



SIDEWALKER

REPORTS TO: Instructor

PREREQUISITES FOR SIDEWALKERS

- Minimum age 16
- Comfortable with horses
- Completion of therapeutic riding orientation session
- Completion of therapeutic riding sidewalker training session
- Able to walk briskly over uneven terrain in all weathers while supporting a rider for an hour
- Able to run beside horse for brief periods while supporting a rider

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the student. The degree of assistance from the sidewalker will depend on the balance and the ability of the student. Sidewalkers can also help the Instructor in many ways ie keeping the student's attention on the lesson, assisting in left/right directionality, spatial orientation, understanding the Instructor's direction. Any unnecessary interference should be avoided. Offer feedback to instructor and/or program director either in the lesson log book or verbally.

Before Mounting

- Introduce yourself to the rider and help him or her put on their belt and helmet if they require assistance
- The Instructor will check the tack and tighten the girth before the student mounts, but may ask you to check it during the ride. The Instructor will make any adjustments.

Mounting

- The left sidewalker escorts the rider to the mounting area (riders may mount from the ground, ramp or mounting block). This is done at the request of the instructor, not before. Stay with the rider until the Instructor takes over
- The right sidewalker acts as "post", standing on the right side of the horse as it approaches the ramp or mounting block, preventing it from swinging its body away from the block or ramp. As the rider mounts, the "post" holds the stirrup leather on the right side to counterbalance the rider's weight

While Mounted

- Keep conversation to a minimum during the lesson
- NEVER LEAVE THE RIDER UNATTENDED WHILE MOUNTED
- Sidewalkers may be required to actually support the rider or simply act as "spotters", depending on the needs of the rider. The Instructor will tell you what hold is appropriate for each student (See "Holds" section of the Handbook)
- If the student starts to lose his/her balance gently push him/her back into position. Try not to grab the rider, rather, give just enough support to help him/her regain the proper position in the saddle.
- Sidewalkers who accompany poorly balanced riders need to change sides occasionally to relieve the stress on their arms.



THERAPEUTIC RIDING PROGRAM

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- If you need to change sides, ask the horse handler to go off the track and halt. Once stopped, switch sides ONE AT A TIME if two sidewalkers are present. If only one sidewalker is present, get assistance – do not leave the rider unattended.
- Let the Instructor know if the rider is uncomfortable or having any type of difficulty
- Help the rider carry out the Instructor's directions, allowing the rider to do as much of the work as possible (check with the Instructor re how much help to give if unsure)
- If appropriate, remind the student to maintain correct posture – check with Instructor if this is appropriate
- Assist with exercises
- Be careful not to get so excited during games that your rider doesn't get to use his/her skills because you are doing it all!
- In an emergency, use a medium hold (see "Holds" section) OR remove the rider's foot from the stirrup and assist in dismounting the student quickly and safely (see Seizure Procedure/Emergency Dismount)
- In the event of an accident, stay with the rider

Dismounting

- Riders are dismounted to the ground whenever possible
- Assist as directed by the Instructor
- Assist rider to run up stirrups if he/she is able
- Escort rider out of ring if he/she is not leading the horse out
- Assist rider to remove their helmet and belt before returning to the supervision of the caregiver/parent
- If the rider you are assisting uses a wheelchair or other assistive devices make sure you are thoroughly familiar with the dismounting procedure for that rider. Bringing the chair or devices at the wrong time can scare the horse. They may also be in the way during the procedure. When possible, the rider will be dismounted, the horse taken away and then the chair or devices brought to the rider.

Sidewalkers are the volunteers who get the most hand-on duties in therapeutic riding. They are directly responsible for the student. As such, they have the capability to either enhance or detract from the lesson. In the ring, the sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the Instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the student or the other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing for anyone, and to students who may be dealing with perceptual problems as well as physical limitations, it can be overwhelming. If two sidewalkers are working with a student, one should be designated "talker" to avoid this situation.

It is important to maintain a position by the rider's knee. Being too far forward or back makes it difficult to assist with instructions or provide security if the horse should trip or shy.

Please don't lean on the horses or pull on the belts – it is extremely hard on the horses and the riders.

Mounting and dismounting are the most dangerous times of the lesson – please pay extra attention during these times.



HOLDS

Spotter

- Simply walks beside horse and rider paying attention, perhaps helping with comprehension of instructions and being ready in case of emergency

Minimum

- Used for riders with good balance
- Sidewalker cups the rider's ankle with the hand closest to the rider
- Just maintain contact – do not squeeze or pull on the leg

Medium (arm over thigh)

- Sidewalker grips the front of the saddle (flap or pommel depending on the horse's size) with the hand closest to the rider
- The fleshy part of the forearm rests across the rider's thigh
- Do not put any pressure on any joints
- Be careful that your thumb is not in a position to be jammed and sprained if the horse stops or turns suddenly
- In the event of an emergency, the medium hold is the most secure

Maximum

- Used for very unbalanced riders
- Sidewalker does a medium hold with the OUTSIDE arm, while supporting the riders trunk with the inside arm
- Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider's waist (it is tempting with a young or small rider, but will offer too much and/or uneven support)
- Be very careful not to pull down or push up on a waist belt. Rather than grip the belt, "cup" your hand around the rider's body
- Belts are a safety device for helping a rider who has lost their balance, NOT to provide constant support to the rider or sidewalker