

## **Welcome new volunteers! We are delighted to have you join us.**

**Volunteers drive the Harmony Farms program**, are indispensable at all levels of the organization *and need not be equine oriented*. Some do bring skills in horsemanship, others bring leadership skills, and others simply bring many new ideas and insight to the program and frequently enlist their friends! Ask any Harmony Farms volunteer and they will state that they gain as much, or more, than they give.

As a volunteer, you will learn and achieve, as well! The information in this manual is designed to assist you in understanding some of Harmony Farms policies and procedures. This handbook is not all-inclusive and does not include every policy or protocol relating to volunteers at Harmony Farms. Please feel free to ask staff members or seasoned volunteers if you have further questions or concerns.

Riding sessions take place on the following days and times. Please note the times are volunteer arrival times. Sessions start one-half hour later. You may work the full session or any part of it.

Monday 8:30am – 1:00pm

Wednesday 8:30am – 1:00pm

Thursday 3:00pm – 6:30pm

Saturday 8:30am – 12:30pm

Volunteers are also needed on our “off session” days; Tuesday, Friday & Sunday, to clean stalls. This aspect of the program will be explained at the Volunteer Orientation. Additional sessions or special events may be added during the year. They will be posted on the calendar and the bulletin board. Please feel free to sign up for any session you can work.

If you volunteer regularly and will not be able to work your usual session we ask that you indicate this on the calendar and /or leave a message on the barn answering machine **321-631-9433**.

Remember even if riding is canceled due to weather etc. the horses still need grooming and the stalls need cleaning so we can always use your help

### **Personal items are your responsibility**

Please leave cell phones, purses and any other personal belongings in your locked vehicle. If you need a place for your keys ask a staff person the best location. If you need to have your cell phone with you please have it on vibrate, however we would prefer you have it off while participating in sessions.

**Remember no cell phones are permitted while volunteering in the riding arena and/or the grooming stations, unless they are turned off or on silent!**

## **ATTIRE**

You will be working in a professional setting. It is expected that volunteers will use good judgment in selecting appropriate clothing. When choosing your clothing-consider "Safety First"-inquisitive hands can pull off your jewelry, excessively baggy clothes can get caught on things, etc.

### **What to Wear:**

- Comfortable clothes, appropriate to the season, that you don't mind getting dirty
- Sneakers or boots
- Sunscreen, bug repellent, sunglasses, hat or visor
- Harmony Farms name tag
- Long hair should be tied back
- Long pants that are not too tight or baggy
- Shorts – hem no shorter than your finger tips with arms hanging straight down at your sides

### **What NOT to Wear:**

- Jewelry (necklace, bracelet, hoop/dangling earrings)-Stud earrings are okay
- Excessively tight or baggy clothing
- Perfumes that can attract stinging insects
- Bare midriff or other revealing clothing
- Clothing with inappropriate slogans, decals, etc.
- Short Shorts – see guide above to measure length
- Opened toe shoes, sandals, clogs, or flip flops

You may bring your own drinks or snacks. We also have some beverages in the refrigerator and usually snacks for sharing on the table. Please make sure your name is on whatever is yours. Volunteers also help us with items like paper towels, toilet paper, bottled water etc. And of course treats for the horses like apples and carrots. Check the blackboard for what we may need.

You may use the Barn phone for a personal call. Please ask permission and remember to keep your conversation short. We have one line for incoming calls and emergencies.

## **PROCEDURES:**

**ATTENDANCE LOG BOOK:** It is *very important* that you log in and out every time you come to volunteer. If you need verification of your volunteer hours for taxes, school, court, scholarships, Service Learning, etc., this is where we will take the information. If you do not sign in, you do not get credit.

**Name tags** are required during class time. **Volunteers need to have a name tag on at all times.** If you lose or misplace your name tag please let a staff person know so they can make a replacement for you.

## It's your first day volunteering

Well, you have already signed in, put your name tag on, checked the bulletin board and blackboard for any information you may need. Next you will put your name on the assignment blackboard where you will find the Barn supervisor making the daily assignments. Simply introduce yourself and let them know you are new. You will be assigned to an experienced volunteer who will show you the ropes. You will probably be shown how we muck stalls, clean buckets or groom and tack horses. Your abilities will determine how long you will need to work with a partner. No worries, we want you to take all the time you need to be comfortable, safe and confident.

### Things to remember

We focus on safety, courtesy, respect and kindness. Here are a few rules that help us maintain our standards:

- Do not feed the horses. Treats may be given with permission. Please read information on stall board. Some horses may have treats in their buckets only.
- Do not Halter a horse over the stall door. Please go into the stall to put on halter.
- Do not share grooming tools with other horses.
- Do not leave a Horse in the cross-ties unattended.
- Do not turn horses out without permission from staff.
- **Never turn horses out with a halter on.(Fly mask only)**
- Leave gates the way you find them.
- Do not have your cell phone ringer on around the horses if you must have your phone please put it on vibrate. Ringing phones are not only a distraction to you while your attention is needed, but they could potentially spook a horse.
- Never panic, scream or run. Stay calm and quiet and the horse will calm down with you.
- **Never leave any foreign objects in the horses stall.** (ex. Wheel barrel, mucking fork, grooming basket etc.)
- **Special grooming procedures (clipping, cutting mane or tail, etc. ) are not to be done.**
- Please read stall board for any information that you may need for that horse. (Use of sunscreen, medicine for scrapes etc.) If you have any questions please ask staff or experienced volunteer.
- Please take care of tack. Wash bits after use, clean saddles if needed etc.
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- All tacking and UN-tacking should be done in the stall or cross-ties. NO EXCEPTIONS (This is for safety and to keep the ally clear)
- Exercising, lunging, schooling or training of any kind is to be done by approved individuals only.

Throughout the barn policies are posted please take the time to read them. Treat every person and horse with respect. Help each other and have fun. We are all part of the Harmony Farms team.

### Side walkers

The side walker's responsibility is the rider (not the horse). Be prepared to give the rider your undivided attention. Get to know him/her! If you ever feel your rider is "not himself or herself" or are concerned about him or her, notify the Instructor privately. At every lesson, reinforce what has been learned. Ask the student to share what they remember.

### Prior to Class

- Be out of the barn waiting for your riders' arrival. Usually 10 minutes before class starts.
- When the rider arrives, greet your rider, then the parents/guardians. Review your rider's attire, check for appropriate and safe clothing, no dangling jewelry or objects etc.
- Fit your rider with the size helmet indicated on the Lesson Board. See helmet guidelines in this manual for more information.

### During Class

- **Only the Instructor is allowed to mount the rider, unless the instructor has designated an assistant.** Listen for directions from the Instructor for your rider to mount in the arena at the ramp or at the mounting block. ( This information is also found on the assignment blackboard.) Generally, the rider does not put their feet into the stirrups until he is fully away from the mounting ramp.
- **Never leave your riders side.** If an object falls onto the ground, such as a glove, etc. leave it and tell the Instructor who will then pick it up.
- The side walker's position is typically between the rider's knee and hip facing forward.
- If your rider has only one side walker, it is best for the side walker to be positioned on the rider's weaker side. If both sides are the same, you should walk on the opposite side of the horse leader. Avoid putting a hand on the rider's back (unless told to do so). Encourage the rider to use their trunk muscles.
- Reinforce the Instructor's directions. When two side walkers are with one rider, they can share the task of communication with the rider, but be careful not to confuse the rider with too much verbal stimulation. Have the rider carry out tasks, allowing time to react to the instructions. Encourage the rider to do the exercises, games and reinforce the use of new skills.
- The side walker should ask the rider and the leader to bring the horse into the center of the arena anytime a stop is needed. Some examples are: the rider is off balance and can not regain balance, the saddle pad has slipped or the girth is loose, the stirrups need readjusting, the rider's helmet needs adjusting, the rider is fatigued, in pain or needs to stop for any other reason. **When changing sides, one volunteer changes at a time.** If there is only one side walker, ask the Instructor for assistance.
- At the end of the class, wait for the Instructor to dismount your rider. Only Instructors can do the dismount, or a designated assistant.

### After Class

Accompany your rider to the parents/guardians. You must stay with them at all times until they are returned to their parents/guardians.

Wipe out the helmet and return it to the helmet rack.

## Horse leaders

The horse leader's responsibility is **the horse** (not the rider), except in the case of an independent or semi-independent rider. Then the leader will be in charge of the whole team.

### Prior to Class:     **ALWAYS ASK IF YOU NEED HELP!**

- Familiarize yourself with the horse. Check the stall board for any information you need to know prior to working with him.
- Once horses have been groomed, they should be wearing their halter, indicating they are ready to be tacked.

**ONLY DESIGNATED, EXPERIENCED VOLUNTEERS SHOULD SADDLE or BRIDLE HORSES.** You could hurt the horse if they this is done improperly.

- Tack, check assignment board make sure your horse has the proper tack and that it is put on correctly. All saddles should be tagged with the horses name or a number.
- Place the saddle on the horse behind shoulders. The seat of the saddle needs to be level. Always pull the saddle pad up into the gullet of the saddle.
- Put all Velcro and keepers on saddle pads through the billets and girths (when possible).
- If girth has one elastic side, it goes on the horse's left side.
- Girth should be a couple of holes higher on the right side.
- Girth should only be as tight as needed to keep the saddle from sliding. Girth will be tightened by **INSTRUCTOR**, or designee, (for class) prior to rider mounting.
- Once bridle or reins are on: **DO NOT LEAVE THE HORSE UNATTENDED.**
- At least 10 minutes prior to class warm up your horse with stretching and walking around.

### When leading a horse:

1. Hold the lead rope about 6 to 8 inches from the snap with your right hand.
2. Fold the excess rope in a figure eight, with your left hand. Never wrap the rope around your hands. Be sure the lead rope dangles between the reins.
3. Maintain your own space.
4. Look up to where you're going, do not look at the horse.
5. Keep the horse at your side with its eye about even with your shoulder.
6. Do not allow the horse to get ahead of you.
7. Do not allow the horse to fall too far behind you.
8. Do not allow the horse to walk right behind you.

### During class:

- **The Instructor, or designated assistant, always mounts and dismounts the rider.** Pay attention to the Instructor. The Instructor will address the rider, but as the Leader you need to know what the instructions are as well.
- Whenever your horse is stopped, stand facing the horse. Your body language will tell the horse to stay put. This during mounting, dismounting, emergencies and or anytime the horse is stopped for extended periods.
- Maintain a steady, even pace. Avoid sharp turns or abrupt changes of gait. Follow the rail unless directed otherwise. Maintain two horse lengths between horses.
- **Allow the horse's head freedom of movement!** As they walk, all horses bob their heads up and down. This rhythmical movement starts at the head and moves all the way down to the horse's spine. **This movement provides the most therapeutic benefit to the rider.**
- Reinforce the rider's attempts to control the horse. Keep an eye and ear on your rider's commands. Don't give a free ride!
- Don't drag the horse along. Encourage the horse to move out with the energy in your upper and lower body.
- Remember: with side walkers your horse is much wider. Be sure to leave enough room around barrels etc. for the side walker to pass without running into items in the arena.
- When the rider is controlling the horse, you may allow a little slack in the lead, do not influence the horse. (The horse may get confused if he feels tugs on both reins and the lead). This may, at times be difficult if the horse tends to follow you. Allow the horse's head to point forward, not pulled towards you, especially important at the trot.
- Allow the rider time to process the information given by the Instructor and make an effort to comply---be patient and listen to the Instructor's directions as to what to do when.
- Be aware of the rider's uncontrollable body movements, vocalizations and behaviors.
- Manage the horse to avoid problems. Never discipline a horse with a rider mounted.
- Bring the horse to the center of the arena anytime the rider or side walkers need to make any adjustments. Avoid stopping on the rail.
- At the end of the class, wait for the Instructor or the designated assistant to dismount the rider. After all of the students have left the area, lead the horse to the tacking area. Some riders are allowed to lead their horses into the barn, check with the instructor first.

### If an emergency occurs with your rider or horse, such as:

The rider having a seizure, the rider is falling off, the horse is frightened or any other emergency requiring an emergency dismount, - **Stop your horse** - turn towards the rail if necessary, as an aid for a quick stop, and stand in front of the horse to keep him stopped.

Soothe him while the side walkers assist the rider. **Do not leave the horse or let go of the lead rope, UNLESS THE HORSE IS ATTEMPTING TO DRAG YOU OR YOU DO NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH TO HOLD ON, THEN DROP THE LEAD! You can be seriously hurt trying to stop a horse that is out of control.**

When the rider is off of the horse, pull the horse's head towards the student, which will cause the horse's hindquarters to move away from the student. When the horse is away from the rider, halt the horse and wait for instructions, (If you do not have side walkers the Instructor will assist the rider)

## After class

- Check to see if the horse will be used for another class. The horse may need a tack change.
- Un-tack the horse. Bridles and saddles should be cleaned. Secure cinch and tie strap on the saddle, before returning to it's proper location. If cleaning a saddle or bridle, **DO NOT TAKE THEM APART!** If you do not know how to do it, always ask!
- Make sure horse is properly cooled down. The horse may need to be rinsed off and or brushed out. Clean hooves, apply fly spray. Check if horse is ready to be turned out & make sure fly mask is on (properly) and **halter is off.** Only approved people may turn out horses.
- Complete a "Horse behavior log" regarding any unusual behavior or performance of your horse in class. Master horse binder is located in the tack room. Leave the completed form in the designated section of the binder. Blank logs are located in the Master horse binder.
- For urgent concerns contact the Instructor immediately

## Confidentiality

Names, specific conditions or other personal details specific to the riders are to be held in confidence. By all means, share the stories, the successes, and the warmth-just leave out the private information.

## SPECIAL RULES FOR PHOTOS AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:

You cannot take a rider's picture without permission. Harmony Farms has permission to photograph all riders and volunteers, you do not. Always ask.

If you plan on posting the photo on a social networking site; like Facebook, Twitter or any web site, you must have specific permission to do this from anyone whose picture you have taken.

**NEVER** identify a rider by name unless they (if an adult) or the parent gives permission.

## Inappropriate Behavior:

If you should observe any inappropriate behavior on the part of another volunteer toward a horse or rider, please report it to management. Our volunteers must be our eyes and ears to everything that is going on at the center.

Never feel you are gossiping or it is wrong. We must know what is happening for the protection of everyone; the riders, horses and you the volunteers.

## **Emergency Procedures**

At Harmony Farms an emergency is defined as any unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances resulting in a real or potential safety hazard demanding immediate attention.

Every volunteer should be familiar with the location of the following:

- Telephones located in the office and the barn. Using these phones, 911 will immediately know our location to respond quickly.
- **DO NOT USE A CELL PHONE.** Brevard County does not have 911 cellular capabilities. They cannot pinpoint your location from a cell phone.
- Emergency phone numbers are posted next to the phone in the barn.
- Human first aid kit is in the bathroom on the counter next to the sink.
- Animal first aid supplies are in the tack room closet.

## **Emergency during class:**

If an incident occurs during class, the following procedures will be followed and adhered to:

- All riding (motion) STOPS in place. Stay with your horse & rider unless instructed otherwise. If your position threatens the situation or another horse, move slowly to safety & advise instructor reason for your actions.
- The Instructor proceeds to the emergency situation and assesses the incident. If necessary, the Instructor designates a volunteer to call 911. If injury should involve a horse, the Instructor designates a volunteer to call the Veterinarian.
- Do not move an injured rider or horse without permission.
- If the incident is serious, the Instructor designates trained volunteers to dismount the remaining students with the assistance of parents, if needed, and stays at the incident site until emergency personnel arrive.
- Remember, in an emergency during class, the Horse Handler is responsible for the horse and the side walkers are responsible for the student.

## **Emergency Dismount**

- If you are side walking next to a horse that becomes involved in an emergency, alert your Instructor and horse leader of the situation.
- If an emergency dismount becomes necessary, the side walker the rider is falling away from needs to remove the stirrup and reins from the rider, while the side walker towards whom the rider is falling needs to remove the stirrup then hug the rider around the trunk and under the arms, pulling the rider off and away from the horse.
- If the side walker feels he cannot bear the full weight of the descending rider, a controlled fall can be initiated, taking care to protect the rider and side walker's heads and roll with the fall as much as possible.
- It is important that the side walker breaks the rider's fall and does not fall on the rider.

## **Benefits of Equine Assisted Activities**

Intrinsically riding a horse is a beneficial activity for any person challenged with a physical, cognitive and/or emotional disability. The uniqueness of equine assisted activities lies in the gait of the therapy horse.

The horse having gaits with a three dimensional swinging motion is a living therapy tool for the rider, enabling the rider to experience up/down, forward/backward, and side-to-side motion- all the while stimulating muscle, brain and social activity.

Without doubt, equestrian activities, in and out of a therapeutic setting, increase a rider's posture, balance, strength, focus and coordination while also positively enhancing flexibility, self-awareness, confidence and a sense of independence. Social and emotional growth is too gained from the natural bond created between horse and rider.

### **The physical benefits of therapeutic riding include**

As the horse moves, the rider is constantly thrown off-balance. In an attempt to re-balance the rider's muscles are required to contract and relax.

- Improved posture control and balance
- Increased muscle tone and strength
- Greater range of motion
- Decreased spasticity
- Better hand-eye coordination
- Reduction of abnormal movement patterns
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### **The cognitive benefits aide participants to excel in:**

The repetition of patterned movements required in controlling a horse quickens the reflexes and aids in motor planning.

- Development of learned skills
- Tactile awareness and sensory integration
- Improved application of direction
- Greater skill at sequencing, patterning and motor planning.

### **The overall experience contributes to emotional gains by the rider:**

Riding provides excitement and the sense of achievement of working independently as well as with a team.

- Independence
- Increased self-control and awareness
- Better emotional control
- Greater self-awareness and self-confidence
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### **The social benefits reaped by riders:**

Being involved as a rider creates a shared interest and experience on which to build a social foundation.

- Friendship building
- Increased experiences
- Improving social skills and cooperation

## **Suggestions on How to Relate to Individuals with Disabilities**

A person with a disability is an individual first and is entitled to the same dignity, respect and considerations expected by anyone.

A disability need not be ignored or denied between friends. But, until your relationship is that, show a friendly interest in him/her as a person.

Be yourself when you meet him/her.

Talk about the same things as you would with anyone.

Help him/her only when he/she requests it. If a disabled person falls down, he/she may wish to get up on their own.

Be patient. Let the disabled person set his/her own pace in walking or talking.

Don't be afraid to laugh with him/her.

Don't stop and stare when you see a disabled person you do not know. He/she deserves the same courtesy any person should receive.

Don't be over-protective, over-solicitous and don't shower the disabled person with kindness.

Don't ask embarrassing questions. If the disabled person wants to tell you about his/her disability, he/she will bring up the subject themselves.

Don't offer pity or charity. People with disabilities want to be treated as an equal. He/she wants the chance to prove him/herself.

Don't separate the disabled person from his/her wheelchair, walker, crutches, etc. Unless asked. They may want them within reach.

Don't make up your mind ahead of time about a disabled person. You may be surprised at how wrong you are in judging his/her interests and abilities.

Enjoy your friendship with the disabled person. His/her philosophy and good humor will give you an inspiration.

When speaking to someone in a wheelchair, remember to get down to his/her eye level. Inappropriate behavior is the same for persons with or without a disability.

## **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.

### **Autism/PDD(Pervasive Developmental Disorder)**

A disorder of unknown origin in which the individual has difficulties with speech, social interaction and handling various sensory input.

Benefits: Riding may help by offering calm, positive social interaction, stimulation of speech and language skills.

### **Cerebral Palsy (CP)**

A non-progressive disorder thought to be due in part to loss of oxygen to brain at or before birth. 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 percent of all cases. It may impact 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. **ANTHEOID**: Occurs in approximately 20 percent of all cases. It manifests itself in slow, jerky, involuntary movements of the arms and/or legs. It appears more obvious during periods of emotional tension. Speech functions are usually involved.

**Benefits**: Riding may improve balance, relaxation of muscles and posture.

3. **ATAXIC**: Occurs in approximately 10 percent of all cases. Weakness, poor coordination with quick and fine motor movements result is loose, "rag-doll" appearance.

**Benefits**: Riding may help strengthen and tighten loose muscles, while improving balance, posture and fine motor skills.

### **Developmental or Cognitive Delays (DD)**

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

### **Down's Syndrome- Also known as Trisomy 21, Trisomy G**

It is one of the most widely identified hereditary disabilities. Individuals with Down's Syndrome have a mean IQ of approximately 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 coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relationships. Behavior 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 Impaired**

It 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 Disability (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.

### **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 MD, which often reduces life expectancy.

*Benefits:* Riding may slow muscle tone degeneration and maintain muscle function. Riding provides appropriate opportunities for social interaction and alleviating emotional depression.

### **Multiple Sclerosis (MS)**

A slowly progressive central nervous system disease usually occurring in adults between 20-40 years of age and 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 and social output.

### **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; life expectancy is 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 (inter cranial bleeding causes pressure) or open penetration (profuse bleeding and open wounds ensure permanent damage). Deficits may include gross and fine motor skills, cognitive disabilities, speech, balance and psychological alterations. Social skills may be affected and appear inappropriate.

*Benefit:* Riding improves balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and cognitive deficits such as sequencing and processing.

### **Visually Impaired**

Visual deficits may range from severely limited to total and may be caused by congenital defect, traumatic illness or injury. If the onset of impairments occurs after five years of age, they 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.

## **Precautions**

Universal precautions are used to minimize contact with blood and body fluids by taking steps that may prevent non-intact skin exposures of individuals to specific organisms such as Hepatitis B and Human Immune-Deficiency Virus (HIV/AIDS).

*When you follow universal precautions, you assume that all persons are potentially infected with blood-borne pathogens.*

- Wear disposable latex or vinyl gloves when it is likely that hands will be in contact with bodily fluids.
- Protect clothing with an impervious material when it is likely that clothing will be soiled with bodily fluids.
- Wear masks and/or eye protection when it is likely that eye and/or mucus membranes will be splashed with bodily fluids.
- Wash hands often, before and after client care, paying attention to around and under fingernails and between the fingers, even if gloves are worn. If unanticipated contact with these body substances occurs, washing is done as soon as possible.
- Resuscitation masks should be used for CPR.

## **Helmets**

A safety riding helmet is the single most important piece of equipment. It is important to understand that posture and balance of a rider will be directly affected by the fit of the helmet.

An ill-fitting helmet will make proper balancing more difficult and will fail to protect the head during a fall. Overly large helmets are dangerous and uncomfortable. They may slip, obscure vision or fall off. A properly fitted helmet should be snug.

The well-fitted helmet should stay on the head when harnessed without rocking or moving. A good way to check a helmet's fit is to have the rider bend down at the waist and shake his/her head. With the manufacturer's suggested adjustment, the helmet should feel secure to the rider.

**All riders and volunteers are required to wear helmets when mounted on Harmony Farms horses.**

## **HELMETS SHOULD BE FITTED BY THE INSTRUCTOR**

### **How to help a student with his/her helmet:**

- Place the helmet on the head sliding it from front to back. It should sit level on the head at above the eyebrow level. Allow it to rest so there are two fingers between the eyebrows and the edge of the helmet. Loosen the inside adjustment with the two sides straps on the helmet or the back dial.
- Make sure the helmet is centered correctly, check the straps around the ears and fasten the chin strap. Just be sure it's tight enough so the helmet doesn't slip or fall.
- Ask the rider how the helmet feels.
- Practice fitting a helmet on a fellow volunteer.

## Understanding Horse Behavior

The beneficial interaction and relationship with the horse lies at the core of all work at Harmony Farms. Our horses are valued partners and members of the team. Their health, safety and welfare are a primary responsibility of the Harmony Farms leadership. Horses are not tools or “beasts of burden”; they are valuable assets, with individual personalities, talents and aptitudes that they bring to this difficult work.

**Communication** is the key to developing relationships and working with horses. It is critical to providing a safe environment for equine-assisted activities. Learning to understand horse senses, instincts and body language is a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks and positively influencing relationships.

### **Sense of Smell**

The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and allows the animal to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations and people.

### **Implications**

- Smelling allows horses the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment.
- It is recommended that treats not be carried in your pockets since horses may attempt to retrieve them. Do not feed treats without permission.
- Volunteers should not have food in the arena.

### **Hearing**

The horse's sense of hearing is also thought to be very acute. The horse may also combine their sense of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alarming sounds. The situation of a horse “hearing and not seeing” is often the cause of the *Fright & Flight response*.

The position of the horse's ears communicates attentiveness and interest, distress and aggression. Reading your horse's ears is learning his language.

Your horse's ears and actions are the key to his emotions. He can tell you what he is paying attention to; by the way he uses his ears and the way he acts.

- Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest.
- Stiffly-pricked ears indicate interest and alertness.
- Drooping ears indicate relaxation or inattentiveness, exhaustion or illness. An inattentive horse can be easily startled.
- Flattened ears indicate anger, threat or fear.
- Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest.

### **Implications**

- Horses are wary when they hear something but do not see it. If your horse is acting nervous, talk to him in a quiet, calm, reassuring voice.
- Avoid shouting or using a loud voice. This can upset or scare the horse.

### **Sight**

The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head. There is good peripheral (lateral) vision, but poorer frontal vision. Horses focus on objects by raising and lowering their heads. The horse's visual memory is very accurate. Horses are thought to see quite well in the dark due to the large size of their eyes. There is still controversy as to whether or not horses see in color, but most believe they do see shades of red, yellow, pink & green.

### **Implications**

- The horse may notice if something in the arena or out is different. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects. Introduce new props that the horse may be unfamiliar with.
- Since the horse has better peripheral vision, consider two blind spots ---directly in front and directly behind the horse. The best way to approach a horse is at the shoulder. It may startle a horse if you approach from behind or directly in front.
- The horse may be unable to see around the mouth area, which is a safety consideration when feeding.

### **Touch**

Touch is used as a communication between horses and people. Horses are sensitive to soft or rough touch with a person's hands and legs.

### **Implications**

- Handlers should treat the horses gently but firmly.
- Horses have sensitive areas. It is important to be familiar with them. (I.e. flank and belly areas, ears, under tail).
- Watch the rider's leg position. The rider may need appropriate assistance to reduce tightening of the legs, sometimes referred to as the “clothespin effect”. Ask the Instructor what is the best handling technique for this situation.
- Horses will often touch or paw at unfamiliar objects. For example, a horse may paw at a bridge or ground pole before crossing over it.

### **Taste**

Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects.

### **Implications**

A horse may lick or nibble when becoming familiar with objects and people. Be careful— this could lead to possible biting.

### **Sixth Sense**

Horses do have a “sixth sense” when evaluating the disposition of those around them. Horses can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for its sensitive response to the rider. At times, there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and horses. It is important for the Instructor to know if you're having a difficult time relating to or getting along with a particular horse.

### **Other Signs to Watch for**

- Tucking the tail down tightly indicates danger to the rear. The horse may bolt, buck or kick. Watch out if ears are flattened too!
- Switching the tail indicates annoyance and irritation at biting flies, stinging insects, tickling or bothersome actions of a rider, another horse, or you.
- Droopy ears and cocking one hind leg to rest on the hoof reveals a calm, resting horse that may be dozing. Don't wake him up by startling him!
- Wrinkling up the face, ears flat back against the head, and swinging the head is the threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse. Watch out for biting or kicking.

Being aware of horse behaviors is one of the best safety precautions that can be practiced. Knowing how to read your horse can prevent an accident and increase the quality of your “mutual” relationship. If you are uncomfortable working with or handling an individual horse, please speak to an Instructor or Management.

## **The Horse's Lifestyle**

In addition to understanding the horse's sixth sense and how they communicate with us, we need to appreciate and increase our awareness of the horse's lifestyle. This will assist us in responding to the horse's reaction to situations.

### **Flight & Other Instincts**

Horses would rather turn and run away from danger than to face and fight it. Remember, in the wild, horses are prey animals. They run for survival.

### **Implications**

- At a sudden movement or noise, the horse might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly.
- A frightened horse that is tied up or being held tightly, might try to escape by pulling back. Relax your hold or untie the horse quickly and it will usually relax. (Use quick release hooks found at cross-ties and wash rack) Learn how to use the quick release ties.
- Be sure not to stand directly behind the horse.
- If flight is not possible, the horse could either turn to kick out or face the problem and rear, especially in a tight area like a stall. A halter with a lead rope may assist with maintaining control while working around the horse in a stall.
- If a horse is nervous or fearful, it may be helpful to allow a more experienced horse handler to lead.
- Most horses working in a therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee. It is helpful if the volunteer remains calm and talks to the horse in a soothing voice.

### **The Herd Animal**

Horses like to stay together in a clearly defined herd or group where one or two alpha horses are "in charge" and the rest of the group lives in an established social hierarchy. It is not unusual for horses in a long, established herd to have "separation anxiety" and be barn sour.

### **Implications**

- Be aware that a horse may not like being alone. That is a consideration when horses are leaving the ring or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride.
- If the horse in front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also attempt to trot or canter.
- If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected.
- For safety, it is recommended to keep at least one or two horse lengths between horses when riding within a group to respect the horses' space and hierarchical order.

## VERIFICATION OF RULES AND REGULATIONS

In order to make our Harmony Farms sessions run smoothly, we rely on our trained volunteers to assist us. We believe that “hands on training” is the best approach, so new volunteers will shadow our experienced volunteers until they are ready to handle their assigned duties.

Please feel free to ask questions, because all questions are important. We encourage you to improve your education of horses and the world of Therapeutic Riding by attending the various workshops we offer throughout the year. If there is something you have not been taught and are interested in learning, please mention it to the Program Director or anyone in Management.

Thank you again for volunteering your time with Harmony Farms.

We would appreciate if you could print and sign this page after you have read and understand the various components of this program, as written in this Volunteer Handbook.

As soon as you have completed and reviewed these educational tools, you will be ready for some hands on training.

When you have completed all of your paperwork we will be happy to get you started.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print your name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent (if volunteer is under 18 years of age)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print your name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date