



**THE INSTITUTE  
OF  
EQUESTRIAN  
THERAPY**

*A 501 (C) (3) Non Profit Corporation*

**VOLUNTEER  
MANUAL**

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## **The Institute of Equestrian Therapy Volunteer Training Manual**

**Welcome to the IET Volunteer Program! We are very excited to have you as a volunteer. You are an important part of a team that makes a tremendous difference in the lives of children and adults with disabilities. Please review the guidelines in this manual to ensure you feel comfortable with our program and understand the basic functions of an IET Volunteer. We hope you find your time here to be a rewarding experience!**

### **Our Mission**

*The IET is dedicated to teaching traditional horseback riding to disabled children and adults as a supplement to their clinical therapy. We offer a safe, fun, and challenging environment for students in which they develop equestrian skills that improve their balance, coordination, and most importantly self-confidence.*

### **Volunteering at The IET**

Qualifications: Prior experience with horses and/or people with disabilities is very helpful but not necessary. More important is a real desire to aid our students in the development of their skills as a rider. We also require a commitment to learn and adhere to our guidelines in order to provide a safe and secure environment for both students and volunteers. The minimum age to volunteer is thirteen with a few exceptions. Volunteers need to be fit enough to be able to walk for up to 45 minutes on various terrain. Some lessons take place on trails with sloping hills and rocky ground. You will also be asked to saddle horses, groom, and clean stalls or other area from time to time.

### **What we expect from a Volunteer**

A volunteer is expected to be reliable and try to give some advance notice of when they are not available. We try to have some idea of how many volunteers we'll have on any given day, so knowing who plans on attending is very helpful. Our Volunteer Coordinator contacts our entire membership weekly through e-mail. If e-mail is not available then volunteers can call our Volunteer Hotline to find out if lessons are scheduled. Letting us know if you are attending is VERY important. The **Volunteer Hotline is (805) 426-9981**. The Hotline will inform you that lessons are scheduled and also have other information regarding inclement weather contingencies or special announcements. The Hotline will be updated each Thursday. Please listen to the announcement and then leave a message confirming your attendance or notice that you won't be attending.

### **Training Requirements**

All volunteers will be required to attend scheduled safety training sessions from time to time. New volunteers will shadow experienced volunteers and staff until the Director or Assistant Director feel they are ready to assist riders without direct supervision. Most new volunteers are ready after one day of lessons. The basic training consists of:

- Taking horses from stalls with a halter and lead rope
- Learning to tie a "quick release knot"
- Grooming horses and cleaning hooves
- Saddling and bridling horses
- Leading horses to the mounting ramp
- Assisting the mounting of students on the horses
- Side walking with students on trails and in the ring
- Assisting with exercises/games in the ring
- Dismounting students safely
- Putting back tack and equipment at the end of lessons

## General Conduct at The IET

- We require volunteers to be polite and respectful to both our clients and fellow volunteers.
- Only perform tasks you are qualified to do and ask experienced volunteers or staff if you're not sure about something.
- Profanity is not allowed and cause for dismissal.
- Electronics such as ipods, cell phones, Blackberries etc, should be **off** during lessons unless there are circumstances that require them to be on.
- Under no circumstances are volunteers permitted to assist students or minor volunteers in the restroom. Only the student or minor volunteers parents or caregivers are permitted to assist. **NO EXCEPTIONS**
- Revealing clothing is inappropriate

## What to Wear and What to Bring

The IET recommendations:

- Comfortable, sturdy shoes. No sandals or open toes.
- T-shirts, jeans, slacks or shorts are appropriate.
- Dress in layers, it's cool in the morning and can warm up during the day
- Sunscreen and a cap or hat and sunglasses are advisable.
- No long jewelry that could get caught and cause injury to yourself, the students, and horses
- Occasional light rain during winter operations require appropriate outwear (no umbrellas)
- Water and coffee are available-you're welcome to bring anything else. **Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.**

## General Responsibilities

Once you have completed your basic training and start working directly with students you will have seen how the experienced volunteers relate to our students. Things to remember during lessons are:

- 1. NEVER LEAVE A RIDER UNATTENDED OR A HORSE LOOSE WITH A RIDER ON IT UNLESS OTHERWISE INSTRUCTED**
- 2. BE SURE ALL STUDENTS ARE WEARING HELMETS SECURELY FITTED AT ALL TIMES WHILE ON A HORSE**
3. Know the student's name
4. Listen to the directions being given to the student
5. Be aware of your surroundings. Look for potential hazards or things that could scare the horse such as blowing newspaper, bags, traffic, or other livestock.
6. Be "present" during the lesson or trail walk.
7. Establish a rapport with the student. Help them focus on the lesson.
8. Report any signs of fatigue, discomfort, or unusual behavior to the staff or instructor.
9. Help keep the students interested and occupied during times when they have to wait.
10. Remember SAFETY is the number one concern for students, volunteers, and horses.

## Working with Students

When meeting disabled students, be yourself. Be a friend and treat them as an equal. At the same time be aware of the disability. One of the hardest aspects of working with disabled riders is letting the student do things for themselves. The natural reaction is to assist the student, however, it's self-reliance that is the goal, so students are challenged to do difficult exercises. Helping too much defeats the purpose of the exercise. Lend a hand if asked by an instructor or other volunteer or if you see an unsafe situation. Most of all: be patient. Try not to pre-determine a student's ability. They will always surprise you with what they are capable of when they are motivated. Do not talk *about* a student in front of them-talk *to* them. If you are curious about a student's disability use appropriate language. Don't say, "What's wrong with..." Rather, tactfully asks a parent, "Can I ask what your child's diagnosis is?" or "Would it be ok to ask ...". If you are unsure ask an experienced volunteer or staff member for guidance on what is appropriate to ask and how to phrase a sensitive question.

### **Working with Parents**

In many instances, the time spent at Equestrian Therapy benefits the parents as much as the student. They have time to relax and watch their child enjoy the freedom of riding and the milestones they accomplish. Parents of children with disabilities have a lot of responsibility. It is not easy for them to get the child prepared and brought to the ranch for lessons. Be empathetic. Try to establish a rapport with parents. Tell them about things that may have happened during the lesson to make their child smile or the student's reaction to riding. Let them know their child is making progress! Also, let them know if a child is not feeling well or in some kind of discomfort such as a sweater on a hot day, or the need for heavier clothing on a cool day.

### **The Lesson Team**

Each student and horse has a team of (3) volunteers.

- (2) Side walker
- (1) Lead

Lessons are usually in groups of (3) students on (3) horses. The group is equipped with a two-way radio in case of an emergency.

### **Leading the Horse**

The job of the Lead is to control the speed and direction of the horse, be aware of the horse's reaction to the surroundings, and obey the direction of the Side walkers with regard to stopping, speed, or other issues. Leads are always experienced volunteers. Side walkers are new or experienced volunteers. When leading the horse walk beside him not in front of him. Always lead from the left side. A position even with the horse's head or halfway between the horse's head is considered safest. When walking around a horse always turn his head away from you. The horse is stronger than you so don't try to out pull him. Never wrap the lead rope around your hand or arm or body. Never drape lead ropes or reins over your shoulders or neck. Use judgment when turning a horse loose. Make sure he is completely through the gate or door. Turn him toward the way you entered to remove his halter and rope.

### **Side walkers**

Side walkers assist the students with poor balance by placing an arm over the student's upper leg and grasping the saddle. This "locks" the student in position. Students that are more advanced need Side walkers to attend in the event of an emergency. The Side walker's responsibility is to talk, reassure and direct the rider, communicate any problems to the Lead, and maintain awareness of the horse, the surroundings and the Leads actions. The team decides on one Side walker to give direction to the rider, so as not to confuse them.

### **Emergencies**

Emergencies rarely occur during lessons. Prior to the lesson, teams are instructed to appoint one volunteer to pull the child from the horse if there is a problem. The other two volunteers will attend to the horse. (This is part of what you'll learn in training). Other emergencies can be falls, seizures, or medical reactions. The volunteer team working with the student will be made aware of any conditions prior to the lesson and what to do in the event of a problem. Handling the horse in an emergency situation is also part of the training we provide and experience you will gain.

## **Equestrian Therapy Basic Horse Care and Handling**

Any horse has the potential to hurt someone if it is startled or scared. The following guidelines will help you avoid getting injured during your volunteer service. We rarely have any incidents involving our horses however; everyone volunteering should know the basics. If you are new to our program, you may feel a bit overwhelmed at all you need to remember. But safety rules become second nature as long as you continue to practice them. If you're not sure about something ask the staff or a more experienced volunteer.

To understand a little about how a horse thinks, you need to remember that they are "prey" animals. This means predators in the wild hunt them. Even though they are well trained and domesticated, the ability to react quickly and out-run a real or perceived threat is how they survive. They have no fangs or claws. Their first defense is to run. This instinct remains strong throughout a horse's life. So to start, here are a few key points.

1. Wear sturdy shoes or boots that will protect your feet if your horse steps on them. No sandals or opened toed shoes!
2. Be calm and quiet. Sudden moves can cause a horse to shy (jump sideways) or kick.
3. The safest way to lead a horse is with a halter and lead rope from the left side. Don't hook your fingers through the halter straps or rings or the bit. If the horse pulls away your fingers could be caught.
4. Never stand directly behind a horse. His field of vision is limited and he can't see you if you're behind him. When you approach him from behind touch the side of his hip or talk to him so he knows your there. If you are grooming its tail stand to one side and pull the tail gently over.
5. When tying use a quick release knot or panic snap so that if your horse gets scared and pulls he can quickly be freed. The feeling of being constrained can make a scared horse panic to the point of hurting him or you.
6. Never loop lead ropes or reins around your hands or any other body part. If your horse pulls away you could be dragged.
7. The safest place to stand is beside your horse's shoulder where you can see each other.
8. We don't allow treats for the horses during lessons. Once the day is over they are allowed carrots, apples, etc, Feed treats from buckets or tubs. Horses can very quickly become greedy and mistake fingers for carrots.
9. When grooming or saddling up, make sure the horse is securely tied. A loose horse can cause havoc. And don't leave a tied horse out of sight.
10. When cleaning a horse's hooves don't squat or kneel. Bend over so that if the horse moves you can get out of the way quickly.

### **GROOMING**

Grooming is an activity that is enjoyable for both you and your horse. It is also a good opportunity to check for injuries and irritations. It is an absolute must before riding. Grit beneath the saddle will be uncomfortable for your horse and could cause sores. Start from the left or right of your horse. Have your grooming tools arranged in a safe convenient place. Our tools are in buckets marked for each horse.

You will find:

- A currycomb or grooming mitt.
- A body brush with fairly stiff bristles.
- A mane and tail comb
- Plastic causes less breakage than metal ones.
- A fine soft bristled finishing brush.
- A hoofpick.

Don't sit your bucket or box too close to your horse where he could knock it over, or where you might trip over it as you move around your horse. Also have your horse securely and safely tied with a quick release knot.

### **Cleaning The Horse's Hooves**

Cleaning out your horse's hooves is very important. Rocks can get lodged in the hoof and cause irritation that can lead to injury. Our horses are glad to lift their hooves for you to clean.

1. Slide your hand down the left foreleg. Squeeze the back of the leg along the tendons just above the pastern and say 'up' or 'hoof' Hold the hoof and with the hoof pick pry out any dirt, manure or anything else lodged in the "V" around the frog or the inner part of the hoof
2. Check for any injury and signs of thrush, (black mushy substance with a foul odor) or other problems. Take note of any cracks in the wall of the hoof so you can consult with the Staff as to what should be done. Gently place the foot down on the ground and continue until all four feet are done

### **Mane and tail**

Either with a mane comb or brush, brush out the mane and tail. Start at the bottom of the strands and brush downwards in sections until you can smoothly comb from the top of the mane or tail, right to the bottom. When brushing the tail, stand to one side and pull the tail gently over to you. This way you are out of the way should the horse kick. A grooming spray that detangles hair is used once in awhile, and makes brushing out the long strands easier while cleaning, shining and protecting the hair.

### **The Curry Comb**

Starting on the left side use your currycomb or grooming mitt to loosen the dirt in your horse's coat. Curry in circular sweeps all over the horse's body. Be careful over boney areas of the shoulders, hips and legs.

### **The Body Brush**

Once you're done with the currycomb we use the body brush to whisk out the dirt brought to the surface by the currycomb. Start on one side and move around the horse brushing in sweeping strokes following the direction of the hair the way it grows. The body brush is more useful for cleaning the legs than the currycomb. This is a good time to check for lesions and skin irritations on the legs, knees, and pasterns

### **The Finishing Brush**

A finishing brush has shorter softer bristles. With sweeping strokes whisk away any dust missed by the body brush. The finer bristles help smooth out the body hair and get rid of the fine coat of dust that may be left.

## **SADDLING THE HORSE**

Each horse at Equestrian Therapy has his own saddle and pads. Please refer to the signs in the tack room to make sure you put the right saddle on the horse. The square saddle blanket goes on first followed by a saddle pad. The saddle pads are shaped to fit neatly under the saddle and may have ties or hook and loop fastener tabs that attach to the leather billet straps on the saddle and help keep it in place while riding. These tabs or ties go on the top side, not against the horse.

Place the saddle pad or blanket on the horse's back positioning it forward over the withers (see diagram) and sliding it back into place. This ensures that the hair on the horse's back lies flat beneath the pad and saddle. Make sure the blanket and pad are even on both sides.

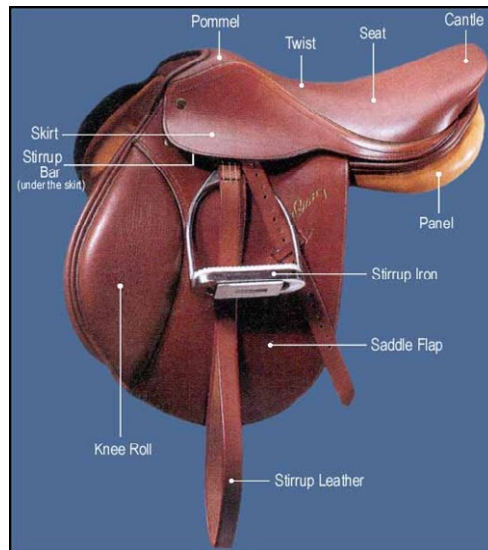
The stirrups on an English saddle should be run up the leathers. The girth, if they are attached should be folded back over the saddle seat. With stirrups and cinch out of the way, they won't hit the horse as you lift the saddle over the horse's back.

Lift the saddle high enough that it doesn't hit the horse or knock the pad out of position. The saddle should be placed slightly forward and settled back. Be careful to place the saddle gently on the horse's back.

Letting a saddle fall heavily onto your horse's back may cause it to spook Buckle the girth loosely to start.

**REMEMBER: ALWAYS RUN THE BILLET STRAP THROUGH THE TOP SPACE OF THE BUCKLE!** Otherwise you cannot unbuckle it and we have to cut the girth. (That gets expensive) Tighten the girth gently in small increments. Sometimes the horses may bloat themselves in anticipation of being saddled. So we wait a moment for it to exhale and tighten the girth gently again. Only tighten the girth enough to hold the saddle firmly in place. You should be able to slide your fingers between the girth and the horse.

Before the horses exit for a trail ride or ring lesson, **REMEMBER: CHECK THE GIRTH ONE MORE TIME!**



### THE BRIDLE

1. Start with your horse's halter on and make sure it is safely tied with a lead rope and quick release knot.
2. Hold the bridle up over the horse's nose with your left hand. Using your right hand fingers, hold the bit against his mouth, and insert your thumb into the space between the front and back teeth. If he is resistant to taking the bit, wiggling your thumb may encourage him to open his mouth wider. Slide the bit in, and lift the bridle higher with your left hand so the horse can't spit the bit back out. Be careful not to knock the bit on the horse's teeth.
3. Grasp the crown of the bridle with your right hand (making sure the headband and noseband are facing forward) and with your left hand gently bend the horse's left ear forward to slip it under the crown
4. Switch your grasp of the bridle again to your left hand and with your right gently slip the right ear under the crown. Try not to pull the bridle too high, so you won't pull on the horse's mouth.
5. Buckle the throatlatch of the bridle leaving about 4 inches of slack under his neck. Make sure to put the end of the throatlatch in the keeper.

Remove the bridle by slipping the halter (attached to a cross tie or lead rope) back over the horse's ears as in Step 2. Undo the throatlatch, curb chain and noseband. With your left hand reach under the horse's neck and slide the crown over the horse's ears. Holding it as you did in step 3, gently lower the bit out of the horse's mouth. Be careful not to knock his teeth. With your right hand, slip the halter on properly and take the reins up over the horse's neck to completely remove the bridle.

### REMOVING THE SADDLE

1. Take your horse to where you groomed and tacked up (put the saddle and bridle on). Tie the horse with a lead rope to its halter. Place the reins over the horse head and let them rest on his neck. Never tie a horse by the reins!
2. The stirrups hang from a long loop. Draw the stirrup up the back strap of the loop. Now take the bottom of the loop and any slack leather and pull it through the stirrup.
3. With the horse safely tied undo the girth. Walk around the horse to the side the girth is still buckled and put the girth up over the seat of the saddle..
4. We like to work from the left side however you could take the saddle off from either side. Just be sure to lift it high enough not to hit the horse's back. Again the left side being preferable pull off the pad and blanket.
5. When returning the saddle, pad and blanket to the tack room, place the saddle on the appropriately marked saddletree and place the pad on top the saddle and then the usually sweaty blanket wet side up on top of the pad.
6. Even though you cleaned hooves before riding do another cleaning to make sure your horse hasn't picked up any rocks. Lead your horse and put it in its stall and remove it's halter. Make sure the chain to the stall is secure.

## **THE GAIT**

Horses have different speeds and different ways of moving their legs for each speed. These are known as "gaits". Knowing the 4 Gaits will help you understand more about riding.

### **The Walk**

The walk is a natural **4-beat** movement. The horse always has two or three hooves on the ground. The walk is the slowest natural gait; it is the steadiest and most comfortable. This is the gait we use most with disabled students that need side walker assistance.

### **The Trot**

The trot is a steady **2-beat** movement. This gait has a period of suspension. The horse springs from one diagonal to the other. In between these springs, all four legs are off the ground. Since the trot has two beats each stride and a moment in mid-air, it is more comfortable for the rider (and the horse) to rise up and down every-other beat (this is called "posting").

### **The Canter**

The canter is a **3-beat** movement. This gait has a period of suspension after each stride. This gait starts with the hind leg then leads to the front in a rocking motion. When you canter, you keep your seat in the saddle (unlike the trot). Before learning to canter, make sure your balance and rhythm stays consistent with the horse during the trot.

### **The Gallop**

The gallop is a **4-beat** movement. This gait is similar to the canter, but the horse's legs move one at a time. The gallop feels just like a fast canter. When riding the gallop, raise your seat slightly out of the saddle, putting your weight in your heels. The gallop is never used in our program.

## **Other Terms To Know**

**Posting:** The term "posting" is used to describe the up-and-down pattern of the **trot**. When you post, you raise out of the saddle for one beat, and sit down in the saddle for the two beat. This pattern creates a more comfortable trot for both the horse and rider and it is the goal of our students to eventually master this technique.

**Diagonal:** The term "diagonal" refers to which fore leg is moving forward while you are in the **up** position of the posting trot. You should always be in the **up** position of the posting trot when the horse's **outside** fore leg (closest to the arena wall) is farther forward.

*The Institute of Equestrian Therapy is very happy to have you as part of our family. We know you can make a big difference in the lives of our students and hope your time with us is fun and rewarding!*

## **External Features of a Horse**

