



## Volunteer Guidelines for Sidewalking and Horse Handling

1. The Sidewalker and Horse Handler must be at least 14 years of age and of sufficient maturity and competence to work with disabled riders safely and effectively. The SW and HH must be reliable for their volunteer commitment and attend when they sign-up on volunteer sign-up sheet.
2. The Sidewalker agrees to place the safety of the rider as the highest priority and to be constantly vigilant when working in the Sidewalker capacity.
3. The Sidewalker and Horse Handler must be physically, mentally, and emotionally able to walk next to the horse, using the correct method of Sidewalking and Horse Handling for the entire therapy lesson (usually 30 minutes).
4. The Sidewalker must be of sufficient stature and strength to be able to safely stabilize a rider on a horse. The Horse Handler must be of sufficient stature and strength to be able to control a horse under any circumstances.
5. The Sidewalker or Horse Handler must be willing and able to assist the riding instructor and/or therapist in helping the rider carry out their therapy lesson.
6. The Sidewalker or Horse Handler **will not distract** the rider during the therapy lessons or give the rider instructions independent of the riding instructor and/or therapist.
7. The Sidewalker or Horse Handler should not gossip or exclude the rider in conversations.
8. The Sidewalker or Horse Handler will not undermine the authority of the riding instructor and/or therapist.
9. The Sidewalker or Horse Handler agrees to maintain the rider's confidentiality.
10. The Sidewalker or Horse Handler will not partake in any mind-altering substances including any degree of alcohol that would impair or inhibit physical or mental responses, before or during their time spent at TheRTC.
11. The Sidewalker or Horse Handler will dress appropriately, including close-toed shoes that are required for any activity at The RTC.
12. The Sidewalker will use the accepted and approved method of the Sidewalking technique they were trained with and that is explained in the Sidewalker Handout.
13. The Sidewalker should never attempt to mount or dismount a rider unless they have been properly trained and are listed on the approved list of those trained in the Mounting and Dismounting Procedure. Only aid in mounting and dismounting once properly trained and have been given instructions to help by the riding instructor and/or therapist. This procedure is never to be initiated on one's own.
14. The Sidewalker will remain aware of the emergency procedures and of their designated category of Sidewalker 1 or Sidewalker 2 in relation to the Emergency Plan. The Horse Handler also agrees to remain aware of the appropriate emergency procedures as well.
15. Each Sidewalker and Horse Handler must disinfect their hands either by washing with soap or using an antibacterial hand sanitizer before and after each ride and interaction with each rider.

The Sidewalkers and Horse Handlers are vital to the therapeutic riding program and it is therefore, essential that each person working in the capacity of a Sidewalker or Horse Handler understand all of their responsibilities and carry them out consistently.

**I have read the description and duties of a Sidewalker or Horse Handler for The RTC, and understand the content. My signature is my agreement to follow and adhere to all of the prescribed duties.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## POSTURE AND MOVEMENT

Remember, it is the responsibility of the NARHA Certified Instructor, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Pathologist, etc., to evaluate a rider's posture. This information is provided to the volunteer to enhance your understanding of the basic principles of the "ideal" rider position.

### **POSITION OF THE RIDER**

*By Lorrie Renker and Martha Biery*

All riders strive toward the "ideal" riding position. It should be no different for riders with disabilities yet, instructors often appear afraid to make position correction. So, while not all riders will be able to achieve the ideal position, that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. The rider's position has little to do with looking good and everything to do with being in balance and moving in harmony with the horse. The better the body alignment the better the therapeutic benefits.

The best way to evaluate the rider's position on the horse is to step back and view the rider from all angles. The rider may look great from the side but could be off center when viewed from behind. Don't be afraid to make corrections.

Videotapes often show a rider in a poor position for the entire lesson with no attempt made to improve the position. Here are some common problems to look for:

1. When viewed from behind, the rider should sit as straight as possible (Figure A). Many riders sit to one side, and then have to make corrections in the rest of the body to maintain balance. When this imbalance occurs, one foot will appear lower than the other.

Figure B shows a rider with the left foot lower, the pelvis leaning to the left and the upper body correcting to the right.

Figure C shows just the opposite – the right foot lower, the pelvis leaning to the right and the upper body correcting to the left. Neither of these positions helps the rider strengthen muscles evenly. Correcting this position usually requires aligning the rider's base (get the butt square in the saddle).

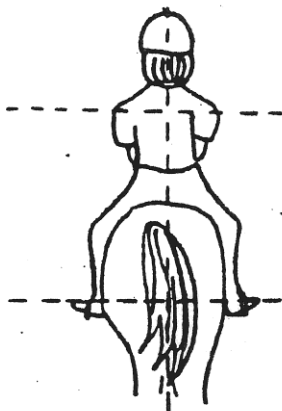


FIGURE A

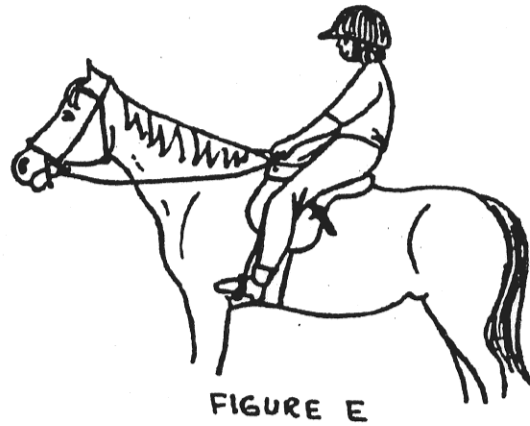
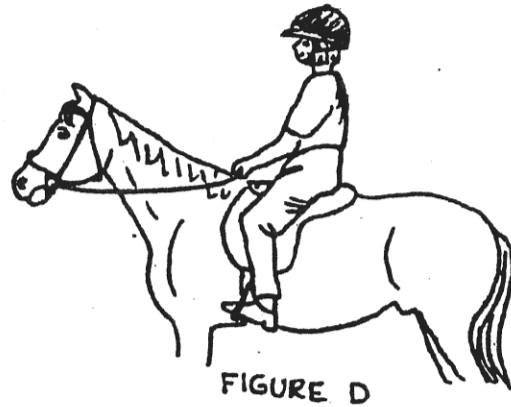


FIGURE B

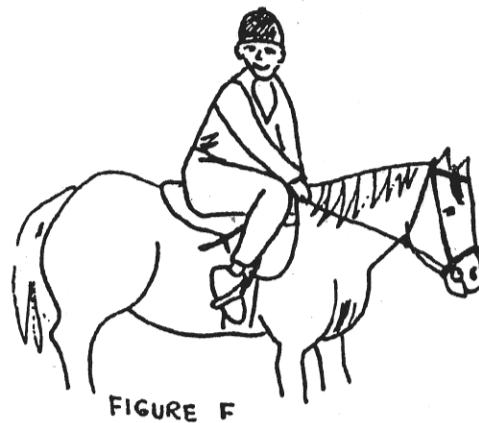


FIGURE C

2. When viewed from the side, the rider should sit as straight as possible (Figure D). Videotapes often show riders in the “sofa seat” or C curve (Figure E). Often the rider will sit up if asked. Sometimes the position will reflect the rider’s posture off the horse. Encouraging elongation of the leg usually improves the posture. To achieve a better position, it may be necessary to evaluate the type of saddle being used. Is the saddle level on the horse so that it will encourage a good position? Just placing a bounce pad or lollipop under the saddle does not ensure a level saddle. Often the weight of the rider compresses the pad completely, resulting in a backward-sloping saddle. It is literally impossible to keep the leg position under the rider’s pelvis in these circumstances. Use of a foam pad with more density will help. Ideally, the saddle should be fitted correctly to the horse and the rider.



3. Figure F shows a rider with a “toe-down” and leg pinched up. This position could indicate a rider with tight adductor muscles, an extreme forward-seat saddle or stirrups that are too short. The rider should be encouraged to lengthen his leg. This lengthening could be achieved by riding without stirrups or by trying a different type of saddle.



4. The important thing to remember is to constantly evaluate the rider’s position. Consider all factors, such as disability limitations, posture off of the horse and equipment used, and then work toward improving the rider’s position.

### **Sidewalking Guidelines:**

The job of walking next to the horse to stabilize the rider is extremely important and demands continual awareness. Please read and study the handout referring to the Sidewalking Guidelines in addition to the following information.

- You must be physically able to walk and job with your arms extended up against the leg of the rider for at least 30 minutes.
- You will be expected to maintain high awareness of the rider for the duration of the ride. Staying alert is crucial to the safety of the rider. The horses are gentle however, there is always a possibility of an abrupt, quick movement that could cause the rider to lose their balance and potentially fall. Your job is to be able to react quick enough to prevent the rider from losing their balance while also maintaining your own Sidewalking position.
- The Sidewalker will also assist the rider in following the directions of the riding instructor. Remember, you are assisting the rider, so it is important to not actually perform the task for them. Please allow the rider ample time for thought processing before physically prompting to aid in the task.
- Do not repeat what the instructions given by the riding instructor, as the rider would then also have to process your instructions as well as the instructor's instead of focusing on the initial task given.
- Conversation should be minimal so as not to distract the rider, the other Sidewalker, or Horse Handler.
- Once the Sidewalker has been trained in the proper Mounting and Dismounting Procedures, they are to help the rider on the mounting ramp or mounting block and follow directions given by the riding instructor or therapist for dismounting.

### **Effective Sidewalking**

*(reprinted from May/June 1989 NARHA News)*

**By Susan Tucker and Molly Lingua, R.P.T.**

Sidewalkers are the ones who normally get the most hands-on duties in therapeutic riding. They are directly responsible for the rider. As such, they have the capability to either enhance or detract from the lesson.

In the arena, the sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and to riders who already have perceptual problems, it can be overwhelming. If two sidewalkers are working with one student, one should be the “designated talker” to avoid this situation.

When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process it. If the instructor says “Turn to the right toward me”, and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, “Right,” to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and learn when they need help and when they’re just not paying attention.

It’s important to maintain a position by the rider’s knee. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security if the horse should trip or shy.

There are two ways to hold onto the rider without interfering. The most commonly used is the “arm-over-the-thigh” hold. The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle (flap or pommel depending on the horse’s size) and the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider’s thigh. Be careful that the elbow doesn’t accidentally dig into the rider’s leg.

Sometimes, pressure on the thigh can increase and/or cause muscle spasticity, especially with the Cerebral Palsy population. In this case, the “therapeutic hold” may be used. Here, the leg is held at the joints, usually the knee and/or ankle. Check with the instructor/therapist for the best way to assist. In the (unlikely) event of an emergency, the arm-over-thigh hold is the most secure.

Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider’s waist. It is tempting, especially when walking beside a pony with a young or small rider, but it can offer too much and uneven support. At times, it can even pull the rider off balance and make riding more difficult. Encourage your students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.

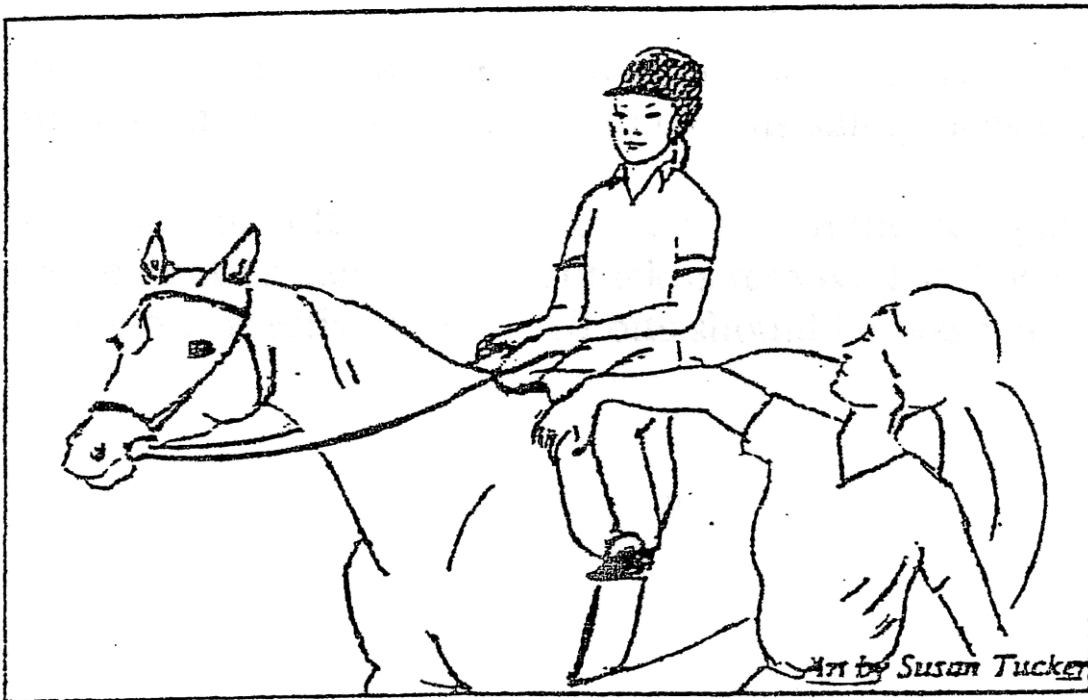
If the instructor chooses to use a safety belt on your rider, be very careful not to pull down or push up on it. As your arm tires it’s hard to avoid these movements, so rather than gripping the handle firmly, just touch your thumb and finger together around it. This way you are in position to assist the rider if needed, but you will neither give unneeded support nor pull him off balance. When you are ready for relief for your arm, ask the leader to move into the center to stop and trade sides, one at a time, with the other sidewalker. (Instructors: if your rider has serious enough balance problems to warrant a safety belt, you should probably be using two sidewalkers).

“EFFECTIVE SIDEWALKING” CONT.

During exercises, pay attention to your student. Sometimes volunteers forget that the riders are to do the exercises and the sidewalkers are to reinforce and assist. The same applies to games. Don't get so competitive that your rider doesn't get to use his skills because you do it for him in an all out effort to win.

The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow to be as normal as he can possibly be. You are right at his side, so help the instructor to challenge him to the best of his ability.

Without you, these programs couldn't exist. We thank you for all you give and challenge you to be the best you can be.



### **Horse Handling Guidelines:**

Horse Handlers must have a working knowledge of and working experience with multiple horses. This person must have the physical ability to lead and control the horse in all situations. Their minimal physical stamina must include the ability to walk and lead a horse for at least 45 minutes.

- The Horse Handler is responsible for bringing the designated horses up from their pasture(s), assess the condition of the horse, groom and tack with appropriated equipment for the upcoming rider and supervise other volunteer help.
- The Horse Handler must also work with each horse at the walk and trot before a rider mounts.
- Inspect all tack and its condition before using it on the horse. Any tack in questionable condition should not be used, tagged for repair and notify the riding instructor of the problem.
- The Horse Handler should be well versed in the various moods and reactions of horses, especially with the horse currently being used for riding lessons. Any perception of a change in attitude or behavior of the horse needs to be communicated with the riding instructor or other Sidewalkers as needed.
- In case of an emergency, the Horse Handler will maintain control of the horse and safely move the horse away from the rider as quickly as possible.
- After the ride, the Horse Handler is responsible for securing the horse in the designated area with a quick release knot or to the cross-ties. If the tack is removed at that point, it should be cleaned and correctly stored. All bits should be washed prior to storage.

## THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

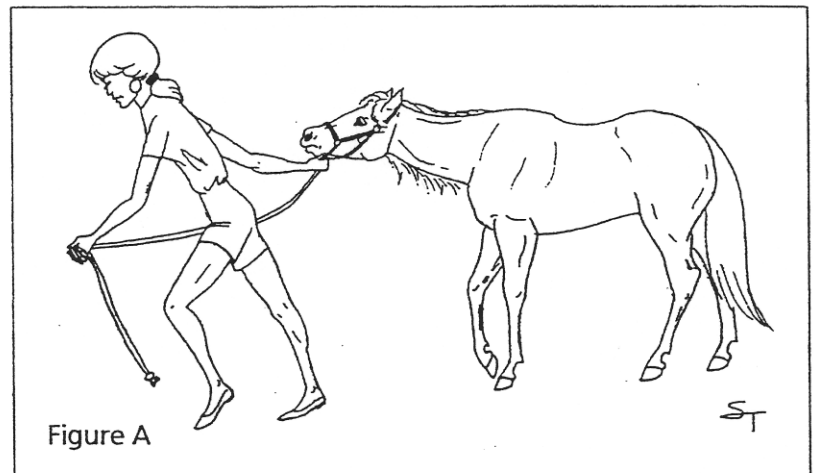
By Susan F. Tucker

One of the most challenging duties that can be assigned to a volunteer is that of a leader. A leader's first responsibility is the horse but he must also consider the sidewalkers, making sure there is enough room along the fence and around obstacles for them to pass.

An effective leader pays close attention to the rider's needs as well as to where the horse is going. This reinforces the rider's attempts to control the horse. However, you should not execute an instruction for the rider before he has time to process the information and make an effort to comply. Sometimes it may be appropriate to walk into the corner and stand until the student figures out what to do.

Avoid the temptation to talk to the rider or sidewalkers. A rider may get confused by too much input and not know who's in charge. (Instructors often make terrible leaders because they can't keep their mouths shut!).

**Figure A** depicts a few faults common among leaders. Here is a leader grimly marching along – head down, one hand on the lead snap, the other inside the coiled end of the rope – dragging a strung-out horse. In a battle with a horse, you lose. You must get the horse to cooperate. Walk alongside the horse, about even with his eye. This helps keep him in a proper frame, which is more beneficial to everyone.



Talk to the horse; most of them know whoa, walk and trot, or can learn the words. Watch where you're going and what's happening around you. Do not walk backward to look at the rider. It's dangerous for everyone and the horse isn't eager to follow someone who can't see where he is going.

**Figure B** shows the correct position for leaders. The lead shank is held with the right hand 6 to 12 inches from the snap, allowing free motion of the horse's head. This is more therapeutic to the rider and less irritating to the horse. The tail end of the lead should be looped in a figure-eight in the left hand to avoid tripping on it. Never coil the rope around your hand.

