

A.W.A.R.E.

(Always Wanted A Riding Experience)

North American Riding for the Handicapped Association Accredited Center

OVERVIEW

Therapeutic horseback riding for the disabled is a beneficial form of physical and recreational activity that improves balance, posture, and coordination; strengthens and relaxes muscles; and helps develop self-awareness, self-confidence, self discipline and concentration.

A.W.A.R.E. serves children and adults with mental, physical, or emotional disabilities including cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, mental retardation, closed head injury, spinal cord injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment, arthrogyrosis, amputation, learning disability, emotional impairment, autism, stroke, and polio.

A.W.A.R.E. instructors design and monitor individualized treatment plans for each student to address their physical, emotional and social needs while they learn skills of horseback riding. Individual and class goals encourage each rider to be the best he or she can be, on and off the horse.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS:

VOLUNTEER: Horse Leader and Sidewalker

1. Dependable, able to make a commitment and must have reliable means of transportation.
2. Must enjoy working with people with disabilities.
3. Must be able to work around horses.
4. Must be in good health.
5. Must be able to follow instructions and help students relate to those directions.
6. Must be 14 years of age or older.
7. Must exercise patience.

TRAINING PROVIDED:

1. Attend volunteer orientation
2. On-the-job training.
3. Must become familiar with volunteer handbook.

TIME COMMITMENT REQUIRED:

At least one class hour per week for the duration of that specific session.

SPECIFIC DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Report to barn and sign in at your volunteer time.
2. Assist instructors in grooming and saddling horses before classes and remove saddle and saddle pads and groom after classes. (Instructors will always put the bridle on and take the bridle off.)
3. Assist in keeping the barn and area around barn neat and clean.
4. Assist riders in preparing for classes.
5. Serve as a sidewalker or horse leader to the riders during the class.
6. Assist instructor or class assistant with stable management classes.
7. Assist instructor during classes as needed.
8. Report to instructor and sign out.

FROM THE RIDER'S PERSPECTIVE:

Some of your new friends at A.W.A.R.E. have disabilities. Here are a few thoughts which might help you feel more at ease during your volunteer hours.

1. Laughter and humor make the world a richer place to live -- for ALL OF US!!
2. Patience is a virtue -- with some, it is a necessity.
3. Charity begins at home -- and pity does not belong anywhere.
4. You cannot judge a book by its cover -- so give us a closer look because there is more to us than meets the eye!
5. To have a friend you have got to be a friend -- some of us may have a hard time telling you how thankful we are for your friendship, but without you, we would not be able to ride -- so THANK YOU!!
6. Faith, love and hope; but the greatest of these is love -- we can learn a lot from each other about love!!

BE SENSITIVE TO:

1. Separating a rider from his wheelchair, crutches or braces unless asked.
2. Helping a rider only when he/she requests it. When a rider falls down or has difficulty outside of the class period, allow him/her time to solve the

problem him/herself before asking if he/she needs help.

3. The commitment you have made to the program. Without you, we cannot ride. If you cancel at the last minute we may have to cancel class.

A VOLUNTEER SHOULD:

1. Direct rider's attention to instructor's directions throughout lesson.
2. Reinforce instructions with riders who have hearing problems.
3. Lead horse an arm's length away from your shoulder.
4. Stay even with your horse's head when leading.
5. Do not do anything with rider without instructor's permission.
6. Be patient with the rider.
7. Notify instructor of any discomfort if the rider complains of any discomfort.
8. Become familiar with the riding equipment and its use.
9. Know where to stand while leading during exercises, mounting and dismounting.
10. Know how to assist as a Sidewalker.
11. Know how to assist when rider is mounting from the ramp, block or ground.
12. Sign in each time you come.
13. Be dependable. -- Instructors and riders are counting on you.
14. Dress appropriately.

A VOLUNTEER SHOULD NOT:

1. Leave rider for any reason.
2. Switch sides unless asked to do so by instructor or before you tell the instructor.
3. Allow riders to mount or dismount without instructor.
4. Have conversations with other volunteers during class instructions.
5. Visit with rider during class instruction.
6. Pull on horse's head while doing exercises, mounting and dismounting.

7. Reprimand horse while the rider is mounted.
8. Wear short-shorts, short tops or sandals.

DON'T FORGET TO BE YOURSELF -- SMILE!!!!

PREPARING FOR CLASS

1. REMEMBER -- It is important to arrive 1/2 hour before class time for grooming/tacking and volunteer assignments!
 - a. Record your hours on the sign-in sheet and check with the instructor for assignments.
2. SAFETY RULES:
 - a. Do NOT duck under the neck of a tied horse. Safety first, go around.
 - b. When going around a horse do a semi-circle around the horse's rump that puts you out of "kicking range."
 - c. Do NOT kneel around a horse, it's hard to get out of the way quickly.
 - d. When bringing a wheelchair toward the horse, approach from the front SLOWLY!
3. GROOM THE HORSE IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:
 - a. Rubber curry comb -- use in a circular motion on neck and body to loosen dirt and stimulate skin. Do not use on face and legs.
 - b. Stiff body brush -- use long, sweeping strokes on neck, body, and legs to remove loosened debris.
 - c. Soft brush -- use short strokes to polish coat. Use on body, legs, and face.
 - d. Mane and tail brush (or comb) -- stand to the side when brushing the tail to avoid being kicked. Start at the bottom and work up. Brush tail carefully to avoid pulling out long hairs.
 - e. Hoof pick -- clean dirt from hooves, especially in the grooves.
4. TACK THE HORSE IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:
 - a. Saddle pad -- place over the withers and slide back into place.
 - b. Saddle -- position over pad and adjust to fit properly.
 - c. Girth for the English saddle -- attach non-elastic end to the right

side of saddle, then go around and tighten only to the point of keeping the saddle in place. Girths should be re-tightened just before class time. NOTE: To aid the instructor at mounting, please adjust the girth more on the right to allow for final adjustment on the left.

- d. Girth for Western saddle -- check girth so center of girth is in center of horse's belly. Tighten girth so saddle will stay on. Girths should be re-tightened just before class. Instructor will check girth before student mounts.
 - e. Call for staff person to bridle horse. BRIDLING AND UNBRIDLING ARE TO BE DONE BY AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY. This rule must be observed because bridling done by many different people can make the horse head shy.
5. REPORT TO INSTRUCTOR FOR CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.
6. AT CLASS TIME:
- a. Leaders -- check to make sure your horse is properly tacked and re-tighten the girth if necessary. Proceed to the mounting area as directed by the instructor.
 - b. Sidewalkers -- check to see that your rider is prepared to ride. All riders must wear a safety helmet. Helmets will be fitted to each rider the first day of class and sizes recorded on the class schedule. Safety belts are also worn by some riders. If your rider is required by the instructor to wear a safety belt, make sure it fits properly on the outside of jackets. Sidewalkers are to stay with their riders while the horses are led to the mounting area.

LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES:

A LEADER

1. Takes charge of the horse.
2. Is responsible for the rider's safety.
3. Assists the rider's control of the horse as necessary.

HOW TO LEAD

1. Hold lead rope 4" to 6" from the clasp to allow for the natural motion of the horse's head.
2. Hold extra rope in left hand. Never wrap it around your hand.
3. Make sure the lead rope is between the reins, not over them.
4. Stay even with the horse's head, not behind or in front.

5. Wait until rider initiates actions. DO NOT give student any more support than needed.
6. Look up and forward. Focus attention on the lesson. Glance occasionally at the rider to make sure he/she is safe.
7. Keep a minimum of 3-4 horse lengths distance between your horse and the horse in front of you.
8. Do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground -- this may upset the rider's balance.
9. Adjust your steps to the horse -- be careful not to get too far ahead, behind or far away.
10. Short tugs work better than a steady pull on a slow horse.
11. Make turns wide. Allow room for sidewalkers when next to a fence or obstacle.
12. If your rider has a sidewalker, allow them to give any necessary verbal cues to avoid confusing the rider. Only one person should give instructions.
13. If the horse stops and is hard to move, push to the left or right with lead rope, instead of pulling straight ahead.

SIDEWALKER RESPONSIBILITIES:

A SIDEWALKER

1. Assists the rider in maintaining balance. One or two sidewalkers may be assigned according to the rider's needs. Some riders do not require sidewalkers.
2. Reinforce instructor's directions. Some riders need a sidewalker to help them understand what to do.

HOW TO SIDEWALK

1. Different methods are used with individual riders, depending on their needs. For example:
 - a. Place your arm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle.
 - b. Hold the rider's safety belt to assist with balance. This is done while supporting the legs.
 - c. Walk beside rider's leg to assist when needed. (i.e., at the trot or to reinforce directions.)
2. If a rider has a leader and one sidewalker, walk on the opposite side of the

- horse.
3. If a rider has a leader and two sidewalkers, designate only one sidewalker to verbally reinforce instructions. Too much input can confuse a rider.
 4. Focus student's attention on the instructor.
 5. Do not give student any more support than needed.
 6. Reinforce instructor's directions after giving rider time to process. For example, if the instructor says "turn right" and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say "right."
 7. Use little strokes and tickles on shoulders/back to encourage good posture, if verbal cues are not working.
 8. Just touch finger and thumb around the safety belt rather than holding tight so you do not accidentally pull the rider off balance as your arm tires.
 9. Do not rest your elbow on the horse's back. It hurts the horse.
 10. If you tire, raise a hand, come to the center of the ring to prevent a traffic jam, stop and change sides one at a time.
 11. The sidewalker who drops behind the rider's thigh on corners is in an unsafe position.

DURING CLASS, TALKING BETWEEN RIDERS AND VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE MINIMAL. IF A RIDER INITIATES CONVERSATION, DIRECT RIDER'S ATTENTION BACK TO INSTRUCTOR. CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR BEFORE AND AFTER CLASS.

MOUNTING PROCEDURES:

REMEMBER: Leaders remain in front of their horses during mounting, stirrup adjustments, or any time the horse stops for more than a minute. Stay alert during mounting. Listen to instructor talking to rider.

- A. AT THE MOUNTING RAMP -- used for wheelchair mounts:
 1. LEADER is responsible for -- positioning horse in the ramp -- keeping the horse quiet and still.
 - a. Approach the ramp from the outside end (end next to the pasture) walking slowly backward between the ramps.
 - b. Position horse close to the side from which mounting will take place.
 - c. Place the front of the horse's head.

- d. Do not put pressure on the lead rope; this may cause the horse to back up. If the horse should back up, do not pull on the lead rope -- simply release pressure on the lead rope and go with him -- he will stop.
- e. Allow the horse to relax -- hold the lead rope quietly, trying not to restrict his head.
- f. Once the rider is mounted and the cue is given by the instructor for the rider to "walk on" guide the horse out of the ramp slowly and quietly, while still facing the horse. Once the horse is clear of the ramp, stop and wait for the instructor to adjust the stirrups.
- g. Take the position on the left side of the horse once the stirrups have been adjusted and the rider has told the horse to "walk on."

2. SIDEWALKERS

- a. Position yourself on the ramp opposite the rider while mounting is taking place.
- b. Follow instructor's directions concerning assistance -- helping the rider's leg over the neck of the horse, etc.
- c. Keep rider's feet forward and up -- this prevents injuries if the horse steps to the side. As the horse walks out of the ramp gradually lower the legs.
- d. Take position at the rider's side and hold the safety belt assisting rider with balance while the stirrups are adjusted.

B. AT THE MOUNTING BLOCK:

- 1. LEADER is responsible for -- positioning horse alongside the block and keeping the horse quiet and still.
 - a. Approach the mounting block in the direction requested by the instructor, turning to face the horse just upon reaching the edge of the block.
 - b. Position the horse close to the side from which mounting will take place.
 - c. Face the front of the horse's head.
 - d. Do not put pressure on the lead rope; this may cause the horse to back up. If the horse should back up, do not pull on the lead rope -- simply release pressure on the lead and go with him -- he will stop.

- e. Allow the horse to relax -- hold lead rope quietly, trying not to restrict his head.
- f. Lead the horse slowly and quietly from the block once the rider has said "walk on."

2. SIDEWALKERS

- a. Support the rider once he/she has cleared the block as directed by the instructor.

C. MOUNTING FROM THE GROUND:

1. LEADER

- a. Face the front of the horse.
- b. Stay alert.
- c. Keep the horse quiet and still during mounting.

2. SIDEWALKER

- a. Instructor will provide directions concerning help you should give -- helping the rider's leg over the rump, putting weight in the stirrup to keep the saddle from slipping, etc.

DURING CLASS:

A. AT THE HALT (STOP):

1. LEADER

- a. Step in front and face the horse to keep him from moving. This is one of the most important jobs of the leader, especially during mounting and exercises. Try not to hold the horse's head too tight -- this is a good time for the horse to relax.

2. SIDEWALKER

- a. Remain at the rider's side.

B. AT THE WALK:

1. LEADER

- a. Adjust your step to the horse's walk.
- b. Stay attentive to the instructor and horse.
- c. Allow enough room for sidewalkers on both sides of the horse.
- d. Keep a safe distance, 3-4 horse lengths from the horse in front of

you and from horses on either side of you. If you are getting too close and the rider is unable to slow down, you may stop or slow the horse, or make a large circle -- make sure the rider and sidewalkers know beforehand. A quick turn or circle may unseat the rider.

2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Adjust your step to the horse's walk.
 - b. Stay next to your rider's side! A sidewalker should never leave their rider unless requested to do so by the instructor.
 - c. The sidewalker who drops behind the rider's thigh on corners is in an unsafe position.
- C. AT THE TROT:
1. LEADER
 - a. Make sure the rider is prepared to trot, according to the instructor's directions.
 - b. At the rider's command, begin a slow steady trot, looking up and forward. After trotting, allow the rider to bring the horse to a walk unless they have two hands on the handhold. In that case, bring the horse to a walk smoothly while remaining in a straight line.
 2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Make sure the rider is positioned squarely in the saddle.
 - b. Make sure the rider is prepared to trot, according to the instructor's instructions.
 - c. Support the rider, if directed, by placing your arm across the rider's thigh and grasping the front of the saddle. In some instances, the instructor may ask you to hold the safety belt.
 - d. Stay next to the rider's leg as the horse is trotting. Try not to drop behind.
 - e. Communicate to the leader if problems arise (i.e., rider becomes unbalanced). Stop the horse and make adjustments.
- D. DURING EXERCISES:
1. LEADER
 - a. Face the front of the horse.
 - b. Stay alert to the horse, rider, and instructor.

- c. Allow the horse to relax.
 - 2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Responsible for the safety and balance of rider.
 - b. Reinforce directions only if needed.
- E. DURING GAMES
 - 1. LEADER
 - a. Be attentive to the horse and rider's safety.
 - b. Control the horse only when needed to provide safety to the rider.
 - c. Allow rider to use acquired skills to execute games and to provide problem-solving opportunities.
 - 2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Responsible for the safety and balance of the rider.
 - b. Reinforce and praise all riders with applause and/or positive reinforcement.
- F. BACKRIDERS

Backriding is a term used when an instructor accompanies the rider on the horse. Backriders generally have multiple disabilities and range in age from 2 to 11 years.

- 1. Leader
 - a. Responsible for control of the horse.
 - b. Follow instructor's directions.
- 2. Sidewalker
 - a. Responsible for the safety and balance of the rider. Generally instructed to support the instructor's leg instead of the child's.

G. EMERGENCY MEDICAL PROCEDURES:

Plan 1: Major Injury

- 1. The instructor appoints someone to:
 - a. Telephone the emergency number (911) and read the directions to the arena that are by the telephone.
 - b. Remain in the arena area to direct emergency vehicles and reassure

- people in the area.
 - c. Get the rider's Emergency Medical Release form from the files and give it to the instructor.
2. The instructor appoints a volunteer to:
 - a. Go to the road and wait for the emergency vehicle.
 - b. Stop the driver and have the lights and siren turned off so the horses will not be frightened.
 - c. Tell driver where the accident is and how to get there.
 3. Instructor will decide who will remain with the grounded rider and who will take the class to the safest confined area from the accident.
 4. Horse leaders should take all horses a safe distance from the injured party. The instructor will tell other volunteers if the riders should be dismounted.

Plan 2: Minor Injury

1. The needs of the individual should be met, i.e., Band-Aids, ice, taken in out of the heat, etc.
2. If the injured person is a rider, take the horse to its stall or to the "tacking" area.
3. If the injured person should not walk, have a car driven into the arena.
4. The rest of the class should continue in an orderly manner, when directed to do so by the instructor.

Plan 3: Horse is injured or becomes sick

1. If time allows, notify instructor, if not, sidewalker should dismount client and remove client from arena.
2. Observing your horse closely can prevent the necessity of a dismount. When the horse turns its head and looks at its stomach repeatedly, this can be an indication the horse has a "stomach ache" and may lay down.

AFTER CLASS:

- A. Leader
 1. Check with the instructor to see if the horse will be used again; if not, please remove saddle, pads, and groom the saddle area.

THE INSTRUCTOR WILL REMOVE THE BRIDLE.

2. Bridles are to be hung in the tack room according to the horse's name tag.

Please make sure bridles are hung properly and reins are not knotted.

3. Saddles are stored on racks -- Match up the numbers under pommels with numbers on the end of the saddle racks.

B. Sidewalker

1. After the instructor dismounts the rider, take your rider back to the helmet area to put away helmet/safety belt.

HELMETS MUST REMAIN ON THE RIDER'S HEAD UNTIL THE RIDER IS COMPLETELY OUT OF THE ARENA.

2. Return rider to parents or responsible party.
3. Assist in untacking the horse.

SAFETY STANDARDS:

- ** Observe and obey all safety signs posted.
- ** Mounted persons must wear helmets at all times.
- ** Riders can only mount and dismount when the instructor is present.
- ** Horses must be tacked properly with all safety equipment.
- ** All children should be supervised by an adult when on the premises.
- ** Teachers and volunteers should not bring children to class.
- ** Unauthorized personnel are not allowed in the fields.
- ** Only experienced horse handlers should enter corrals when the horses are not in their stalls.

DESCRIPTION OF DISABILITIES:

The following is a brief, non-medical description of some of the disabilities and conditions of riders. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability but rather as a general overview, along with an explanation of how therapeutic riding is a beneficial treatment aid.

CEREBRAL PALSY: "CP" -- a non-progressive disorder thought to be due in part to loss of oxygen to the brain. Speech, hearing, vision, learning and/or memory deficits may be present; however normal intelligence is generally not affected unless further brain damage has occurred. There are three main types of cerebral palsy:

1. **SPASTIC:** Occurs in approximately 70% of all cases. It may effect motor function in one or more of the limbs. The muscles stay flexed and tense and the facial muscle involvement may affect speech. Benefits: Riding may improve balance, posture, and the ability to relax. It also strengthens weakened muscles.

2. **ATHETOID:** Occurs in approximately 20% of all cases. It manifests itself in slow, jerky, involuntary movements of the arms and/or legs. It appears more obvious during period of emotional tension. Speech functions are usually involved. Benefits: Riding may improve balance, relaxation of muscles and posture.
3. **ATAXIC:** Occurs in approximately 10% of all cases. Weakness, poor coordination and difficulty with quick and fine motor movements result in loose, rag-doll" appearance. Benefits: Riding may help strengthen and tighten loose muscles, while improving balance, posture and fine motor skills.

DOWN'S SYNDROME: Also called Trisomy 21, Trisomy G. It is one of the easily and widely identified hereditary disabilities. Down's Syndrome individuals have a mean IQ of about 50 and are physically, mentally and developmentally delayed. Benefits: Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance, posture and coordination.

EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES (ED): A congenital and acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies. In general, emotionally disturbed individuals have trouble copying with everyday life situations and interpersonal relationships. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia and schizophrenia may be exhibited. Benefits: Riding can provide structure to a disorganized thought pattern, increase feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness, and provide appropriate social therapy.

HEARING IMPAIRMENT: Hearing impairment may vary from mild to severe and may be congenital or acquired. True deafness is defined as hearing loss in both ears severe enough to prevent communication through the ear even with amplification. Communication with the deaf may involve lip reading, finger spelling (the manual alphabet) , or sign language. Benefits: Riding helps increase self-confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD): Learning disabled is a catch-all phrase for individuals who have problems processing, sequencing and problem solving but who appear to have otherwise normal intelligence skills. New learning generally takes time to be integrated and may need to be reviewed frequently to ensure retention. Benefits: Riding may increase attention span, group activity skills, cooperation, receptive and expressive language skills, posture and coordination.

MENTAL RETARDATION (MR): A genetic defect where the individual develops at a below normal rate in terms of intelligence. It may also involve physical and emotional development. Benefits: Riding helps increase group activity skills, coordination, balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, and eye-hand coordination.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS (MS): A slowly progressive central nervous system disease usually occurring in adults between 20-40 years of age more frequently in women than men. Symptoms and manifestations include weakness in one or more limbs, visual impairment, minor gait disturbance, course of progression with periods of remission.

there is no known cure for MS. Benefits: Riding maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides highly recommended opportunities for emotional therapy.

MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY (MD): A hereditary disorder usually appearing in infancy or early childhood. It is characterized by progressive skeletal and muscle deterioration. There is no known cure for the disease which often shortens life. Benefits: Riding may slow muscle tone degeneration and maintain muscle function. Riding provides appropriate opportunities for social interaction and alleviating emotional depressions.

SPINA BIFIDA: A congenital defect where there is incomplete closure of the spinal column at birth. There are usually varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs; however, life expectancies are not necessarily shortened. Benefits: Riding improves balance, posture, and muscle strength in the affected limbs.

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI): Head injuries cause more disabilities in people under the age of 50 than any other neurological cause. Injuries may be closed head (CHI) where intracranial bleeding causes pressure or open penetration where profuse bleeding and open wounds ensure permanent damage. Deficits may include gross and fine motor skills, cognitive disabilities, speech, balance, and psychological alterations. Benefits: Riding improves balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and cognitive deficits such as sequencing and processing.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: Visual deficits may range from severely limited to total and may be caused by a congenital defect, traumatic illness or injury. If the onset of impairment is from birth to five years, the person affected has no visual memory. Impairments occurring after five years are accompanied by memories of people places and things. Benefits: Riding helps orient the body in space and improves balance, posture, coordination and self-awareness.