

*Equest Center for Therapeutic Riding, Inc.*

## **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

**Updated 2024**

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*"Let us not be satisfied with just giving money.  
Money is not enough, money can be got, but  
They need your hearts to love them.  
So, spread your love everywhere you go."  
-Mother Theresa*

Welcome to the Equest Center for Therapeutic Riding Volunteer Program!

We are so glad to have you with us. You have just joined an extraordinary group of volunteers who love special needs individuals and horses. We realize that the volunteer orientation covers a lot of information in a short period of time, so we have put together this Volunteer Handbook for you to keep. In this manual you will find all of the information covered in our orientation, as well as other useful information designed to help you increase your skills and feel more confident in whatever role you choose to serve during your time as a volunteer here at Equest.

**REMEMBER:** Working with horses is a **risk activity** and attention to safety is our first concern for all individuals involved. There are as many ways to do things as there are horse people. When you are here at the Equest Center, we kindly ask that you do things the way they are outlined in this training manual.

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### First things first:

- There is absolutely **no smoking** or **solicitation** at the Equest Center. Smoking is prohibited in all of our buildings and paddock areas.
- All volunteers must have their completed Liability and Release and Confidentiality forms signed and turned in to the Volunteer Coordinator or Instructor on duty **BEFORE** beginning any volunteer activity at the center.
- We ask that volunteers sign in when volunteering! The volunteer sign-in sheet is located at the Volunteer Board by the arena.
- We ask that all volunteers wear a nametag while volunteering.
- For program safety and consistency, we ask that all volunteers attend at least one volunteer orientation during their time here at the center.
- If a volunteer/volunteer group is coming to help with set up, clean up, barn work, special projects, Horses & Hands, etc... they are only allowed to be there when an Equest Staff member is present.

### Barn Conduct and Safety Rules

For the safety and well-being of all individuals and program animals at Equest, we ask that you abide by the following set of guidelines when in our barn. These safety rules are posted in various visible locations throughout the barn.

1. All riders must wear a helmet when riding Equest horses.
2. No running, yelling, jumping or screaming in the barn or observation room. "Horsing around" can be harmful to everyone.
3. If you take it out, put it away!
4. If your horse makes a mess, clean it up!
5. Know the horse danger zones and avoid them (directly behind, directly in front of, and under the necks of horses).
6. Only staff members and lead volunteers may hand feed treats to horses. Exceptions may be made with riders for therapy purposes and/or under the direct supervision of a staff member.
7. Close-toed, closed-heeled shoes must be worn when working with the horses. No bare feet inside the barn at any time.
8. Always use a lead rope when moving a horse.
9. Never lead a horse under another horse's occupied crossties. Have someone unhook it to go through.
10. Students/Volunteers may not be INSIDE stalls without instructor or lead volunteer permission.

11. Volunteers must be 13 or older AND have permission from the instructor or lead volunteer to help bring horses in or out from the paddocks.
12. Riders and volunteers may not go inside pastures except when given specific permission and directed by staff or lead volunteer.
13. BEWARE! The wire fencing outside is electric. The fences are on, but the red gates are safe.
14. Please do not climb on the hay bales or sawdust bags.
15. Because our horses work so hard on lesson days, we set aside special volunteer appreciation parties. Volunteers are invited to ride at these times.
16. Only individuals who have completed the Equest Kubota/Mule/Golf Cart policy and training sessions, as well as passed the testing requirements given by the Equest staff member in charge may drive the equipment. Permission to use this equipment may be revoked if rules and procedures are not followed.
17. Volunteers that are 15 years old and younger must attend an orientation before volunteering at the center for classes. Junior Volunteers (12 - 13 years) old must have a parent or guardian volunteer with them at least the first 2 times they come in. Junior Volunteers must be pre-approved by the Lead Volunteer to volunteer at the center without being accompanied by a parent. Pre-approval is based on the ability of the volunteer in the following areas:
  - Demonstrates the willingness and ability to follow directions effectively.
  - Demonstrates the willingness and ability to follow all barn safety rules.
  - Demonstrates the ability to complete given tasks independently.
  - Treats all riders, volunteers, staff and animals with dignity and respect.

Equest Center staff may require ANY VOLUNTEER (regardless of age or prior approval) to be accompanied by a parent in order to continue volunteering if problems arise.

## **What to expect:**

The first time you volunteer at Equest, please introduce yourself to either the lead volunteer or instructor. We will then give you instructions on how you can best help for that day or evening. Once you are familiar with how the program runs, you will find yourself jumping in and helping like it's routine!

The Management team, Instructors, Lead Volunteers and Barn Staff have their pictures up near the entrance to the office in hopes that they will be easier to recognize.

## **Management Staff:**

Kathy Ryan: Executive Director  
Jackie Najdowski: Office Manager  
Kelly Alcock: Client Program Coordinator  
Sara Mulder: Development Coordinator  
Marci DeVries: Equine Program Coordinator  
Megan Krausman: Volunteer Coordinator  
Kaitra Wilkins/Angelica Sawyer: Barn Manager

## **Lead Volunteers:**

Lead volunteers are those individuals chosen and trained by the Equest Center staff to assist the instructor on duty during lesson times. Lead volunteers are responsible for facilitating the tacking and grooming of horses for class, maintaining order in the barn during lesson times, and the leading, directing and assigning of volunteers for duties in the barn or teaching arena. If you are looking for something to do or have a question, ask a lead volunteer! We ask that you do not go to other staff members because they may not know what is happening with the classes. If you are interested in training to be a lead volunteer, please ask the Volunteer Coordinator.

Monday AM: Joan Lenon    Tuesday AM: Brenda Perkins  
Monday PM: Lisa Riley    Tuesday PM: Abby Tworek

Wednesday AM: Janice Barnes  
Wednesday PM: Steph Tol

Thursday AM: Brenda Perkins  
Thursday PM: Sara Mulder

## **Sign in:**

The volunteer sign-in sheet is located at the Volunteer Board by the arena. Please sign in and out when you are here. The tracking of volunteer hours is used for grant-writing purposes, as well as for various volunteer awards be given at the end of the year.

## **Name Tags:**

We kindly ask that you wear your name tag when volunteering to help the lead volunteers, instructors, and other volunteers better identify you. Name tags can be found near the volunteer board. Your tag can be left at Equest when you are finished for the day. If you are a new volunteer, make a note by your name on the sign-up sheet and a new name tag will be made shortly.

## **Attire:**

Correct shoes are required for work around the horses (safety rule #6). We ask that for your own safety, you refrain from wearing dangling jewelry, bracelets and necklaces. In warmer months, shorts and tops are okay as long as they are an appropriate length. Remember to wear sunscreen and bug spray! In colder months, layering your clothing is best as the barn is cold and the arena is heated to about 60 degrees.

## **Class Times:**

Class times vary throughout the year. All class time schedules are posted on the volunteer bulletin board and are handed out at orientations. Generally, in the fall, winter and spring, classes are held Tuesday through Thursday days and Monday through Friday evenings. Equest does not run regularly scheduled classes during the month of August for summer respite and we follow the Rockford Public School schedule for all holiday breaks.

Equest Center riding sessions are generally seven weeks in length. We schedule one week off between sessions for horse respite. Scheduled breaks are posted one week in advance as a reminder to our riders and volunteers. There are many, many different situations that arise where volunteers are needed at the center BESIDES class time. If a volunteer/volunteer group is coming to help with set up, clean up, barn work, special projects, Horses & Hands, etc... they may only be there when an Equest Staff member is present.

## **Cancellations:**

Equest Center cancels classes during severe weather. In the winter months, cancellations are posted on TV and on our Facebook page. During the warmer months, we will cancel classes for severe thunderstorm warning, tornado warnings, and if the heat index is 90+. If a thunderstorm erupts during class, we must stop the class and dismount for safety reasons.

Instructors will do their best to contact all volunteers before they leave their homes if classes are cancelled.

**Please be sure to register your UP TO DATE phone/text/email information with our Volunteer Coordinator so that we may send you direct information as quickly as possible.**

If you are unable to come to class, please call and leave a message on the voice mail system or let the Volunteer Coordinator know that you will not be available to volunteer.

## **Promptness and Reliability:**

We ask that all our volunteers arrive at least 15 minutes before a scheduled class time and volunteer at least once a week for two hours per session. Your consistency helps our organization deliver the highest quality program to our riders. If you are unable to volunteer due to illness or other reasons, please call the Center or contact the Volunteer Coordinator so that we may secure a replacement. In many cases, your attendance is critical for a client's safety during a lesson.

## Volunteer Roles

### Leader:

You must be at least 14 years of age or older. As a leader during a therapy class your only responsibility is the horse. You must pay careful attention to what the instructor says during class, for cues for turning the horse around, halting and games. **In regard to our riders, we have a policy that we (volunteers and all staff at Equest) are NOT able to assist an client in toileting, administering of medication and do not go with them alone in the bathroom . They must have parents/guardians there before, during and after their ride to assist with that**

- **How to lead a horse:** The proper position for leading a horse is to stand on the left side of the horse at the throatlatch (between his shoulder and eye). Hold the clasp end of the lead rope in your right hand (closest to the horse's halter) to lead. The slack of the lead rope should be folded in your left hand. **DO NOT** let the end of the lead rope drag on the ground or wrap the lead rope around your hand at any time.
- **Do not** drag the horse or let the horse drag you. A quick pull and release on the lead rope is the most effective way to get a horse to cooperate. Use voice commands such as "whoa" (stop), "walk on", and "trot" communicate as well.
- Spacing while leading the horses in the arena is very important. Generally, you should be at least two horse lengths away from the horse in front of you. If you find yourself too close, it is recommended to walk a small circle towards the center of the arena and then continue on. **ALWAYS** inform your side walkers that you intend to make a small circle for spacing between the animals so that they can prepare the rider for the change in direction and balancing.
- At the mounting block and ramp: If you are to lead a horse to the mounting block/ramp, pay close attention to the instructor's directions on where to position the horse. You'll want to position the horse as close as possible to the side of the ramp on which the student is mounting. When leaving the mounting area, pay special attention to any tack or the student's feet in the stirrups to ensure nothing gets caught on a railing during departure.
- Your responsibility while the rider is mounting is to keep the horse as quiet as possible. Stand slightly off to the right at the head of the horse. Do not hold the halter unless told to do so by the instructor. If you are having horse trouble, alert the instructor. It is better to avoid a potential problem than not say anything.
- Do not attempt to help the student mount the horse. The instructor will do all of the mounting unless the rider is instructed to go ahead without help.



The correct way to hold a horse at the mounting block.



The correct way to lead a horse. Your body on the left side, between the horse's head and shoulder. Clasp of lead rope in right hand, with the slack of the rope in the left hand. Slack should never be wrapped around your hand.

- Once the lesson is underway, please pay close attention to the instructor. Try as much as possible not to interfere with the rider's attention on the instructor. Many of our riders are easily distracted and may often initiate conversation; please try to direct the student's focus back on the lesson when appropriate. Unless you are told to

help give specific direction to the rider by the instructor, please do not instruct the client to move or to say anything. Too many voices may disrupt our client's concentration.

- If another horse is having trouble in the arena, stop your horse. Stay stopped until the instructor gives permission to walk on.
- If your horse is having problems... remain calm. If you cannot control your horse, ask for an emergency safety dismount.
- Should a horse get loose during class, every leader in the ring must halt and stay with their horse. The instructor will catch the loose horse.
- If there is a fall, the leader is to remain with the horse. Do not let the horse go to assist a fallen rider. The instructor will take over to help a rider down.
- Horses communicate with body language. Please refer to the section of this manual on "horse sense" for cues on how to interpret horse language.

### Side walker:

You must be at least 14 years of age. In regard to our riders, we have a policy that we (volunteers and all staff at Equest) are NOT able to assist an client in toileting, administering of medication and do not go with them alone in the bathroom . They are to have parents/guardians there before, during and after their ride to assist with that

As a side walker, your only responsibility is the safety of the client and making sure that they stay centered on the horse.

- The proper position for a side walker is parallel to the rider's leg about 8-10 inches away from the horse and rider. Do not walk too far behind the rider or too far in front of the rider as you will not be able to be effective if there is a situation where the rider becomes unbalanced. If you walk too far behind the rider, you are also putting yourself at risk of being in one of the danger zones of the horse.



The thigh hold method of stabilizing a rider. Rider sitting astride and rider sitting sideways with a surcingle.

- Please keep conversation to a minimum and redirect the student's attention back to the instructor. In many cases, too many voices, *even if the student initiates conversation*, is an "over stimulation" and can have negative effects on the student after they leave the center.
- Thigh hold: The instructor may ask the side walkers to use a "thigh hold" method of stabilizing the rider. Using your arm closest to the rider, place your forearm across the top of the rider's thigh and hold the surcingle handle with your hand. The pressure of your forearm will stabilize the rider during walking or trotting.
- At the walk or trot, if the rider starts to slip, please tell the leader to halt the horse and ask the rider to try and center themselves. If they are unable, you may assist the rider by gently pulling them towards the center. **DO NOT** push the rider unless absolutely necessary.
- Accidents, although infrequent, can and do happen. Please do not underestimate the importance of paying attention to the rider, no matter how comfortable you have become in your role as a side walker.

- **Emergency Dismount/Safety Dismount:** If the leader or instructor asks for an emergency dismount, the side walker that is on the side of the horse closes to the center of the arena (unless told otherwise by the instructor) will wrap their arms around the rider's waist and ask the rider to clear their feet from the stirrups (if applicable). If the rider is unable to communicate, the other side walker should clear the rider's feet on that side. The rider is then pulled off the horse and moved to safety.
- **Know your limitations.** If you feel unable to safely dismount a person, please inform the instructor so that they may pair you with a more suitable client.

## Emergencies in brief:

The leader takes control of the horse. One side walker stays with the rider at all times. At the instructor's request, the other side walker may call 911 from the office or barn phone, if the need arises.

In the case of a "rider down" situation, all horses in the arena must halt. **The instructor is the only individual responsible for assisting the fallen rider.** All instructors at the Equest Center are trained and certified in CPR and First Aid from the American Red Cross and should be the only individuals assisting a rider down.

## Tacking, Grooming and Barn Maintenance:

Many individuals who are unable to help in the arena during class are able to help groom and tack the horses as well as participate in the daily cleaning and maintenance of the barn.

## Pasture Safety, Tacking and Grooming:

It is helpful to become familiar with pasture safety guidelines, tack, and grooming tools, as well as the anatomy of the horse before you begin working with the animals in the barn.

## Pasture Safety:

When putting a horse into a pasture, please follow these steps:

1. Assess the situation in the pasture. Are there horses crowding the gate? Is it safe to enter?
  - a. If needed, shoo the horses away if they are crowding the gate. Please ask for assistance if you are unable to do so on your own.
2. Unlatch the gate and open it inwards so that the horses are pushed inside the pasture cannot leave the pasture.
3. Turn the horse around so that you and the horse are facing the gate.
4. Close the gate and ensure that it latches before taking the halter off the horse.

When taking a horse out of a pasture, please follow these steps:

1. Grab the halter from the gate and enter the pasture by pushing the gate inwards.
2. Ensure that the gate is latched before you go to grab a horse.
3. Once you have the halter on the horse, you may lead them out of the pasture by opening the gate inwards. Turn to face the gate once you and the horse are outside the pasture and promptly shut and latch the gate behind you.

If a horse gets loose, please follow these steps:

1. Do not panic! If there are classes going on, panicking can lead to an unsafe environment for the rider and horses.
2. If you are able, immediately go and shut the brown and red gates on either side of the barn.
3. Calmly find a staff member or another volunteer that will be able to assist you in getting the horses back into the pasture.

All of the Equest Center horses have their own tack boxes with their name on it, located in the tack room. Generally, the boxes contain the following:

- **Currycomb:** usually made of rubber or plastic, round or oval in shape with "teeth" or a serrated type of edge. To use correctly, place on the body of the horse and rub in circular motions across the body. It is used to loosen and remove caked-on dirt, mud and shedding hair from the horse.
- **Body Brush:** usually used after the currycomb to remove loose dust and hair. This is a medium to soft bristled brush. Always brush the hair in the direction it grows.
- **Mane comb/brush:** Looks just like our human equivalents, used to brush the mane and tail.
- **Hoof pick:** Small hand held pick with a curved metal end. Used to clean dirt and debris out of the horse's foot.

## **Grooming a horse:**

Make sure horse is properly secured in cross ties.

Gather all your tools and place them to one side, so that they will not be in the way of others walking through the area.

For the comfort and safety of the horses and the volunteers, please limit to 2 individuals grooming a horse at a time.

Pick up the horse's foot and using the hoof pick, remove any dirt, stones, etc. that may be lodged in the hoof with the point of the pick. Be careful not to dig too deeply or hard in the area called the frog (v-shaped area near center of foot), although the deeper "grooves" on either side of the frog should be cleaned thoroughly. Tell an instructor if you suspect any problems with a horse's foot.

Curry the horse's coat with currycomb and finish with a body brush. Start at the neck and shoulder and work back towards the tail. It helps to talk to the horse in a calm and soothing manner so they are aware of where you are, especially when you are near the hindquarters and tail.

Mane and tail: horse hair is coarser than human hair. When brushing the tail, hold it in one hand and brush, while standing OFF TO ONE SIDE (not directly behind). Only in special situations do we brush the mane and tail. If the mane or tail are brushed too often, the hair tends to fall out.

## **Helpful tips:**

Do not use quick, jerking or excessive movements around horses.

Be mindful of a horse's sensitive areas: face, flanks, girth area, tummy, mane and tail. Think about how you would like to be groomed or touched and apply this to the horse. **Remember:** horses can feel a tiny insect alighting anywhere on their bodies... for large animals they are very sensitive creatures!

**DO NOT** go underneath a horse's belly or neck/chest. A horse's first instinct is to go forward when startled, no matter if you are in the way of that.

**Do not** stand directly in front of a horse in the crossties or let the horses rub you with their heads. Many horses would love to use you as a scratching post and a nudge from a 1200 lb animal is enough to knock you down or break a bone. It may seem cute or affectionate if a horse wants to nudge you, but please be mindful that the very same horse, if allowed to have that habit, will not be able to discriminate between you and a child/child with a disability walking with crutches or a walker. If a horse wants to rub you with its head, simply move out of its range or push its head away out of your space. You may have to repeat this as horses are great "negotiators" of what they want and will test you to see if you "mean it."

## Tacking up:

A list of class times, riders, horses and their tack is posted on a clipboard outside the feed room. Please refer to it for tacking instructions. If you have tacking concerns or questions, please ask the lead volunteer or instructor.

### Commonly used tack:

- **Surcingle:** Two or one-handed piece of equipment with foot loops on both sides or, in some cases, no foot loops. A surcingle is positioned on the horse's back behind the withers, but not on top of the shoulders. A surcingle is used for most therapeutic horseback riding clients when they are beginning therapy because it allows the rider the most flexibility and mobility on the horse.
- **Western saddle:** Saddle with which most people associate riding. Large, deep leather seat, saddle horn, pommel and long stirrups. Equest Center has a wide range of sizes for horses and riders
- **English saddle:** Saddle that is smaller in size, shape and weight. Again, Equest Center has a wide range of both sizes and types for different disciplines.
- **Bridle:** Harness for the head with several leather straps, a bit and reins.
- **Reins:** At Equest, we typically use rainbow reins. They are colored rubber reins that attach to the bit or on a halter for steering and controlling the horse.
- **Bit:** Generally, we use a snaffle or a gentle curb bit for our horses. Both are made of metal that is jointed in the middle and goes into the horse's mouth. The rings on either side of the mouthpiece attach to the bridle and the reins. In the winter, we hold the bits in our hands for about 5 minutes to warm them up before placing them in the horse's mouths.
- **Halter:** Made of nylon or leather, the halter is like a head collar that the horse wears while out in the pasture or being led in class. The lead rope is normally clipped on to a metal ring at the back of the noseband when the horse is led. Two metal rings on the cheek pieces of the halters are used when securing the horse in the crossties.
- **Rope halter:** Similar to the halter and is put on underneath a halter or bridle. An effective tool used to lead a horse in classes that is made of a strong, fibrous material that can be adjusted to the size of the horse's face.
- **Western saddle pad:** Thick, large, square and normally used under either a surcingle for therapeutic riding or a western saddle.
- **Western built-up, cut-back saddle pad:** Similar in size, shape and thickness as the normal Western pad, but has built-up padding in shoulder area and a cut in the top for greater protection of the horse's wither area.
- **English pad:** Smaller and lighter weight than the Western pad. Usually, but not always, similar in shape to the English saddle. Made of cotton or fleece.
- **Girth:** Attaches to the saddle by buckles or a latigo, fastens underneath the horse to the other side of the saddle by either buckles or a latigo. When tacking horses in the crosstie area, girths are tightened only to make sure the saddle or surcingle doesn't fall off ("snug"). When the horse goes into the arena for class, the instructor will tighten the girth securely.
- **Lead rope:** Usually made of cotton or nylon. Used to lead the horse anywhere in the barn, arena or property. Do not let the lead rope drag on the ground or hang from the halter on the ground when the horse is in crossties. If a horse steps on their lead rope, they may become frightened and hard to handle. It's best to loosely tie the slack end of the lead rope around the horse's neck when they are in crossties.
- **Shims and Neoprene Pads:** These are special pads that are made of foamy material. They help the saddle to fit the horse in a more comfortable way.

## Important notes on tacking up:

- All saddles and surcingles use a girth strap to hold them onto the horse. When tightening the girth on any form of tack, please do so in a slow and gentle manner (**ONE HOLE AT A TIME**). Some of the horses here at Equest Center are “girthy”, meaning they pin their ears, threaten to bite and sometimes threaten to kick when their tack is being girthed. Being mindful of this is the best way to deal with the animal when it is uncomfortable. In many cases, it is a problem that came with the horse when it came to our center. The instructors will always recheck the girth and tighten as needed before a rider mounts.
- Do not yell at, slap, kick or hit an animal that acts “girthy”. Please inform an instructor or lead volunteer if you are uncomfortable working with an animal that acts aggressive or report any incidents that seem unusual or out of character for an animal you work with on an ongoing basis.
- Always check to make sure tack is properly fitted. If you **are unsure, please ask a lead volunteer or instructor**. If you find damaged or broken tack please inform the instructor on duty so that it does not get used.
- Please put away all tack and grooming equipment after you are finished with it.

## Barn Maintenance:

Because it is a home to our therapy animals as well as a teaching facility, we strive to keep the Equest Center property clean and well maintained at all times. There is always an area that needs tidying up or a floor to be swept. The farm is a large area with many different areas to be maintained. Lead volunteers and the instructor on duty are in charge of making sure all barn duties are completed at the end of each night of lessons. Please check with them if you are looking for something to do. If you are feeling particularly creative, go to them with your ideas on getting things done or any special projects you see that we may have overlooked.

- There are some volunteers who feel that working with the animals and clients is not appropriate for them for whatever reason, but still enjoy the opportunity to volunteer by helping out with farm maintenance. If you would like to volunteer your services in this way, please speak with the Volunteer Coordinator about suitable choices.
- We also have opportunities to volunteer your time at the welcome center desk. This would include answering phones, greeting riders and volunteers, and keeping the welcome center picked up and clean.

## Days of Service:

On many occasions throughout the year, we are fortunate to have different groups from the community participate in a Day of Service for our organization. If you have a group that would like to do a one-time service project, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator.

## Horse Sense:

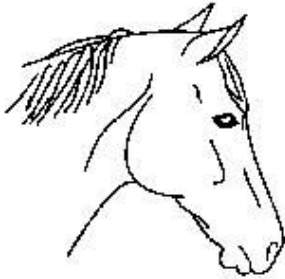
Benjamin Franklin once said, “The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man”. Many people who work with the horses during their time here at Equest say that the bonds made with these special animals is both unique and therapeutic even if they are only brushing and grooming them for class.

Horses do have a “sixth sense” when evaluating the disposition of those around them. They can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for their gentle and sensitive response to a rider. At times, there may exist a personality conflict between horses and handlers. It is important to tell the instructor or lead volunteer if you are having a difficult time handling a particular horse. Additionally, do not be embarrassed to tell an instructor that a horse that acts “strong” might intimidate you. It is better to work with a horse that you are compatible with than risk an accident by putting yourself in an uncomfortable situation.

In addition to understanding the horse’s “sixth sense”, we need to appreciate and increase our awareness of the horse’s lifestyle and the way they use body language to communicate. This will assist us in responding appropriately to the horse’s reactions to situations and its behavior.

## Reading a Horse's Ears

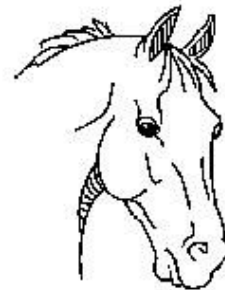
The horse's ears and actions are the key to his emotions. He can tell you what he is paying attention to and how he feels by the way he uses his ears and the way he acts. Following are some tips to his emotions.



**Ears forward but relaxed**  
interested in what's  
in front of him



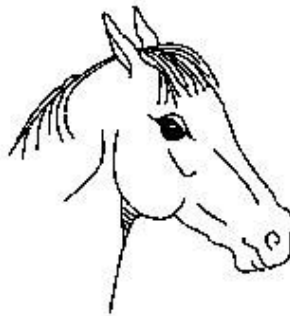
**Ears turned back but relaxed**  
listening to his rider  
or what's behind him



**Ears pointed stiffly forward**  
alarmed or nervous about what's  
ahead. Looking out for danger



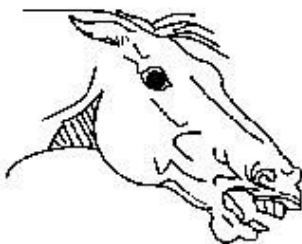
**Ears pointed left and right**  
relaxed, paying attention  
to the scenery on both sides.



**Ears stiffly back**  
annoyed or worried about what's  
behind him; might kick if annoyed.



**Droopy ears**  
calm and resting,  
horse may be dozing.



**Ears flattened against neck**  
violently angry, in a fighting mood.  
May fight, bite or kick.

### OTHER SIGNS YOU SHOULD NOTICE ARE:

- **Tucking the tail down tightly.**  
Danger to the rear.  
Horse may bolt, buck or kick.  
Watch out if ears are flattened too!
- **Switching the tail.**  
Annoyance and irritation:
  - at biting flies, stinging insects or tickling
  - bothersome actions of a rider or another horse.
- **Droopy ears and resting one hind leg on toe.**  
Calm and resting, horse may be dozing.  
Don't wake him up by startling him!
- **Wrinkling up the face and swinging the head.**  
Threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse.  
Watch out for biting or kicking.

**Figure 1: Reading a horse's ears**

## **Flight as Natural Instinct:**

Horses would rather run away from perceived danger than turn and face it. A horse's sense of hearing is thought to be so acute that "hearing and not seeing" is often the cause of his fright/flight response.

What this means:

- A sudden movement or noise may cause the horse to "spook" or try to flee. They might try to bolt sideways or run forwards.
- Remain calm and in control. Speak to the horse in a reassuring manner.
- A horse may get frightened in the crossties or by being held/tied too tightly and he will try to "escape" by pulling back, often until something gives – usually his halter or the cross ties. The best way to handle this is to relax your hold on him or untie him quickly and calmly and he will relax. The cross-ties are quick-release and can be pulled off of the rings in emergencies.
- Horses are herd animals. If a horse gets loose, often times they will run back to the herd for safety. In an arena setting this could be you (if there are no other horses in the arena) or the other horses in the arena.

Most horses in the therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee and are chosen for this reason. The horse may look to you for reassurance. It is helpful if the volunteer remains calm and talks to the horse in a soothing voice.

Please see the end pages for illustrations on basic horse anatomy, emotions and indications to temperament.

## **Ground Manners:**

Ground-work is a term used to describe working with a horse on the ground. Equest Center horses are chosen, in part, for their proper manners on the ground. This means being safe for most people to handle, given the proper instruction.

Consistency of handling is the most important part of creating good ground manners in horses. The nature of the program at Equest means that horses are handled by many different individuals daily. We ask that if you have trouble with a horse on the ground that you please approach a staff member for the correct way to handle a difficult animal.

## **One Final Note:**

Did you know that many Equest Center clients, especially in the beginning stages of their riding, simply could not participate without the assistance of volunteers? Some need as many as three volunteers working together at one time just to ride for a few minutes around the arena. That can mean a need of over 12 volunteers alone just for one thirty-minute therapy class.

Equest Center volunteers collectively donate over 500 hours per month to help the program run. This includes everything from helping in the arena for class, stacking bales of hay in the pole barn, sweeping the aisle ways, and even filling water buckets on a daily basis. We serve over 170 clients per week year-round with a waiting list for services. That's a lot of work!

Thank You! You are the lifeblood of this program. Without you there would be no Equest Center! Our clients would not receive the therapy they need if it were not for your generosity of your time and energy.

We try to show our gratitude once a session with scheduled volunteer appreciation parties, as well as awards for Volunteer of the Year at the annual Christmas Horse Show. Please join us for these events!

Thank you again!

**The Staff at Equest Center for Therapeutic Riding, Inc.**

*"I don't know what your destiny will be,  
but one thing I do know: the only ones among  
you who will be really happy are those who  
have sought and found how to serve."*

**-Albert Schweitzer**

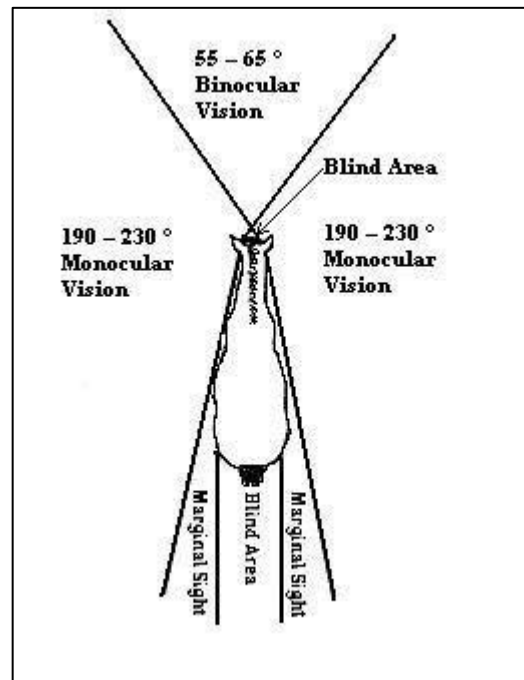


Figure 2: Breakdown of a horse's vision

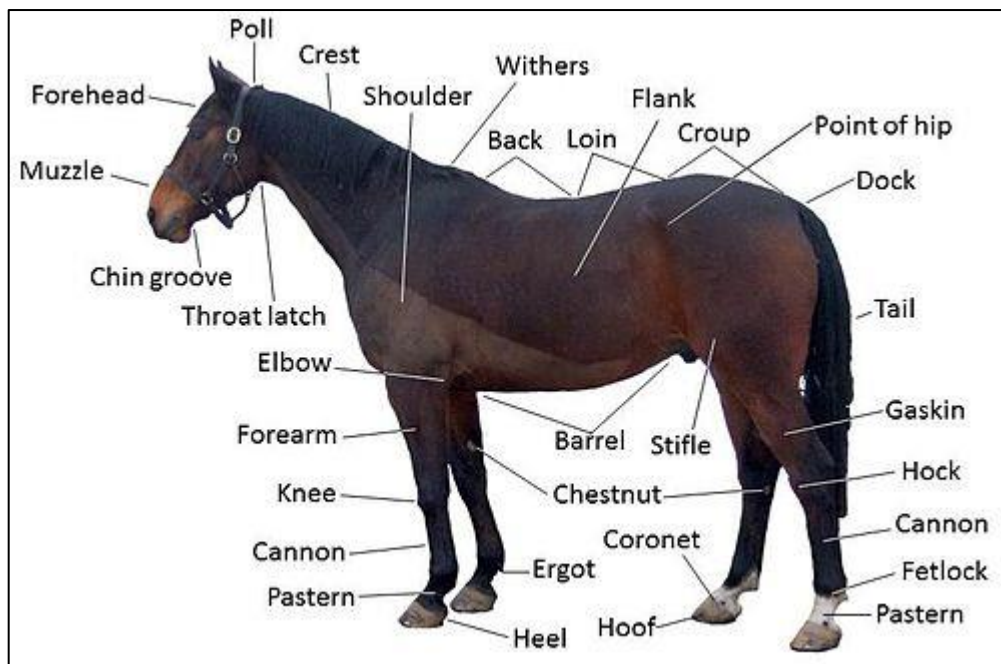


Figure 3: Basic anatomy of a horse