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# HORSE LEADER MANUAL



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Anyone working as a horse leader must attend a training workshop and be approved by a staff member. The horse leader is responsible for the safety of the rider in relationship to how the horse is responding in the lesson program. Horses are not to be reprimanded during a lesson. If there is a problem, the leader should speak to the instructor after class so that the two of them can simulate the behavior and make corrections at that time. If something needs addressed during the class, please stop the horse and call the instructor over.

### **Horse Leader Responsibilities**

- Grooms their assigned horse
- Leads the horse
- If you have no side walkers, you are also responsible for pulling all tack needed.
- In Case of Emergency – DO NOT LET GO OF YOUR HORSE – If a student should fall, keep the horse calm and away from the student. If a Side Walker is present, they will take care of the student. If not, the instructor will take care of the situation
- Untacks the horse after classes are finished per the Instructor's directions
- Must be able to arrive 15-30 minutes prior to lesson to groom, tack, and warm up their assigned horse

### **In the event of an emergency while the student is mounted**

- As you know, these are 1,000lb. animals that we are dealing with along with unpredictable students. We never know what outside factor could affect the horses. We do our very best to have our horses desensitized to everything, but things do happen. Besides the horses, we can sometimes have behavioral issues with the students as well (this is much more common).
- In the event of an issue with the horse or student that the instructor deems out of control, the instructor will ask for an emergency dismount, which is the removal of the student from the horse as quickly and safely as possible. Often times if this is due to a behavioral issue of the student, the instructor will try to reach them in time to handle the dismount. However, if it is due to the behavior of the horse, the instructor may instruct the side walkers to perform the emergency dismount. If at any time the horse leader deems the situation unsafe or out of control, you may call for an emergency dismount.
- During an emergency dismount, your main job is to control the horse as best that you can.
- In the case of the side walkers performing the emergency dismount, the LEFT side walker will remove the student's foot from the stirrup and pull the student off to the ground. The RIGHT side walker will remove the student's foot from the stirrup and help push the student toward the LEFT side walker. If there is only ONE side walker, they will perform the emergency dismount on their own. If there are NO side walkers, an instructor will perform the emergency dismount. COMMUNICATION is key!
- Once the student is dismounted, your job is to get the horse SAFELY away from the rider on the ground as well as the other rider in the arena. Do NOT let go of your horse.
- All horses within the arena must be brought safely and immediately to a halt in the case of an emergency dismount, regardless of whether their student is the one being dismounted

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- This does NOT happen often, but we must be prepared for anything!

#### **Specifics on Mounting**

- Mounting is supervised by the instructor.
- While it is the role of the Horse Leader to calm the horse, this is NOT the time to pet or play with your horse.
- Horse Leaders should align the horse next to the mounting block or platform. (Some students mount from the right side, but most mount from the left).
- Once aligned, stand in front of the horse holding the lead rope.
- Allow the horse some head freedom being sure the horse remains quiet during the mounting process.
- The horse is not allowed to walk off until the Instructor asks the student to say “walk on”.
- The Horse Leader’s sole responsibility while mounting is to keep the horse standing still so the Instructor and Side Walkers can safely get the student on the horse.
- **Remember: Never Wrap the Lead Rope Around Your Hand**

#### **Specifics at the Halt**

- Step in front of the horse and keep their head still. If the horse gets restless, calm him by talking to him and/or stroke his neck. Do NOT pet or mess with their head.

#### **Specifics at the Walk**

- Watch the distance between horses (do not get closer than an elephant’s length to the horse in front of you). If possible, suggest to the student/side walker that they cue the horse to make a circle or halt. If this is not possible, you make the decision to either circle the horse or halt. Ultimately, YOU are responsible for keeping your rider and horse safe.
- If you have two side walkers, be aware of the distance between the outside walker and arena wall/rail.

**Remember, it’s the side walker’s job to communicate with the student, but it’s your job to communicate with the side walker. If you need to stop or turn, let your side walker know so they can follow you. Please avoid correcting the student – allow the side walker to do this. If the side walker asks for assistance, please provide it.**

#### **Specifics at the Trot**

- When the instructor asks for the trot, it is usually done individually.
- Do not bring the horse to the trot without being sure that the student and volunteers are ready. Remember, you’re a team!
- Do not let the student ask the horse to trot until you are comfortable that the horse is ready. Be sure to explain this to a student who is truly giving the correct aids so they learn that what they are doing is correct.

- If the horse does not readily trot, let the instructor work with the student to make the horse trot.
- You should not hit the horse to trot.
- Once the horse is trotting, you must control the speed. Do not let the horse go too fast.
- Always be tuned into the side walkers and the instructor for instructions.
- **Important: The student is learning the riding skills. You are there to assist and maintain safe control of the horse at all times.**

### Specifics at Dismount

- Students always dismount with the Instructor's assistance.
- Stand in front of the horse holding the lead rope.
- Allow the horse some head freedom being sure the horse remains quiet during the dismounting process.
- Once the student leaves the horse, you may loosen the horse's girth, but do not move until the instructor excuses you.
- The instructor will excuse the horses to their stalls when all students are dismounted and safely out of the way. Take the horse to their stall (or an empty stall if their stall is occupied or being cleaned). Remove the horses tack and then their halter or bridle – do NOT leave the horse unattended in their stall with ANY tack on. Allow the horse some time to drink or eat and relax prior to their next lesson. Report any issues from the lesson to the instructor.

### Games

- Get involved, but let the student do the work when possible.
- You are responsible for seeing that safety is maintained and the horse remains calm and well behaved.
- If an item is dropped, allow the side walkers to pick it up; if you have no side walker, ask the instructor for assistance. Again, your attention is always on the horse. Do NOT walk away from your horse.
- Be aware of where everyone is in a group game.

### After Class

- Please plan to stay 15 minutes after the last class to put your horse away.
- If your horse has got hot or sweaty during the lesson, bring it to the attention of the Instructor and follow their directions – you may need to sponge off your horse.
- Do not put the horse away hot or sweaty. If you are unsure, ask the instructor.

**Note: Please know that all horses and volunteers have different personalities, strengths, weakness, likes and dislikes. One horse might be a great partner for you while another might not respond at all. If you are not well matched with a horse, PLEASE let the instructor know so that a different horse can be teamed up with you.**

## Other Guidelines for *First-Time* Horse Leaders

### Grooming, tacking, and leading to arena

- Check for the correct tack for your rider (IF you are responsible for tack – this is usually a side walkers responsibility.)
- Use muzzle when needed or noted.
- Girth snug enough the saddle does not slip on way to arena (if tacking before student arrives.)
- Get to arena AT LEAST 5 minutes before class is to start so that you have plenty of time to perform the pre-lesson procedures.

### Pre-mounting lesson procedures

- Adjust saddle, tighten girth so that it stays on but is NOT too tight – instructor will make sure girth is tightened appropriately prior to mounting (if tacking before student arrives.)
- Work with the horse in hand establishing your space and tuning up your aides, and the horse’s understanding of your aids, so that you and the horse have a comfortable working relationship.
- When leading the horse always make sure that you are positioned with your shoulder at the horse’s eye. When asking for an upward transition (i.e. from a halt to a walk or from a walk to a trot) use a verbal cue (walk on or a cluck) then begin to walk. If the horse does not respond, consult with the instructor on how to better motivate the horse to move forward.
- Make sure that you are always looking forward in the direction you want the horse to go. It is very important to remember that the motor is in the horse’s hind end. That is where the action starts. It is never appropriate to pull a horse into an upward transition. You must activate the hind end if he does not respond to verbal cues.
- If the horse’s head goes up because the horse leader is pulling or getting too heavy with aids that involve the horse’s head, both the horse and rider will be physically less comfortable, because the horse’s back becomes hollow and stiff.
- Horses respond best when they get a pre-signal that they will be asked to make a change. That’s why it’s easier and smoother for the horse and rider when you let the horse know he will need to prepare for a downward (or upward) transition, before you expect it.
  - For example, don’t wait until you get to the end of the arena to ask the horse to come back to the walk from the trot. Consider the speed of the horse and the distance you have to perform the transition. That will help you gauge when you need to give the cue. It might be a soft verbal cue “walk” before you gently reinforce with the lead. It could be that you start to walk (instead of jog) and then ask the horse to walk. It might be a soft pull and release on the outside rein and then a “walk”. Once again, experiment and find out what works best for your

horse. The pre-signal helps the horse transition smoothly which of course is better for the rider and horse.

- Warm up the horse at the walk and trot around the arena in both directions making sure that the horse moves forward willingly and is responsive to your aides. If this is not the case, ask the instructor to observe and offer advice. The time to work out the kinks is now, so that you do not need to do it when the rider is mounted.
- Once the student has groomed and tacked the horse, stand and wait for the instructor to call your horse for mounting.
  - Note on rein placement: Leaders must be aware of the reins at all times. If the rider is doing a conventional mount, the rider will take hold of the reins. For mounts off the platform, some riders are expected to take the reins in preparation for their mount. For those riders who do not take the reins, the reins should be up the horse's neck towards the ears with a knot in them for safety depending on their length. Any time a rider is riding without using the reins (and you are not using them with the lead for extra control) they may be removed so there is no chance of a horse getting caught up or frightened by dangling reins.
- When needed make sure you relocate the mounting side stirrup over the horse's withers to keep it from hitting the horse when nearing the mounting area.

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### Mounting procedures

- Know which side of the mounting area you need to bring the horse into.
- After you turn the horse, ask him to halt and move in front of his head to help guide him straight and close to the ramp/block. Encourage the horse to stand square.
- Stand in front of the horse, slightly to the horse's right side away from the ramp. Your right shoulder blocks the horse's passage but not his view. Keep the horse steady through the mounting process, but keep in mind that a horse will not feel comfortable and relaxed if they feel they are being held in a "death grip". A relaxed but attentive hold works best. We do our best to be careful of the horse, but a rider could inadvertently kick the horse when mounting so be prepared for a sudden reaction from the horse. You may be asked to hold the cheek piece of the horse's halter if a horse has a tendency to react to mounting by nipping. This protects the handler.
- Once the side walkers are in place and the rider prompts the horse, allow the horse to move forward in a straight steady walk. As you come around to the horse's left side into leading position remember not to cut the corner as you come out of the mounting area.
  - Remember: If there are two side walkers you are now leading an elephant sized horse!

### Leading in the mounted lesson

- Keep the horse's pace consistent to allow the rider to adjust, unless directed otherwise by the instructor. Slowing down and speeding up may be disruptive to the rider and horse.

- Allow the horse to move at its natural walking rhythm, (be it quick or slow) and then find a spot in the line of horses where your horse can comfortably move at his own pace.
- Do not make quick turns or abrupt stops and transitions unless specifically directed to do so by the instructor. It is easier for the rider to balance on the straightaway than on turns.
- Leave two horse lengths between horses and know the horses in the class that need more space. Ask the instructor.
- If you need to leave the line of lesson horses (for instance because you were getting too close to the horse in front of you) let the rider and side walkers know you will be changing directions.
- If you need to stop the horse to make adjustments move to the center of the arena to be out of the way of the other riders and be sure to communicate with your side walkers and Instructor before doing so
- Whenever the horses are being asked to stand for more than a few moments (i.e. riders are performing stretches at the halt) horse leaders should stand in front of and facing the horse.
- If your rider has side walkers, develop working cues with the side walkers so that you know when the rider has applied the correct aides. That way you can make sure that you are not preventing the horse from responding to the aid or when needed, you can prompt the horse if he is not responding to the rider's aid.
  - An example of this would be if the rider has wiggled their feet to ask the horse to walk, the side walkers might say "nice job squeezing your legs" and you can walk on.
- If your rider does not use side walkers, they will be able to prompt the horse when the instructor asks them to. Try not to affect the movement of the horse, as the rider needs the feedback from the horse to help them know when they are being correct and effective in the application of their aides. Also, make sure that you are not inhibiting the horse from responding to the rider's aides.
- Give riders the opportunities to learn, to do, and to make mistakes: Mistakes are welcomed and expected. If a rider does not make mistakes, then it is apparent that we did not give them the opportunity to make them and consequently to learn from them.
  - For example: if a rider doesn't attend to the task at hand, the horse will wander off (figuratively speaking of course) and thereby teach the rider to pay attention to and interact with it. If the rider needs a minute (or two) to process what the instructor said, and then another minute to figure out how to move the reins from the left hand to the right hand so that they can turn the horse and we do not give that required time to the rider (we instead just lead the horse through the turn to catch up with the other horses) then the rider lost the chance to learn.
  - Each rider in the class is an individual and should be given the tools (be it time to process or the allowance to make mistakes) to benefit from their time on the horse. The instructors do not have the advantage in a group lesson to work with

the individuals one on one. Please let them know when your rider needs more time or does not understand the task that is asked of them. Instructors have many tools to help the riders, but if they don't pick up on a problem immediately, you can help by letting them know when they might be needed.

**Always alert the instructor if you feel uncomfortable with the horse you are working with for any reason. The pre-lesson work usually allows handlers and horses to become comfortable with each other, but if circumstances change during the lesson talk to the instructor.**

**Signs that a horse is not comfortable**

- Pinned ears, swishing tail, head raised up, nipping, stiff neck, not going straight (i.e. curling towards horse-handler with either front or back end), not moving.
- We need to look for these signs and make adjustments for the horse to relieve his discomfort.
- It could be that the saddle is not fitting properly or a rider might have his/her heels raised and digging into the horse's sides.
- The instructor will help decide what changes need to be made.

**If after attending a Horse Leader Volunteer Workshop and reading this guide you still feel like you need more training (on either one area or in general) please let us know.**

**For any questions and/or concerns, please contact:**

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