



*Reach for the Healing Power of Horses*

# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



**RIDING EQUINES TO ACHIEVE CONFIDENCE & HEALTH**

Rev. 8-2011



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CONFIDENCE &  
HEALTH

We are thrilled you want to be a volunteer at R.E.A.C.H. Therapeutic Riding Center. Our volunteers are the backbone of our program. It can take up to three volunteers to put each student on a horse.

There are many volunteer opportunities at R.E.A.C.H. and we are confident you will find something you enjoy. Whether you become a side walker, horse handler, or barn help, every hour you donate to R.E.A.C.H. helps our students move closer to improved health and greater independence.

You will find everything you need to know in order to volunteer in this handbook. We thank you, and honor you, for your willingness to give of your time and your heart to our students and horses.

## Our Mission

*Improving the health, increasing the confidence,  
and promoting the independence of persons with special needs  
through the use of horses.*

The bond between horse and human is undeniable – and well-documented. In a variety of ways, interacting with horses helps people with special needs to reach their greatest potential.

**Therapeutic Riding** is geared to meet specific riding and/or social objectives. The primary focus of therapeutic riding is to teach riding skills that build toward independent riding.

**Hippotherapy**, performed by licensed therapists, employs the movement of the horse as a tool to improve posture, balance, and movement, as well as fine and gross motor responses.

**Equine Assisted Activities** (EAA) are designed to build confidence and personal interaction skills through a series of non-mounted exercises.

At R.E.A.C.H. Therapeutic Riding Center we have combined a dynamic core of equine professionals, volunteers and horses. Some disabilities which may benefit from therapeutic riding or hippotherapy include:

Autism • Muscular dystrophy • Down syndrome • Multiple sclerosis  
Cerebral palsy • Fragile X Syndrome • Visual and hearing impairment  
Learning and emotional disabilities

Helping physically, mentally or emotionally challenged people reach their potential is what R.E.A.C.H. Therapeutic Riding Center is all about.

Because of the rhythmic, repetitive motion of the horse and the bond formed between rider and horse, equine-assisted activities can produce life-changing results.

## Our Goals

*Respect for the special needs of every rider and client  
Dedication to the success of every rider and client  
Safety for every rider, client, equine and volunteer*



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#### Physical benefits:

- Improve balance and posture
- Maintain and strengthen weak muscles
- Slow down muscle degeneration
- Relax tight muscles
- Improve fine and gross motor skills
- Improve hand-eye coordination

#### Mental and emotional benefits:

- Social interaction
- Animal connection
- Neuropathway development
- Coordination
- Structure and Routine
- Responsibility
- Motivation
- Self-esteem
- Autonomy
- Channel anxious behavior
- Cooperation
- Sense of success
- Improve language skills
- Sequencing and Planning
- Processing
- Increase attention span and self-confidence
- Physical and mental exercise

## Working with Individuals with Disabilities

Each of us at one time in our lives will have a disability – whether from an illness, injury or old age. A disability is nothing more than a body part – be it arm, leg, organ or brain – that does not work properly or does not work at all. Individuals with disabilities do not want to be treated any differently than you or me. Respect, friendship and acceptance – these are the qualities that our students seek from us and from the world in general.

When working with individuals with disabilities, simply follow the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would want to be treated if you were in their situation:

- Be friendly and accepting. Our students are people just like you.
- Respect our students. Many of them have faced hardships that we cannot imagine. Their courage and strength are to be admired, not pitied.
- Speak directly to the student. No one likes to be referred to in the third person. Your attention should be focused on the rider, not on the people around them. If the student has difficulty communicating, their caregiver or instructor will help facilitate communication.
- Offer assistance when asked or needed, but don't overwhelm them with help. Independence is always our goal for our students.
- Choose words with dignity. Avoid phrases such as crippled, deaf, dumb, stricken with... Describe and think of our students in terms of their personality or interests, rather than their disability.
- Be patient. Give our students time to process their surroundings. Speak slowly and clearly when needed. Learn to listen with your eyes and instincts as well as your ears.

Being around an individual with a disability or unique need may be a new experience to you. You may be overwhelmed at first with things you have never seen before or do not understand. This is a natural reaction. Allow yourself to get to know the students. They do not look upon themselves with pity or sadness, and they don't want you to either. R.E.A.C.H. is a place of strength, joy and – hope. Working with individuals with disabilities can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. Allow yourself the opportunity to share in our students' joys and accomplishments.



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*Horses are prey animals and can be unpredictable.*

*Horses are “flight” animals that can become startled by sudden movements or noises.*

*Horses are “herd” animals and often feel the need to return to their group when frightened.*

Horses have sharp peripheral vision but cannot see directly in front or behind their bodies.

Always approach the horse at the shoulder so he can clearly see you.

## Working with Horses

### Handling Horses

- **Talking to a horse.** Always speak to a horse in a calm, soothing and/or assertive voice. Never yell or raise your voice to a horse.
- **Approaching a horse.** Speak to the horse before approaching to avoid startling him. Approach a horse from the side, never from the rear, so the horse can see you approaching. Never run up to or after a horse.
- **Moving behind a horse.** There are two techniques to pass behind a horse: 1. Walk at least six feet away and around; 2. If you are not able to allow six feet, then keep a hand on the horse’s rump and talk to him as you slowly and steadily walk behind as close to the horse as possible. This reduces the risk of the horse being able to kick you.
- **Petting a horse.** Pet a horse by placing a hand on his shoulder or neck, not on the nose or face. The horse’s nose is a sensitive spot and some horses may be head shy.
- **Watch your feet!** While a horse is very sure-footed by nature, it may accidentally step on a human’s foot when balancing itself or turning around. Always be aware of where your feet are when working closely beside a horse. If a horse steps on your foot, do not try to pull your foot out from under the horse’s foot. Rather, reposition the horse so that he removes his foot from yours.



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Volunteers are  
the heart of our mission.

The gift of your time  
cannot be measured.

## Volunteer Code of Conduct

### **RESPECT ALL PERSONS.**

Abusive, suggestive or inappropriate actions or language will not be permitted.

### **RESPECT ALL ANIMALS.**

Refrain from loud, abrupt noises or actions and behaviors that may startle the horses. Abusive actions or language toward the horses will not be permitted.

### **RESPECT ALL PROPERTY.**

Inappropriate use of REACH TRC facilities, equipment or land will not be permitted.

## Volunteer Opportunities

### **For the Horse Lover**

**Barn Captain** The daily Barn Captain oversees and coordinates all operations during sessions. The Barn Captain manages and directs all volunteers and coordinates with the Volunteer Director, instructors and Tack Captain.

**Tack Captain** The daily Tack Captain oversees and coordinates the use of tack and equipment during sessions. The Tack Captain is responsible for making sure needed tack is in good repair, correctly selected and put out on time.

**Groom Team** The Groom Team is responsible for grooming our horses during session, checking for any abnormalities or injuries, and coordinating with the Volunteer Director, instructors and the Barn Captain.

**Horse Leaders** have the primary responsibility of the horses before, during and after each lesson. They coordinate with the assigned sidewalkers, to have the horse prepared on time and help start, stop and guide the horses while allowing the rider to feel like more than a mere passenger.

**Side walkers** provide vigilance to safety standards along with physical and motivational support for the rider.

### **For the Tenderfoot**

If you'd like to help, but would rather not work with the horses, we still need you!

The **Tack Team** helps the Tack Captain keep our saddles and bridles in top condition and makes sure the tack room stays clean and organized.

Our **Barn Buddies** swing hammers, pull weeds, and clean stalls to help us keep our facility in tip-top shape from the front walk to the back forty.

**Cow Hands** help coordinate groups as they learn barn and horse management skills.

**Top Hands** help with all kinds of support for our ongoing fund raising campaigns and special events.

Other opportunities include office work, schooling and exercising horses, volunteer recruitment, computers and technology, budget and finance, photography and video. We need your expertise!



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## R.E.A.C.H. Rules and Regulations

While providing our students, volunteers, staff and families with services, safety is a top priority. These rules and regulations are stated to help insure safety, and we ask your assistance in making sure that everyone follows them.

1. **Age Limitation:** Volunteers who work with the riders must be at least fourteen (14) years of age and be physically able to walk and occasionally jog for short distances during the 30-45 minute classes.
2. **Background Checks:** Because we work with children, volunteers may be subject to a background check.
3. **Unsupervised children** are not allowed at R.E.A.C.H. No bikes or skateboards.
4. **Pets:** Personal pets, with the exception of service dogs, are not allowed without prior consent.
5. **Photos:** All volunteers, staff and families must be granted permission prior to taking photographs or videos.
6. **Cell Phones:** No cell phones are allowed in the arena. If you feel you must carry your cell phone, please turn off the ringer. Volunteers should never take calls in the middle of a class.
7. **Dress Code:** Volunteers should dress appropriately for horse related activities around children.
  - a. Wear comfortable, safe shoes for walking in sand. No sandals, opened-toed shoes, or clogs.
  - b. Wear weather appropriate attire for physical activity (dress in layers).
  - c. No spaghetti straps, midriffs or halter tops. No dangling jewelry that can get caught or tangled on straps, or grabbed by small hands.
  - d. No clothing advertising drugs, alcohol, firearms or other inappropriate subject matter.
8. **Parking:** Leave personal belongings locked in your car. R.E.A.C.H. is not responsible for lost or stolen items.
9. **Designated Areas:** Only staff and volunteers will be allowed beyond designated visitor areas. Off limit areas include, but are not limited to, the tack room, the feed room, stall areas, mounting area, and the arenas.
10. **Attendance:** Regular attendance is important. It is your responsibility to notify R.E.A.C.H. at least 24 hours in advance of your shift if you will be absent or late.

**Arrival Times:** It is very important that classes begin on time. Please arrive no later than thirty (30) minutes prior to your scheduled class time.

**Name Tags:** Always wear your name tag.

11. **Bad Weather Notices:** The Center will remain open and in operation during session hours with the exception of the following:
  - Local ISD's have closed schools.
  - The National Weather Service has issued a severe weather alert.
  - There are high winds, lightening, thunder, hail, or tornado warnings.
  - The arenas are flooded or too muddy.

For all other weather conditions, do not assume classes are cancelled. If there are last-minutes cancellations, R.E.A.C.H. will make every effort to call the volunteers for that day. If you are uncertain, be sure to call the office or the Volunteer Director.

12. **Dismissal:** Volunteers serve at the request of R.E.A.C.H. Dismissal of a volunteer is at the will of R.E.A.C.H. with or without cause. Volunteers who do not adhere to the rules and regulations of the organization or who fail to satisfactorily perform their voluntary assignment are subject to dismissal. The volunteer may request an opportunity to discuss the reasons for dismissal with the Volunteer Director and/or Executive Director.
13. **Fire Extinguishers:** Fire extinguishers are located on either side of the wash stalls on the main aisles. Familiarize yourself with these locations.



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## R.E.A.C.H. Rules and Regulations (cont.)

14. **Stay Hydrated:** Participation at R.E.A.C.H. can require strenuous activity. It is very important – especially during summer months – to stay hydrated.
15. **Never hand feed the horses:** Check with the Instructor if you would like to reward the horses with a treat.
16. **Follow “The R.E.A.C.H. Way”:** R.E.A.C.H. has many volunteers, students and families that come through our gates each week. When working with our horses and our students, we stress the importance of consistency. We ask that all our volunteers follow the procedures and techniques demonstrated in training when working with our horses and our students.
17. **As of September, 1995,** Texas enacted the following law: Texas Law (Chapter 87, Civil Practice and Remedies Code), an equine professional is not liable for the injury to or the death of a participant in equine activities resulting from the inherent risks of equine activities.
18. **Smoking:** R.E.A.C.H. maintains a smoke- and tobacco-free facility. No smoking or other use of tobacco or similar products (including, but not limited to, cigarettes, pipes, cigars, snuff, or chewing tobacco) is permitted on any part of the property.
19. **Harassment:** R.E.A.C.H. is committed to providing an environment free of unlawful harassment. Company policy prohibits sexual harassment or intimidation, harassment due to sex, race, religion, color, national origin, medical condition, physical or mental disability, age or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law, regulation or ordinance. ALL SUCH HARASSMENT IS ILLEGAL.
20. **Firearms:** R.E.A.C.H. does not allow anyone to possess, use, conceal, carry or maintain a concealed weapon or handgun on R.E.A.C.H.’s premises.
21. **Drugs:** R.E.A.C.H. explicitly prohibits the use, possession, solicitation for, or sale of, narcotics or other illegal drugs, alcohol, or prescription medication without a prescription on R.E.A.C.H.’s premises.
22. **Workplace Violence:** R.E.A.C.H. has a zero tolerance policy for violence in the workplace including, but not limited to, physically aggressive, violent or threatening behavior, verbal or physical threats of any kind, excessive arguing, profanity, threats of sabotage to R.E.A.C.H. property, belligerent speech or a demonstrated pattern of refusal to follow R.E.A.C.H. rules and regulations.
23. **Barn Safety:** Stop, look, and listen. Use caution around horses. No running, screaming, or unruly behavior.
  - Never stand directly in front of or behind a horse.
  - Do not go into pastures, paddocks, or round pens where horses are present unless a R.E.A.C.H. staff member has cleared you.
  - Cross ties will not be used in the aisles. Grooming and tack up will be done in the wash rack or stall.
  - Never use a bridle for tying. Never leave a tied horse alone.
  - Helmets must be worn by all students at all times.
  - Stall doors should be open or closed completely.
  - Do not enter stalls with a horse in it unless a R.E.A.C.H. staff member has cleared you.
  - Treat all equipment with care. Return helmets, tack, grooming buckets, toys, cones, and tools to their proper place after use.