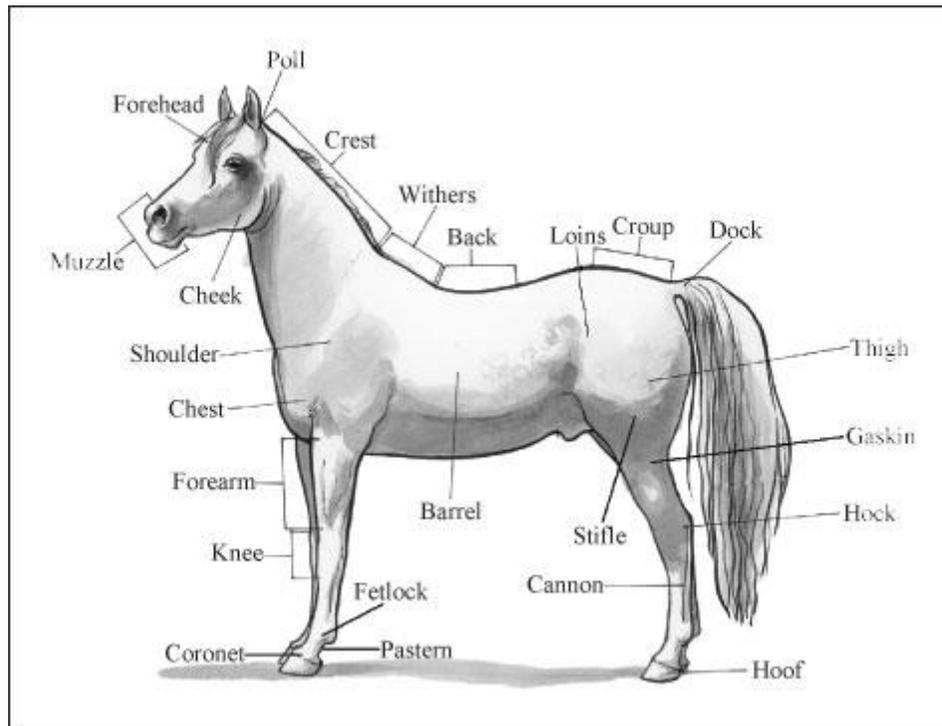
1. Curry comb- circular motions on neck, body and rump, to loosen dirt from the horse's coat. Be careful on legs or boney areas and in the flanks and belly.
2. Stiff brush- sweeping strokes, in the direction of hair growth, to remove dirt from the horse's coat. Be cautious – not all horses like the stiff brush.
3. Soft brush- even pressure, running in the direction of hair growth to remove smaller particles
4. Mane and tail brush or comb - for combing mane and tail.
5. Hoof pick and brush- pick from the heel to toe, examining the sole for rocks or other objects. Stand facing the horse's rump and cradle the hoof (not the ankle) gently in one hand while picking. Keeping the hoof as low as possible while getting the job done allows the horse to maintain balance. When done, lower the hoof slowly to the ground before letting go. Keep your feet out of the way in case the horse puts its foot down.



The five tools listed above are used in every day grooming. You may also see these less frequently used tools:

- A Scraper – used like a squeegee to remove sweat from the horse's hair or excess water after washing the horse
- A Shedding Blade – used to remove extra hair when the horse is shedding

## Parts of the Horse



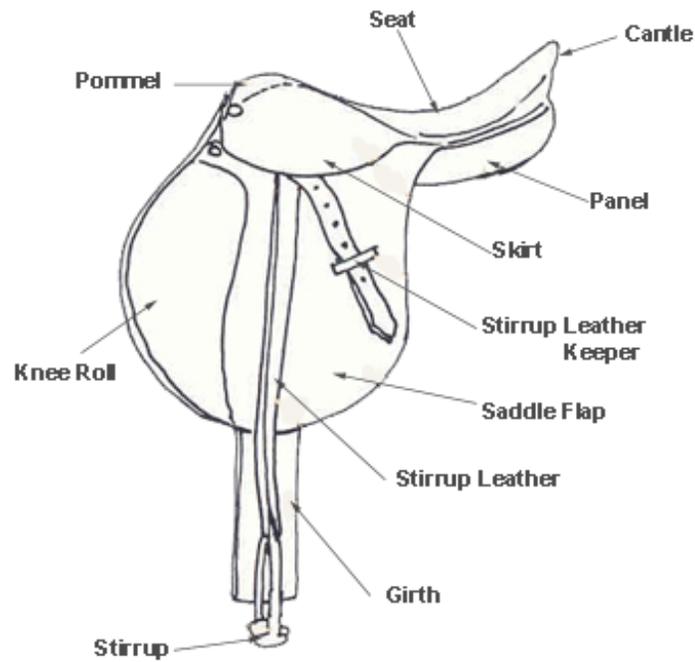
## How to Tie a Quick Release Knot

A quick release tie is used to ensure the horse's safety. Done correctly, it unties when the end of the rope is pulled. It is a series of stacking loops that will release quickly.



## Parts of the Saddle

### English Saddle



### Western Saddle

