

H.M.M.

**THERAPEUTIC/ADAPTIVE
HORSEMANSHIP**

Volunteer Handbook

2024

Welcome to His Mountaintop Ministries – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship!

Mission Statement: To create, establish, maintain and operate equine assisted activities and therapy opportunities and programs, for physically, developmentally, and emotionally challenged individuals.

We are so glad you joined our volunteer team; you are a vital part of making the therapeutic riding experience possible for our riders with various special needs and their equestrian pursuits. We realize that the new volunteer orientation covers lots of information in a short period of time, so we have provided this volunteer manual as a more individually-paced review.

REMEMBER: Working with horses is a **risky activity, and at times can be Dangerous.** So, attention to safety is our first concern for all individuals involved. There are as many ways to do things as there are horse people. When you are here at H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship, we ask that you do things the way they are outlined in this training manual or as shown during the orientation training. Consistency is KEY.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY:

It is the policy of H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship to protect the confidentiality of our clients. Access to student files is limited to staff. However, H.M.M. – does want our volunteers and personnel to be informed and have a positive experience working with our challenged riders. Student disabilities will be discussed with volunteers as needed to provide a constructive and safe riding experience for our students. Please be discreet in the presence of our riders and their families. To further protect the privacy of our clients, no digital or cell phone pictures are to be taken without the instructor's and parent/guardian's permission. At no time shall a volunteer and a student be alone without supervision of a staff member or parent/guardian.

GENERAL RULES:

- There is absolutely no smoking or alcohol at H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship; it is prohibited on all parts of the property.
- Please abide by the 5 MPH upon entering the Riding Center property.
- No dogs or pets allowed on the premises, including no dogs left in your car. "Service Dogs" are allowed with written documentation and permission from HMM staff ONLY!
- All volunteers **must** have their completed liability and release signed and returned to the Volunteer Coordinator or Instructor **before** beginning any program activities.
- Volunteers are required to sign in and out when on the property.
- All volunteers must wear a name-badge while volunteering
- For program safety and consistency, we ask that all volunteers attend at least one volunteer orientation during their time as a program volunteer. Only volunteers who have completed the Mount/Dismount training may assist the instructors.
- For the protection of our students and volunteers, at no time shall a volunteer and a student be out of the line of sight of an Instructor, Staff member, or other program Lead volunteer.

Conduct Policy

H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship volunteers and staff are to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. The use of inappropriate language, abusive behaviors (towards animals or humans) and disregard of safety rules and procedures shall not be tolerated. Neither shall the use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco be allowed during H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship functions. Violations should be brought to the attention of the staff member on duty and appropriate action will be taken (ie, verbal reprimand, written reprimand, and/or expulsion from the program.)

Safety Rules/Procedures:

- If you take it out, put it away.
- If your horse makes a mess, clean it up.
- All riders must wear a helmet when riding program horses
- No running, yelling, jumping or screaming in or around the barn or arenas.
- Know the horse's "danger zones" and avoid them (directly behind, in front of and under the neck of the horse)
- Closed-toe and closed-heel shoes must be worn when working with the horses.
- Always use a lead-rope and halter when moving a horse. Please close all gates.
- Riders are not allowed in an occupied stall without a volunteer or instructor present; riders are not allowed in an occupied pasture.
- Always approach a horse from the front or side.
- Never tie a horse with the bridle reins.
- Always remove the halter after returning a horse to pasture or his/her stall.
- The safety of the rider, others around you and yourself should always be your first consideration.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

The first time you volunteer, please sign in, and introduce yourself to the instructor; you will be given an assignment.

Sign-In:

The volunteer sign-in sheet is located to the left of the office door. Please sign-in when you arrive and sign-out before you leave. The tracking of volunteer hours is used for grant writing purposes and liability coverage. If you require documentation of hours for school credit or another program, please chart your hours utilizing the card box on the table outside the office. If you have further questions inquire with the Volunteer Coordinator.

Name Tags: Name tags must be worn at all times when on the premises. They are located on the display board by end of stalls. Please return your name tag to the display board before you leave for the day.

Attire:

Enclosed shoes are required for work around the horses (safety rule). For your own safety, we ask that you refrain from wearing dangling jewelry, bracelets, and necklaces. In warmer weather, modest shorts are acceptable; in colder months, layering is recommended. Due to the local bee population, we recommend you not wear perfumes or other scents. Please do

not wear clothing that is overly revealing (no short shorts, spaghetti-strap shirts, low necklines, or exposed mid-drifts)..

Cancellations: H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship cancels only in the event of extreme weather or the absence of all riders in a class. In such an event, instructors and/or the volunteer coordinator will do their best to contact all volunteers. IF YOU are unable to attend and fulfill your commitment, please call the volunteer coordinator immediately at the number provided, and PLEASE leave a message on the office answering machine. If you know in advance that you will not be able to attend a specific class or week, please let the instructor or Volunteer Coordinator know. This provides us sufficient time to secure a substitute.

Promptness & Reliability:

We ask that all our volunteers arrive 20 minutes prior to the scheduled class time to help prep the horse and get any additional insights from the instructor. Your consistency helps us deliver the highest quality program to our clients. Your attendance is critical to the clients' safety during lessons. You are a crucial part of the client team!

VOLUNTEER ROLES:

Regardless of what your role is, while volunteering at H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship, you should consistently demonstrate an appreciation and respect for all clients and families and equines and staff. Assist riders only after giving them ample opportunities to be as independent as possible...empower them.

Horse Leader:

You must be at least 16 years of age or older, (unless previous horse experience) at least 5' tall, with sufficient horse experience as demonstrated to the Equine Manager or Instructor. As horse leader during class, your responsibility is the horse and the safety of those around you. You are tasked with paying careful attention to the directions of the instructor. If you are the sole volunteer for your rider, assist them as needed at the direction of the instructor.

- **How to lead the horse:** The proper position for leading a horse is to stand on the left side of the horse, between his shoulder and eye. Hold the rope 8-10 inches below the clasp with your right hand. The excess end of the rope should be looped into a figure-8 and held in the left hand. **DO NOT** let the end of the lead-rope drag on the ground, or wrap the lead-rope around your hand at any time.
- **DO NOT** drag the horse or let the horse drag you. A quick (but gentle) pull and release on the lead rope can be an effective way to gain the horses attention.. Use voice commands such as “whoa” (stop), “walk-on,” “trot” and “easy” (slow down) to communicate as well.
- **Spacing** while leading the horse is very important. Generally, you should be at least two horse lengths away from the horse in front of you. If you find yourself too close to the horse in front of you, it is recommended that you walk a small circle towards the center of the arena and then continue on. **ALWAYS** inform the rider and side-walkers prior to any change of direction.
- **At the mounting ramp:** Pay close attention to the instructor's directions. You will be directed as to how to place the horse as close to the ramp as possible. Your responsibility is to keep the horse as quiet/still as possible while the rider is mounting. Stand in front of the horse. If you are having trouble with the horse, alert the instructor. **DO NOT FORCE THE ISSUE!**

- Once the lesson is underway, please pay close attention to the instructor. Again, your primary responsibility is the horse. Concentrate on YOUR responsibility.
- If another horse is having trouble in the arena, stop your horse and stand in front of him. Remain stopped until the instructor gives permission to resume walking.
- If your horse is having problems...remain calm; if you cannot control your horse or she/he seems agitated and unsafe, ask the instructor for help; the instructor may want an emergency dismount.
- If a rider falls or comes off unexpectedly, the leader remains with the horse. Do not let go of the horse to aid a fallen rider; the instructor will aid the rider. Your responsibility is to move the horse away from the rider.
- Horses communicate with body language; please refer to the section of this manual on “horse sense” for cues on how to interpret horse language.
- Keep your eyes looking ahead of you, not at the ground. Another horse could stop and you would not know it and that is how accidents happen.

Side-walker:

You must be at least 14 years of age or older and at least 5’ or taller to sidewalk in classes. As a side-walker, your only responsibility is the safety and success of the rider, making sure they stay centered on the horse and aiding with task completion.

- The proper position for a side-walker is parallel to the rider’s legs, about 6-8 inches away from the horse and rider; do not lean on the horse, rider, or saddle. Do not walk too far behind or ahead of the rider, or you will be ineffective if the rider becomes unbalanced. If you walk too far behind the rider, you also risk being in one of the horse’s danger zones.
- Please keep conversation to a minimum and redirect the rider’s attention back to the instructor. In many cases, too many voices can be over stimulating to the rider. If a rider has 2 side-walkers, only one is the “talking” side-walker.
- **Thigh Hold:** You may be asked to do a thigh hold to help stabilize a rider. Using your arm closest to the rider, place your forearm across the top of the rider’s thigh; the instructor will direct you on where to hold with your other hand depending on the rider’s needs. The presence of your forearm will stabilize the rider when walking or trotting.
- At the walk or trot, if the rider starts to slip, ask the leader to halt the horse, inform the rider that they need to re-center, then gently assist by pushing him/her back to the centered position.
- Inform the instructor of any unusual issues presented by the rider. **Be discrete when discussing a student in his or her presence.**
- **Emergency Dismount/Safety Dismount:** In the event of an emergency dismount (and the instructor can’t get there fast enough) the side-walkers remove the rider’s feet from the stirrups, and **one** side-walker’s arms encircle the rider’s waist and pull

them off and away from the horse. This Side-walker will be determined at beginning of ride.

- Know your own limitations. If you feel unable to safely dismount a person, please inform the instructor, so that they may pair you with a more suitable rider.

Emergencies in Brief:

The Horse-Leader must remain in control of the horse. All horses are to be haltered. One side-walker stays with the rider at ALL times. At the instructor's directive, the other side-walker may call 911 from the office phone, if the need arises. In case of a "rider down" situation, all horses must come to a halt. The instructor is responsible for aiding the fallen rider. All instructors at H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship are CPR/First-Aid certified. However, if you are likewise, please advise the instructor and wait for directions.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES:

Many individuals who are unable to help in the arena during classes are able to help groom and tack the horses, as well as participate in the daily cleaning and maintenance of the barn and equipment.

Grooming:

Grooming kits are available on the shelf near the entrance to the horse barn just outside the feed room. Each grooming kit contains the following: Curry comb, hard brush, soft brush, mane/tail brush & hoofpick.

Make sure the horse is properly secured in a designated area, using a quick-release knot or blocker tie ring. Obtain a grooming kit and place it in a location where the horse won't step on it. Ask the horse to 'give' you his/her hoof, you may assist to pick up the horse's foot and using the hoof pick, remove any dirt, stones, etc that may be lodged in the hoof. Be careful not to dig too deeply or hard on the area called the "frog" (V-shaped area near the center of the hoof), although the deeper notches on either side should be cleaned thoroughly. Tell the instructor if you smell a foul odor or suspect any problem with the horse's hooves.

Curry the horse's coat with the curry comb, and finish with the soft brush. Start at the neck and shoulder and work back toward the tail.

Mane and Tail: When brushing the tail, stand off to one side not directly behind the horse, and begin at the bottom of the tail removing tangles working your ways towards to the dock.

Helpful Tips:

Be mindful of a horse's sensitive areas: face, flanks, withers, girth area, stomach, mane and tail. **Remember:** horses can feel even a tiny insect anywhere on their bodies... for larger animals, they are very sensitive creatures.

DO NOT duck underneath a horse's belly or neck/chest.

DO NOT allow a horse to rub you with his head. Many horses would love to use you as a scratching post, but a nudge from a 1200 lb animal is enough to knock you down and break a bone. It may seem cute or affectionate if a horse wants to nudge you, but please be mindful that the very same horse, if allowed to have the same habit will not discriminate between you

and a child or individual walking with crutches or a walker. If a horse wants to rub on you, push his head away (do not hit/smack) or step out of his range.

Tacking-Up:

The horse use/tack assignment sheet is posted on a clip-board and hung outside the tack room to the left of the door. Please refer to it for horse-assignments and tacking instructions. If you have tacking concerns or questions, please ask the instructor..

Commonly Used Tack:

- **Surcingle:** two-handled or single handed piece of equipment without stirrups. It is positioned on the horse's back behind the withers, but not on top of the shoulders.
- **Western Saddle:** this is the "cowboy" saddle. It has a large, deep, leather seat, horn, pommel and long stirrups.
- **English Saddle:** this saddle is smaller in size, shape and weight
- **Bridle:** a harness for the head with several leather straps, a bit and reins
- **Sidepull:** a harness for the head that works off pressure on the horse's nose; there is no bit
- **Reins:** may be rainbow reins, black & white, leather or black nylon/synthetic. They are used for steering and controlling the horse.
- **Bit:** Generally we use snaffles or a gentle curb bit for our horses. They are metal and go in the horse's mouth.
- **Halter:** head collar attached around the head of the horse when being handled and during classes. The lead-rope is normally clipped onto a metal ring which is located under the chin of the horse; this is where the horse is lead from.
- **Western Saddle-pad:** pad used under surcingle's or Western saddles
- **Bareback-pad:** a soft, colored fleece seat, secured by a matching girth.
- **English quilt:** a thin white quilt that goes under the saddle (and saddle-fleece) to help keep it clean; also goes under bareback pads
- **Girth or Cinch:** Functions to hold the saddle on the horse; it fits under the horses' belly, and is secured in place by either buckles or a latigo. When tacking up, girths/cinches are to be tightened snugly. Prior to mounting, the instructor will tighten the girth securely.
- **Lead-rope:** used to lead the horse anywhere on the property. Remember not to let the rope drag on the ground or hang from the halter when the horse is tied, or have it looped over your hand.

Important Notes on Tacking-up:

- When tightening the girth/cinch on any form of tack, please do so in a slow and gentle manner , just tight enough to hold saddle/saddle pad on safely. The Instructor will do the final cinch check; unless you have been checked out and tested for cinch procedures. Be aware of the potential discomfort to the horse when tightening the girth: proceeding slowly is the best way to stay safe.
- **Never** yell at, slap, kick or hit a program animal. Please inform the instructor if you are uncomfortable working with a particular animal. Report any incidents that seem out of character for that animal.

- Always check to make sure tack is properly fitted. If you are unsure, please ask the instructor. If you find damaged or broken tack, please inform the instructor immediately.
 - Please return all tack to its proper location in the tack room at the end of class.
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OTHER SERVICE OPTIONS:

Barn Maintenance:

To ensure the safety and convenience of all animals and individuals present, H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship strives to keep the barn and surrounding areas clean and well maintained. There is always an area that needs tidying up, a floor to be swept, tack to be cleaned.

There are some volunteers who feel that working with animals and riders is not appropriate for them, but who still enjoy the opportunity to volunteer by helping out with other H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship functions. Volunteer orientation is still a requirement for this role. If you would like to volunteer your services in any way, please speak to the Volunteer Coordinator..

Days of Service:

Throughout the year, we are fortunate to have different groups from the community participate in a Day of Service for H.M.M. – Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship. If you have a group that would like to do a one-time service project, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator.

HORSE SENSE:

Horses do have a “sixth sense” when evaluating the disposition of those around them and the general environment. They can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good horse is chosen for his/her gentle and sensitive response to a rider. At times, there may exist a personality conflict between horse and handler. It is important to tell the instructor if you are having difficulty with a particular horse. Additionally, do not be embarrassed to tell the instructor if a “strong” horse intimidates you; it is better to work with a horse that you are compatible with, than to risk an accident by putting yourself or your rider in a situation that is uncomfortable or dangerous.

Flight a Natural Instinct:

Horses would rather run away from perceived danger than turn and face it. A horse’s sense of hearing is very keen and they can sense things we cannot. And thier 'flight or fight' instinct can take over.

- A sudden movement or noise may cause the horse to “spook” or try to flee. They may try to bolt sideways or run forwards.
- Remain calm and in control; speak to the horse in a reassuring tone.
- Horses are herd animals. If a horse gets loose, often times they will run back to the herd for safety.

Ground Manners:

Consistency of handling is the most important part of creating and maintaining good ground manners in our horses. The nature of our program means that our horses are handled by many different individuals daily. **Consistency is KEY!** If you have a problem with a horse, please approach the instructor or staff member for the correct way to handle or deflect an issue with a “difficult equine.”

VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS

Many of our clients/riders, especially in the beginning stages of their riding experience, simply could not participate without the assistance of a volunteer. Many riders required up to 3 volunteers working together.

Our volunteers donate many, many, hours a month to help the program run. This includes helping with classes, aiding with clean-up/barn maintenance, and other special projects or events.

Each team member is important; the horse, the volunteer, the client, the instructor. If any part is missing from the team the mission is not complete.

Thank you! You are the lifeblood of this program; without you we would not be able to offer such a unique opportunity to our participating riders.

WE VALUE YOU MOST OF ALL!! THANK YOU!

NOTES: (write down any questions or comments you may have)