

Maryland Therapeutic Riding

Volunteer Training Manual



Updated 9/2009



Welcome!

Thank you for the interest you have shown in the MTR Program. We are very glad to see you! Our program is very volunteer intensive. We could not provide a high quality program without you and we rely on you to help our program operate as safely as possible.

Safety is our first priority!

You are in good company! Most of our volunteers:

- Love and Admire horses
- Enjoy working with people with disabilities or special needs and/or
- Have a strong desire to help others

It is very exciting to watch students develop their riding skills and become physically stronger over time, while achieving improved self-esteem and confidence.

We hope your experience at MTR will bring you satisfaction, personal growth and fulfillment.

You are integral to our success as a team. Please feel free to share your opinions and questions with us to help our volunteer program an enriching experience for you.

“Thank you” is just not enough to express our appreciation!



The History of MTR

Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Incorporated (MTR) was founded in May 1996 as a non-profit corporation for the purpose of providing physical, psychological and social rehabilitation to individuals with disabilities and their families through a high quality horseback riding program.

Therapeutic riding applies the majesty, sensitivity, and physical attributes of a horse to the task of treating an individual with disabilities.

1. Physically, the motion of riding produces a 3-dimensional movement that:

- strengthen muscles
- improves balance
- moves joints
- evokes results like no other activity

2. Psychologically, therapeutic riding improves:

- self-esteem
- self-confidence

MTR is a premier accredited member center of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). Currently, there are over 700 NARHA Centers in the USA and hundreds more internationally, particularly in Europe. Although there are several other therapeutic riding programs in Maryland none are located in the growing area east of the Baltimore and Washington metropolis on the western shore of the Bay.

Since its inception, MTR has been successful in meeting its therapeutic objectives. Additionally, it has earned wide-spread community support and recognition.

Future plans include:

- Education center
- Acquire additional therapy horses
- Continued growth in current programs and development of new programs
- Become a BHS approved center



The Benefits of MTR

Therapeutic Riding is a growing and widely accepted treatment technique for rehabilitating a wide range of disabilities.

Some disabilities served:

- cerebral palsy
- spina bifida
- neuromuscular
- post traumatic brain injury
- cognitive limitations
- emotional disabilities
- autism
- attention deficit disorder

Several health professions, including Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology and Psychology have developed special forms of treatment that combines traditional techniques with the unique benefits achieved using a horse. These include:

- Classic Hippotherapy
- Hippotherapy
- Development Riding Therapy
- Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy

Benefits of Therapeutic Riding include:

- It is Therapeutic, not merely recreational
- Increases awareness of the disabled riders “actual” abilities
- It is educational, with training in horsemanship, terminology and practice
- Improves:
 - muscle coordination
 - strength
 - posture
 - motor skills
 - self-confidence
 - self-concept
 - social skills
 - respiratory development



The MTR Program Goals

The MTR program has established (5) primary goals:

1. To give individuals with disabilities of all ages the opportunity to ride safely, either with assistance or independently.
2. To teach basic skills of stable management.
3. To use the natural movement of the horse and exercise to improve the rider's muscle strength and tone, balance, coordination and cognition.
4. To increase the rider's self-confidence, social skills, and self-esteem.
5. To promote family and peer riding with the disabled individual.

MTR Volunteer Opportunities

A wide variety of opportunities exist for MTR volunteers. Many of these opportunities are described below:

- Volunteer must be at least 14 years old to volunteer due to insurance reasons.
- Horse leaders and side walkers assist with Therapeutic Riding & Hippotherapy sessions. They are in direct contact with the horse and rider and assist in maintaining a safe environment.
- Stable Assistants are needed to help with the care, grooming and tacking of the horses and to perform routine barn chores.
- Committee members are needed to help with fundraising, public relations, event planning, volunteer coordination and marketing.
- Administrative personnel are needed to perform a variety of office tasks.

We will match your skills and interests to our program's needs. Every job is essential and helps ensure that MTR provides high quality, safe, and therapeutic services for its clients.

Qualities of an MTR Volunteer

- Reliable
- Empathetic
- Punctual
- Common sense
- Patient
- Alert
- Physically fit
- Positive attitude



Basic Guidelines for Volunteers

Scheduling

WE COUNT ON YOU!!!! Without volunteers we cannot allow the students to ride! Please arrive 15-30 minutes prior to your scheduled volunteer time.

Please let us know if you cannot make your scheduled time or have any schedule changes call 410-923-1187. We know emergencies happen; please try your best to notify us ahead of time to allow us to find a substitute when necessary.

Class Cancellations

From time to time students or MTR will have to cancel a lesson. In the event of a cancellation we will do our best to notify you. If you have questions about cancellations call 410-923-1187.

Session Schedule

Each session runs for a duration of 8-weeks, with a make-up week at the end. We ask that you commit to a day/time for the full session, this helps us to ensure we have the support necessary and provide some consistency for the students. If this is not possible, you may work with the volunteer coordinator to work out a schedule to benefit you as well the needs of MTR. The smooth operation of our program depends on the commitment and reliability of our volunteers.

Dress Code

DRESS FOR THE WEATHER!!

All volunteers must wear protective footwear, a leather boot is recommended or another close-toed shoe that will not hold sand from the arena. Any type of sandal or open-toed shoe is not permitted!

Please respect the following guidelines:

- No open-toed shoes of any style
- No dangling jewelry
- No perfume (attracts bugs/some participants may have allergies)
- No tank tops/halter tops/tube tops
- Modest shorts are permitted, but not recommended due to biting insects
- No obscene logos

Please keep in mind MTR is a professional organization and may often have unannounced visits or media opportunities. Please dress comfortably yet sensibly. If you are interested in purchasing MTR logo merchandise, we do have order forms available in the office.



Food & Water

Please do not rely on MTR providing refreshments, we will try at times to have water and snacks available but cannot guarantee it. You are welcome to bring food and drinks with you, we do have a refrigerator that you are welcome to use. Please label items with your name and date.

Teamwork

In lessons, you will be assigned to work with a team consisting of the:

- Horse
- Rider
- Leader
- Side-walkers (1 or 2)
- Instructor

We like to see these teams work harmoniously and smoothly for the benefit of the rider. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason with your team, please discuss this with your instructor or MTR staff member. We can almost always find a satisfactory solution!

There may be many opportunities to talk socially with your rider and you are encouraged to do so. However, please do not disrupt the lesson. Many student's have trouble concentrating so please take care not to interrupt the direct line of focus between rider and instructor.

There may be times when your rider cannot focus on anyone far away and you might have to relay information from the instructor. Team members need to communicate with each other. Let your team know if you need to halt, change direction, cut across the arena or proceed to the center of the arena.

At MTR we like to promote and foster independence in our riders. We try to not do anything for them that they can do for themselves, on or off the horse. Our families and students appreciate this policy. If students need help, then by all means help them, but also give them a chance to do as much as they can themselves! This will take judgment on your part as well as sensitivity regarding each student's particular needs. We are not saying to compromise safety, but when it is practical, give each student the opportunity to grow, learn and move toward the greatest level of independence they can achieve as individuals.

Two guidelines to follow are ensuring SAFETY & promoting INDEPENDENCE of the student!



Volunteer Routine

- Each time you arrive; please make sure to sign in by placing a check mark by your name on the schedule.
- We are aware that most volunteers do want to assist with lessons, and we will do our best to allow this opportunity – we ask you to please be flexible and understanding that our daily schedule does not always go as planned and may have rider cancellations as well as other work we need help completing around the farm that you may be asked to assist with.
- You will need to check in with the barn assistant for your shift or staff member for your job duties that day. Please follow the directions of the instructor while in a lesson.
- Always ask if you are unsure of anything or do not feel comfortable completing a task.
- Before you leave, please record your total amount of hours volunteered.

Responsibilities

Horse Leader

The leader is responsible for maintaining control of the horse, but also needs to stay tuned in to the rest of the TEAM. Pay attention to safety at all times.

Position:

- Walk on the left hand side of the horse's head- between the horse's head & shoulder
- Lay the loose end of the lead rope across the palm of your hand
- Hold the rope lightly with your right hand about 6 inches from snap- leave a little slack in the rope
- Allow the horse to move head freely up and down as they walk- DO NOT HANG ON THE LEAD ROPE. This rhythmical movement starts at the head and moves all the way down the horse's spine- this movement is what makes horseback riding therapeutic. If the leader interferes with the horse's head the body stiffens up and there is no benefit from the horse's movement. Also, if you continuously constrict the movement of the horse's head they may become increasingly annoyed.
- Keep your attention focused ahead of you
- Do not attempt to drag the horse, don't look him right in the eye – look forward in the direction of your movement.
- Use your voice "walk-on" or "whoa" instead of pulling on the lead rope
- During times a horse must stand still, remain relaxed and in front of them. Avoid clamping down on their head, this will cause tension and they may react by backing away from you.



Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc. Volunteer Training Manual

- If there is ever a problem with the horse you are working with, please bring it to our attention.

Side-Walkers

The responsibility of the side-walker is to help ensure safety of the rider throughout the lesson. You may be asked to provide physical support, as well as assist them in completing tasks when they need assistance.

The side-walker will:

- Walk right beside the rider's lower leg, close enough to provide stability when needed.
- Never leave your position next to the rider. If you need to stop for any reason the whole team stops with you. Inform the instructor if you cannot continue your role of sidewalker for any reason.
- Reinforce what the instructor says and make sure the rider hears and understands what the instructor is asking.
- You may need to encourage, calm, reassure or divert the rider's attention to the instructor, be helpful but do not interfere.
- Walk or run in position to provide physical support as necessary
- Be constantly alert to the possible need of instantaneous help
- Remind instructor if you need to change sides in case your arms get tired
- Keep you eyes on the rider and in the direction you are going.
- DO NOT interfere with the horse by petting, poking, leaning or bumping. Allow the leader to do the job of moving the horse forward.
- When a rider requires only one side-walker, walk on the right unless otherwise directed. This puts a volunteer on either side of the horse for security.

We all learn from our mistakes, so do our riders. We strive to achieve independency in our riders but we also need to protect them against dangerous situations.

Thigh-Hold

This is the most common support for riders who need stabilizing support, the side-walkers may be asked to use a thigh-hold.

With the arm that is nearest the rider, reach up and grip the front edge or flap of the saddle in a spot that will put your lower arm across the rider's thigh, apply light pressure to provide stability but not enough pressure to cause discomfort.

Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc. Volunteer Training Manual



Some riders who do not need the thigh-hold during the walk may need it at the trot. The instructor will let you know when to use it.

If your rider is tactilely defensive, you should say, “I am going to put my arm on your leg.” The instructor will let you know if this is called for.

If your rider has difficulty steering or halting the horse with the reins, put your hand over the rider's hand to work the reins yourself. This allows the rider to learn by being a part of the process.

Combined Leader/Side-Walker

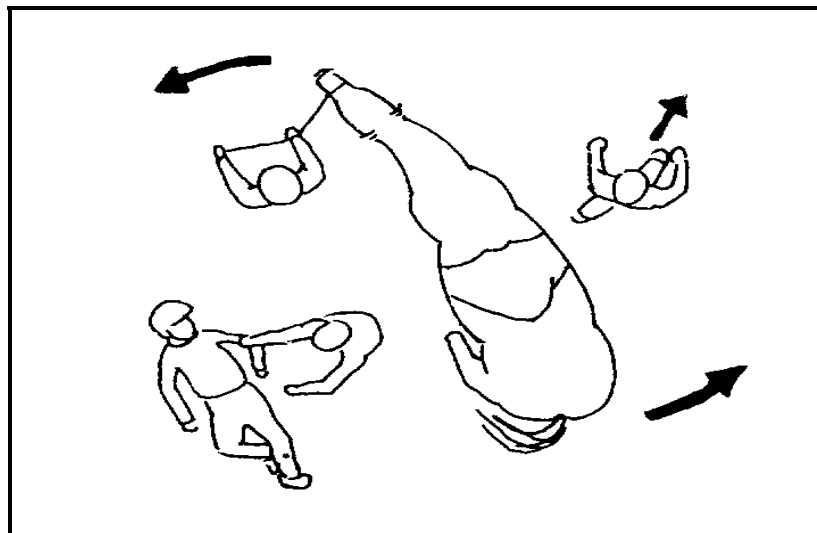
If your rider has good balance and has reached a certain level of riding competence, they may be assigned only one volunteer, a leader. Your responsibilities now include both the horse and rider. As the rider approaches independence on the horse, your job is to be reinforcement and a security resource.

Mounting and Dismounting

All mounting and dismounting is completed by the instructor, volunteer assistance will be called upon when necessary. As a leader, you will need to be aware of how to lead a horse into the ramp and to the block. Side-walkers are often needed to stand on the off side of the mount to help the rider bring the leg over the saddle or simply be an additional safety as they mount. During a dismount, leaders must stabilize the horse while the side-walkers may be needed to help position the rider for a safe dismount. As always, follow the directions given by the instructor. If the rider you are working with requires an emergency dismount, get the attention of the instructor and proceed with dismounting quickly and as safely as possible.

FALLS OFF THE HORSE

Although we do everything we can to prevent a fall, they do sometimes happen. If this should happen, the horse-leader immediately moves the horse away from the fallen rider. This will prevent the horse from accidentally stepping on the rider. The side-walker opposite the falling rider moves quickly away, allowing the horse an escape. The side-walker on the side of the fall may be able to assist the rider to the ground, however we realize that this is not possible at all times, please do not do anything that may cause additional injury to the rider or to yourself. The instructor will attend to the fallen rider.



When a problem arises, all other horses should halt where they are. Facing the other horses toward the accident will help them stay calm. Volunteers wait for instructions from the instructor.



Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc.

Volunteer Training Manual

MTR Farm Rules

These Rules have been created for the safety and well-being of the horses, participants, personnel and guests that are associated with Maryland Therapeutic Riding and all of its programs. Please follow the points below.....

General Barn Rules

1. Volunteers should always follow the direction of the supervising barn staff member
2. Excessive noise or commotion in or around the stable or riding arena is not permitted.
3. All children must be kept under the supervision of an adult at all times.
4. All riders, volunteers, & guests must sign a release of liability.
5. Appropriate footwear should be worn around the horses and farm. Sandals/open toed shoes not permitted.
6. The barn and grounds should be kept neat & orderly at all times. Unused equipment must be kept in its proper place. Aisle-ways should be kept clear of wheelbarrows, pitchforks, etc.
7. Manure should be removed from aisle way or around the stable immediately.
8. Visitors/ riders/ parents should not enter the barn unless they have the express permission of a staff member – they should be supervised at ALL times.

Horse Rules

1. No changes to horse's equipment, appearance, feeding or exercise program without the direct approval of the equine a facilities manager.
2. NO TREATS ARE PERMITTED TO BE GIVEN TO ANY HORSE AT ANY TIME!
3. If you see any injury or abnormality on any horse, please notify the equine and facilities manager or barn staff member immediately.
4. Do not enter stall or fields that contain horses unless you have been asked to do so by a member of staff.

Facility Rules

1. NO SMOKING anywhere onsite
2. No dogs anywhere on the property, especially not left unattended in cars.
3. Keep all automobiles in designated parking areas.
4. Keep all driveways clear at all times. Driveways are also used as fire lanes.
5. Keep all gates closed and latched unless otherwise specified.
6. Hay shed, pastures, stalls and farm equipment are out of bounds unless accompanied or invited by a staff member. Volunteers should follow the direction of the supervising barn staff member
7. If you notice a broken fence, gate or anything out of the ordinary on the grounds, notify the staff immediately
8. The tack room, medicine cabinet & offices must be locked when closing the barn at night.

THINK FIRST, AND THEN ACT! If you are not sure, ask a staff member – better to be safe than sorry!



Maryland Therapeutic Riding Emergency Procedures

Policies and procedures are put in place and expected to be followed for the safety and well-being of participants, staff and guests of any and all MTR programs and facilities.

When working with horses, as much as we care and love them, a human's life has to ALWAYS come first.

Fire procedure

In the event of a fire the following should take place.....

- 1) Evacuate the area of all persons
- 2) Staff will be in charge of evacuating horses
- 3) Put out fire with fire extinguisher if fire is smaller than a office trash can
- 4) If fire is not extinguished 911 should be called immediately
- 5) Riders should be dismounted and remain with their parents or care giver out of harms way.
- 6) Instructors/ therapists should direct volunteers to remove equipment from horses and turn out in field away from danger – equipment can be left where it is
- 7) All persons should congregate in the large outdoor sand arena (Arena A) at the “C” marker – no one should leave until staff person indicates it is safe to do so.
- 8) Barn Assistant should assist with volunteer head count
- 9) Instructors/ therapists should assist with rider head count
- 10) Staff person in charge should complete over all head count
- 11) All persons should remain in the large sand outdoor arena (Arena A) until the authorities have given other instructions

Tornado, Hurricane or Severe Thunderstorm



Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc. Volunteer Training Manual



We constantly check the weather forecast for our Crownsville location.

If a severe weather advisory has been put in place or there is an imminent threat, the following will take place.....

- 1) All lessons will be cancelled and volunteers will be advised NOT to come to the farm if there is sufficient time to do so
- 2) Any person that arrives at farm or is already present will be asked to leave if it is safe for travel
- 3) Riders that are mounted should dismount and remain with their care giver.
- 4) Instructors should direct volunteers to un-tack horses returning them to a safe place, such as their stall.
- 5) If it is not safe to move horses to their stall from riding arena – they should remain in the indoor arena, un-tacked if possible- a competent person should hold them.
- 6) Equipment can be left safely out of the way
- 7) Instructors should remain with volunteers and horses in the indoor arena – if they cannot return to barn
- 8) Barn Assistants and staff members will tend to the horses.
- 9) Horses will be un-tacked and provided with a safe place, such as their stall, with plenty of water and supply of hay.
- 10) Stall doors and windows should be closed, with at least one window cracked for ventilation
- 11) No-one should enter stalls for any reason
- 12) Lights and electrical equipment should be off and unplugged
- 13) The large barn doors can be closed
- 14) Humans should seek safety in buildings and possibly in doorways – until the threat has passed
- 15) Riding helmets can be worn if the need arises.



REMEMBER: When working with horses, as much as we care and love them, a human's life has to ALWAYS come first.

MTR, Risk Management

The following is a list of potential hazards that may be encountered in or around the property where MTR, Inc. operates

1. Mounting ramp
2. Manure Dumpster
3. Tractors & equipment in shed
4. Horses turned out into paddocks
 5. Bees
 6. Ticks
 7. Deer
8. Geese & Ducks
9. Water Troughs
10. Fire, Thunderstorm, Tornado, Hurricane
11. Rider Falls/ personal injury
12. Personnel issues
13. Equine injury
14. Loss of power and Loss of water
15. On-site traffic

MTR, Risk Management Response

These are general guidelines for responding to potential hazardous situations or accidents that might occur at MTR.

1. Mounting ramp is equipped with signs that warn individuals to stay off ramp unless supervised by an MTR staff member. Parents are encouraged to keep all children under close supervision at all times.
2. Manure dumpster is also equipped with a "Keep Out" sign.
3. Since children are to be kept under supervision at all times, they should not be in the tractor/ equipment shed. Operation of equipment such as tractor, truck, van, or power



Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc. Volunteer Training Manual



tools will be by authorized personnel only, designated by Equine and facilities manager or Program Manager.

4. No unauthorized individuals should enter the paddock or pasture areas. All gates are secured with chains & kept closed at all times. Signs are posted “Authorized Personnel Only”.
5. In case of BEE Sting, Benadryl is kept in the first Aid Kit, may be administered to adult or by a parent/ care giver to minors.
6. All participants should routinely check themselves & children for ticks after a visit to MTR. Horse should also be checked during grooming.
7. There are deer that commonly traverse the property. All volunteers & instructors should be aware that they could startle the horses. If they come through during a lesson, have horses stop & allow them to look while handler calms the horse & explains to rider what is happening. Be especially aware on the trail.
8. Geese & ducks commonly fly into or out of the area. This can also be disturbing to the horses. The same procedures will be followed as stated in #7.
9. Children should not be permitted to play in or near water troughs & should be under parental supervision when not participating in the riding program.
10. Thunderstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, & fire are addressed under “Emergency Procedures” & instructions are posted in the feed room/ tool room gate, in the volunteer office and the indoor arena. Procedures are also found in volunteer training manual.
11. In case of human injury, a staff member should assess the situation & determine what treatment is needed. Injured person should be kept calm & still. Do not attempt to move them except to remove them from immediate danger. First aid should be administered as needed by a certified person. Rider falls are addressed in the volunteer training & in the training manual. All instructors and therapists are qualified to deal with rider falls and injuries.
12. Personnel problems will be addressed by the Equine and Facilities Manager or Program Manager when possible. If any individuals exhibit unacceptable behavior, the staff member that is present should suggest that the person be finished for the day & the issue will be taken up by the Equine and facilities manager or Program Manager. If the individual refuses to leave & becomes belligerent, the staff member should call 911, or ask someone else to make the call. Any volunteers or staff members that appear to be



Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc. Volunteer Training Manual

under the influence of drugs or alcohol should not be allowed to assist & should be asked to go home for the day. Repeat offenders will be asked to discontinue their service to the organizations. ANY INDIVIDUALS THAT ARE OBSERVED ABUSING THE ANIMALS IN ANY WAY SHOULD BE ASKED TO DISCONTINUE THEIR SERVICE TO THE ORGANIZATION.

13. If a horse is injured or ill, Equine and Facilities Manager should be notified immediately. The staff member in charge must assess the situation & determine what immediate treatment is needed. A designated person should be assigned to assist the human participant's while the horse is tended to. Participants shall be provided with a suitable replacement horse where possible.
14. If the power fails there is emergency lighting in the indoor arena and main barn. Flashlights are provided. If the power fails, there will be a loss of water as well. There should always be water available in the water troughs and stall buckets. Extra water is stored on site for emergency use. Drinking water is NOT affected.
15. A rider drop off area is available away from the traffic area. Designated parking spaces for riders are provided. Parents, instructors, volunteers & staff are asked to keep children out of parking lot area. Speed limit signs must be observed and followed. Caution must be taken by all that drive a vehicle on the property.

**Policies and procedures are put in place and expected to be followed for the safety and well-being of participants, staff and guests of any and all MTR programs and facilities.
MTR thanks you for strictly abiding by the practices put in place.**



Dismissal Policy

While on the property of Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc. all personnel, staff, volunteers, riders, families, and guests are expected to abide by the rules and policies of MTR. Personnel problems will be addressed by the Equine and Facilities Manager or Program Manager. If any individual exhibits behavior deemed unacceptable, the staff member present will dismiss the individual for the remainder of the day and the issue will be taken up by the Equine and Facilities Manager or Program Manager. MTR maintains the right to ask any individual to discontinue their service to the program or to dismiss any individual from our program who is not following rules and policies.

We want to thank you now, for joining the MTR team! We honestly could not do it without the compassion and reliability of our volunteers!!