



**Angels on Horseback**

# **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

**VOLUNTEERS MAKE ANGELS ON HORSEBACK HAPPEN!**

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## Welcome to Angels on Horseback!

**Thank you for your interest in becoming a volunteer.** Angels on Horseback ("AOH") was founded by Leslie Elliott in 2004 and is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. With the dedication of dozens of volunteers, and only one paid part time employee, Angels on Horseback provides therapeutic equine assisted activities to individuals with mental, physical or emotional disabilities and to encourage growth through the benefits of horse and human relationships. AOH is center member of PATH International. To learn more about PATH International and equine assisted activities and therapies visit [www.pathintl.org](http://www.pathintl.org).

This manual will start you on the right path with the information and tools you will need to be an effective and productive volunteer. Our hope is that reading the manual and attending the orientation and training will provide you with a solid foundation that will enable you to become an important part of Angels on Horseback and that your time spent with us will be safe, fun and rewarding.

AOH appreciates ALL of our volunteers. Without you and the gift of your time, energy and skills, we would not be able to offer these valuable services to our community.

## Benefits of Equine Activities

In therapeutic riding, the horse is used as a tool to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of the disabled person. The benefits are available to individuals with just about any disability, including but not limited to:

- Muscular Dystrophy
- Visual/Hearing Impairments
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Emotional Disability
- Spinal Cord Injuries
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down Syndrome
- Autism
- Brain Injuries
- Learning Disabilities



**Physical Benefits:** Horseback riding gently and rhythmically moves the body (pelvis and trunk more specifically) and internal organs in a manner similar to that of the human walking gait. Students develop and strengthen muscles by working specific muscle groups that are not worked in everyday life. For example, horseback riding also helps to normalize muscle tone, improve posture and build up the cardiovascular system.

**Psychological Benefits:** Exercise in the fresh air, away from hospitals, doctor's offices, therapy rooms or home help is a refreshing change for the riders. Confidence is gained by mastering a skill normally performed by able-bodied riders. The ability to control an animal much larger and stronger than oneself is a great confidence builder.

Riding increases interest in what is happening around the rider, as the rider explores the world from the back of a horse. The excitement of riding and experiences involved stimulate riders and encourage the riders to speak and communicate about it.

The riders start to learn that an "out of control" rider means an "out of control" horse. Shouting, crying, and emotional outbursts upset the horse which in turn frightens the horse. Riders are highly motivated, therefore, to learn how to control their emotions and how to appropriately express them.

## Confidentiality

Every PATH International therapeutic riding center is required to have a confidentiality policy for its staff and volunteers in order to maintain the privacy of social, personal, medical, and financial information. **At Angels on Horseback, we abide by the HIPAA privacy standards regarding student and volunteer information.**

Please respect the privacy of our riders and their families. We must not discuss the students (or volunteers) and/or their disabilities after leaving the property.

## General Safety Information

**Our number one rule at Angels on Horseback is to have SAFE fun! Below you will find some important safety information:**

**Emergency Telephone:** During lessons, a cell phone, located on the shelf, on the right as you walk in the barn door, can be used in case of emergency. This EMERGENCY Cell Phone must remain on the shelf inside the barn door.

**Emergency Numbers:** Posted above the shelf and phone are the telephone numbers for the vets, emergency numbers, and directions to the property for emergency personnel.

**First Aid Kits:** The HUMAN and HORSE first aid kit are located in the cabinet, down the barn aisle past the feed room, on the right.

**Injury:** If an accident or an injury occurs, an accident report form will be filled out and stored on file by the instructor. If the injury is severe, 911 will be called by a designated person.

**Fire:** In the event of a fire, 911 is called by a designated person and everyone is to move to the parking area, far away from the building, until the fire department arrives. A fire extinguisher is located inside the main barn door to the right, at every barn door, and in the break room. To operate a fire extinguisher, remember "Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep".

- PULL the pin
- AIM the nozzle towards the base of the fire
- SQUEEZE the handle
- SWEEP back and forth across the width of the fire

**Gates:** All gates to the pastures and the arena are to remain CLOSED and CHAINED at all times except when going through them. When opening the arena gate, announce "Gate Open!"

**Cell Phones:** Turn off or silence cell phones when working around the horses. Please do not allow your phones to ring while you are working in the arena. Sudden noises or movements may cause a horse to spook.

**What to wear:**

- Comfortable, closed-toe shoes such as athletic shoes, hiking boots, or riding boots. Absolutely **no open-toed shoes**, flip flops or sandals.
- No long necklaces or dangling earrings that could distract a rider or horse, or get caught in tack, etc.
- Long pants, preferably jeans, or riding pants are best to protect your legs from dirt, scratches, etc.

**Inclement Weather:** PLEASE PAY ATTENTION TO THE WEATHER FORECAST AND WATCH YOUR EMAIL FOR SCHEDULE CHANGES! Lessons may be cancelled in certain weather conditions such as thunder, lightning, snow, extreme wind, cold, etc. Watch your email to confirm whether or not lessons will be held as scheduled. Lessons will be cancelled whenever schools in Jasper are closed, for inclement weather. Riding lessons will not be held in the indoor arena, if the temperature is below 40 degrees, but lesson will continue in the heated break room, tack room or feed room.

**Severe Weather:** In the event of a Tornado Warning, seek shelter in the tack room, along the wall to the right, underneath the bridles.

**NO smoking, illegal drugs or alcohol on Angels' property.**

## Rider Dismissal Policy

The Instructor has the authority to dismiss any rider from the arena, for safety concerns of the horse, rider or volunteers during the lesson. The rider needs to return their helmet to the cabinet, and a guardian will escort them to their car, so other horses and riders in the arena are not affected by the unwanted behavior. The rider will not be allowed to return to the lesson that day. Depending on the number of volunteers the lessons might have to be discontinued until the rider and horse are removed from the arena. The Instructor and the Executive Director will decide what other punishment might be needed, if any, and the guardian will be notified of the decision

 **REMINDER:** In the event of an emergency during a lesson, the Leader is responsible for the horse and the Sidewalkers are responsible for the student.

## Horse Safety

Working with and around horses carries with it inherent risks! Both horses and humans can be injured or die from these risks. Think of a horse as having a 6-foot "danger zone" surrounding it. In this "zone" a horse can kick, buck, bite, or rear. No student should ever be near this "zone" without supervision from approved volunteer or instructor. an

### Horse Vision and Blind Spots

Horses have a large peripheral vision and three blind spots to be aware of. They are on the forehead, directly below the nose and directly behind them. It's important to be aware of the blind spots because it may startle a horse if you approach it from one of those areas.

Study the horse vision chart to learn where their blind spots are, and never approach a horse from its blind spot. It's a good idea to use your voice to let a horse know that you are approaching.

Never walk under a horse's neck, and when walking around the back side of a horse, place one hand on his rump to let him know you are there, or walk as far away from the "kick zone" as necessary.

### Other Horse Safety Tips

When tying a horse to a tie ring or post, always use a "quick release" knot tied to a string.

If a horse spooks while tied, remain calm, and quickly untie the quick release knot. Calm the horse down and then re-tie the horse when it is safe.

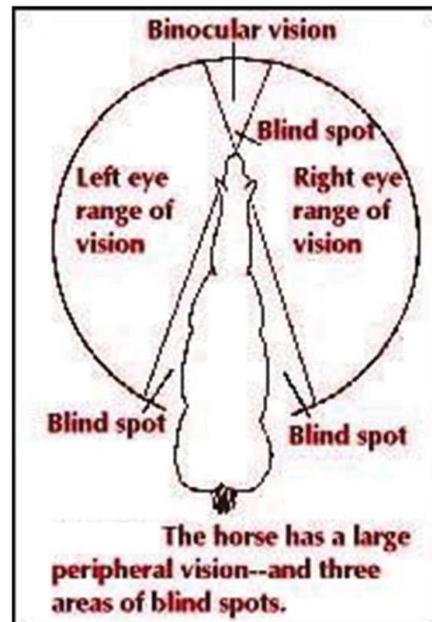
Please remember that horses are very keen to their surroundings and the actions taking place. Something that wouldn't concern us, may very well concern them (e.g. loud noises, running children, etc.). Because they are animals of prey in the wild, they have "fight or flight" response to danger (usually flight). They are herd animals and feel most comfortable when with other horses.

Pay attention to your horse's attitude and body expressions. Their ears tell a lot:

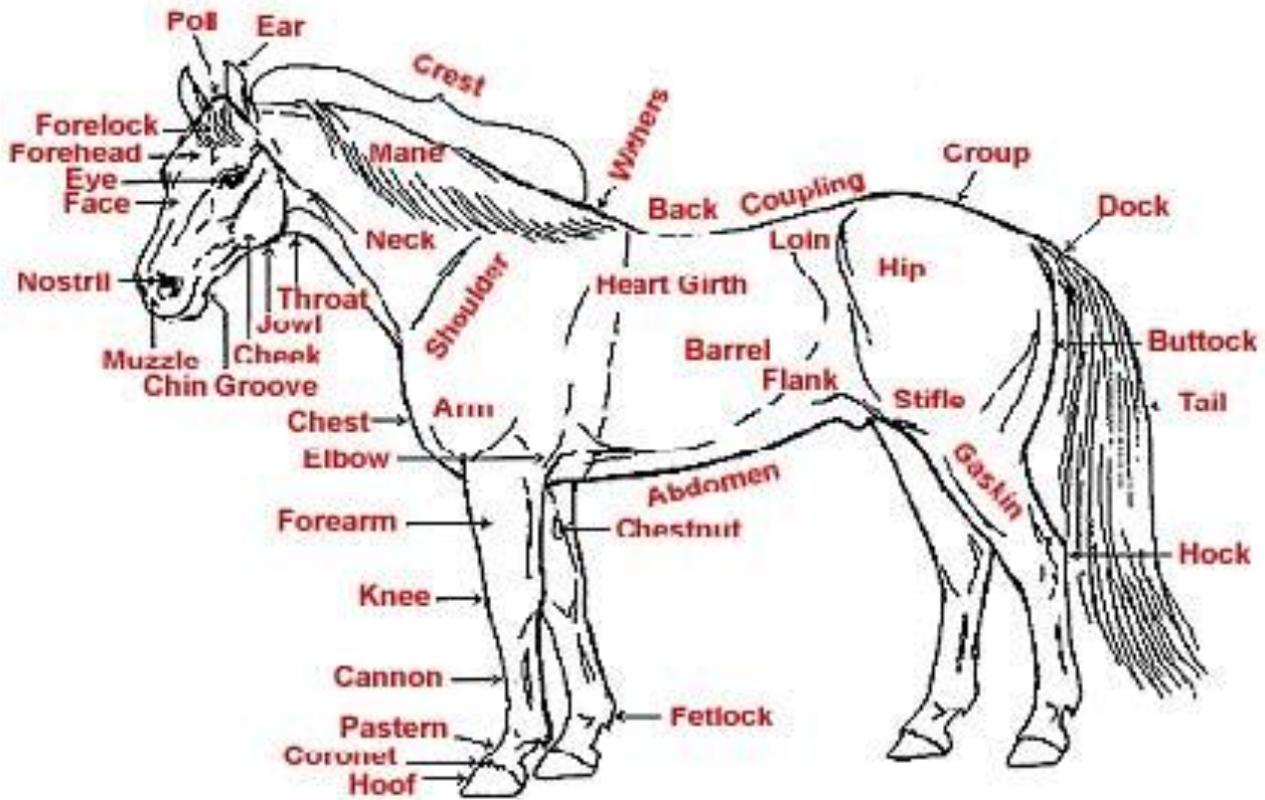
- Ears forward: listening and alert
- Ears pinned back: angry, in pain or upset. (Beware and let others know.)
- Ears drooping: relaxed, inattentive, tired or sick or different:
- Let the instructor and others know
- Remain calm and talk gently to the horse
- Stay away from the back end of the horse
- Move slowly and, if possible, stroke the horse softly on the neck to relax him

Remember, a horse can sense how a person feels (e.g. nervous), so be relaxed, gentle, but firm with horses. They are volunteers, too!

**REMINDER:** Students must wear a helmet at all times when around the horses.



## Parts of the Horse



# Volunteering at Angels on Horseback

## Volunteer Qualities:

- **Dependable:** Volunteers are asked to review their schedule and commit to helping once a week (or more) throughout a 10 week session. It is **very important** to the program to have consistent volunteers from week to week. Of course scheduling conflicts will occasionally arise, so if you can't make it on a particular day, please make sure the Director or Volunteer Coordinator knows that you will be out. **THERE WILL BE A CALENDAR IN THE BREAK ROOM FOR SCHEDULING CONFLICTS.**
- **Flexible:** Help is often needed in areas other than lessons, so your flexibility is always appreciated.
- **Safe:** AOH follows all PATH safety regulations and standards. Volunteers should be aware of the safety rules and help to enforce them.
- **Attitude:** Volunteers need to be able to stay calm, patient, understanding and tactful as well as upbeat, helpful, and supportive of students and each other.
- **Proactive:** Volunteers are encouraged to ask questions, take initiative, offer suggestions, and contribute in any way possible.

## A Typical Lesson Day:

- Volunteers are asked to **arrive 1 hour before the first lesson** of the day in order to have sufficient time to bring the horses up from the pasture and get them groomed and tacked in time for lessons.
- Sign in and put on your name tag.
- Review the daily lesson roster and posted chore list on the lesson board, located on the wall, to the left of the Tack Room door. The daily lesson roster informs the volunteers of what horse and tack are to be used and at what time.
- Bring horses up from the pasture. Collect them with their rope halters.
- Tie the lead rope, using a "quick release" knot, to a string attached to a tie ring in one of the designated grooming area.
- Groom horses.
- Tack horses according to the posted lesson roster. Always check the tack to make sure it's in good repair. Any fasteners or buckles that are broke **CAN NOT** be used. Please notify Director immediately that tack should not be used.
- Lead or sidewalk in a lesson.
- There is always something that needs to be done. Volunteers may be asked to help with office work, yard work, cleaning, feeding, and many other tasks.
- Volunteers are asked to sign in and out and keep up with your total hours.

## Ongoing, Daily Volunteer Opportunities - Feeder:

We ask that Feeders commit to feeding on a regular basis, usually one day per week.

Everyone is invited to consider feeding the horses for a time. Experienced AOH volunteers will provide you with training, and for safety reasons, you will never be expected to feed alone. It is truly an awesome way to get to know the horses even better. Volunteers who FEED are EXTRA appreciated!

**YOU ARE APPRECIATED FOR ANYTHING YOU DO!!!**

 **FACT:** Any person riding horses at AOH **MUST** wear an ASTM-SEI certified helmet while mounted.

## Dismissal of Volunteers

Volunteers and/or guests may be dismissed due to being unsuitable for use in the program, disruptive or threatening behavior. Instructor has the right to ask the volunteer and/or guest to leave the premises. The Executive Director will make the final decision on permanent dismissal of a volunteer.

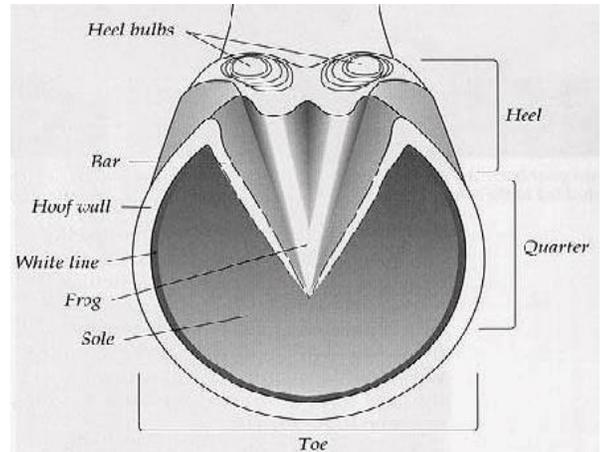
## Grooming

In addition to helping to keep the horses clean, grooming gives volunteers the chance to look the body over for any cuts/swelling/etc. If you notice any cuts or swelling, please inform the Director, Instructor or Facilities Manager.

**Personalized Grooming Buckets.** Each horse has its own grooming bucket, labeled and sitting under their bridles in the tack room. Individual grooming tools help prevent spreading skin irritations and/or diseases around the herd. Each horse has its own hoof pick, metal shedding blade, rubber curry comb, hard body brush, soft body brush, soft face brush and a mane and tail comb and brush.

- The **HOOF PICK** is used to clean out the horse's hooves and remove any rocks that could cause irritation or injury. Begin with the left foreleg and move counter clockwise around the horse until all four hooves have been picked. Always facing the horse's tail, run your hand down the leg while leaning slightly into the horse to get them to shift their weight. You may also squeeze the chestnut on the inside of the horses' leg. Pick up the foot, supporting it on the front of the hoof.

Clean out all clefts (beside the frog) in the hoof, make sure no rocks or packed dirt/mud remains. Always pick in the direction from heel to toe.

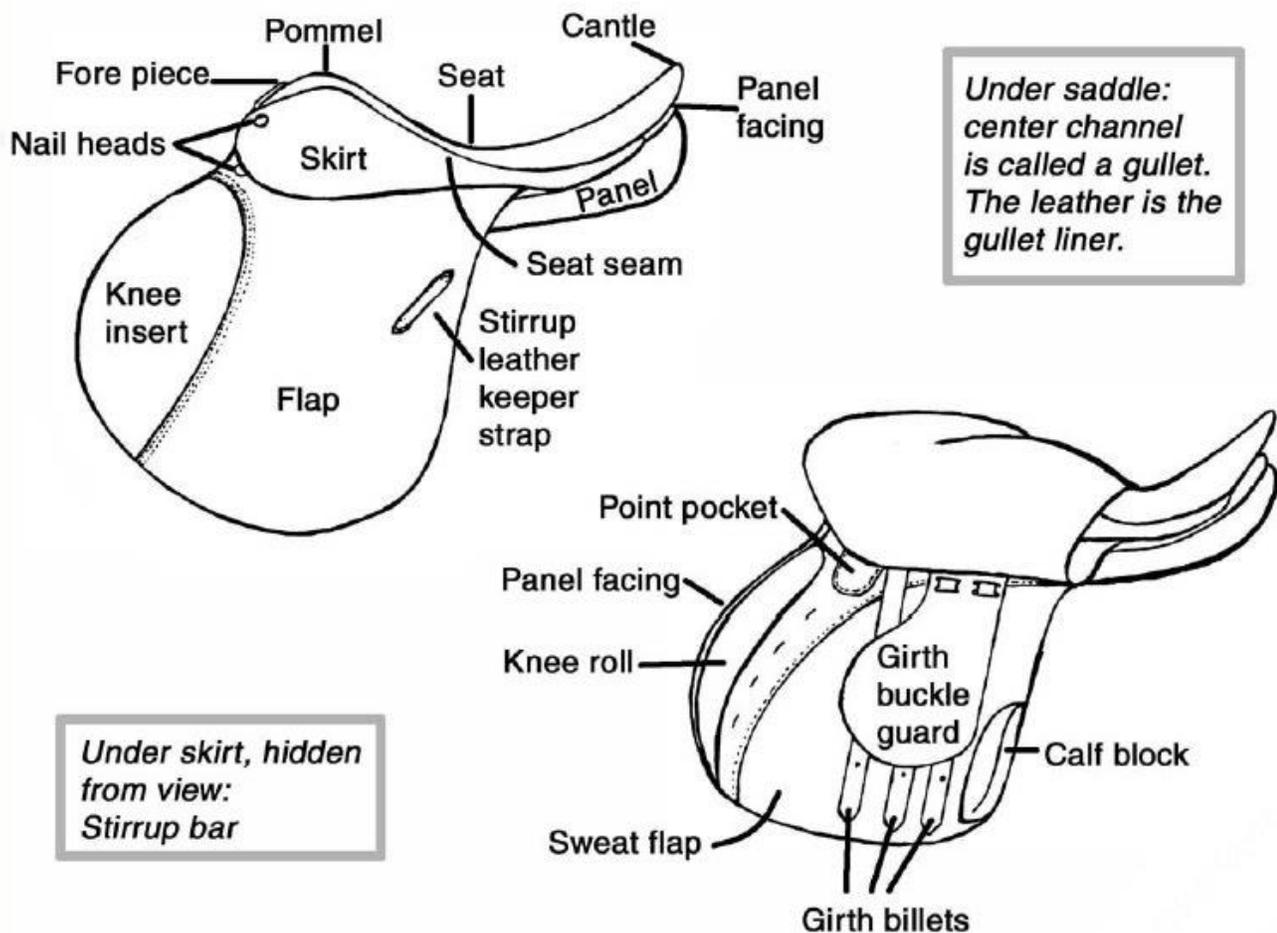


- The **METAL SHEDDING BLADE** (or metal curry) is used to remove excess shedding hair or to loosen dried mud from the horses coat. Otherwise use the **RUBBER CURRY COMB** in circular motion. A curry/shedding blade is to be used only on the body and rump of the horse, not on legs or the face.
- Use the **HARD BODY BRUSH** in the direction of hair growth, starting behind the ear and working towards the tail on both sides, **paying special attention to areas where the saddle and girth go**. It's important to brush all areas where the saddle, girth and bridle will be placed, because any dirt or mud could rub and cause discomfort/irritation to the horse, especially where the girth will go. The hard body brush should be used only on the body and not on the face.
- The **SOFT FACE BRUSH** is used on the face only. Wipe eyes, nose and ears *if needed* with a soft, clean cloth.
- If flies are present, apply **FLY SPRAY** on legs, tail and belly of the horse and if needed, spray some onto a clean cloth and wipe on the horse's face.
- Comb out mane and tail with a **MANE AND TAIL BRUSH OR COMB**. Use Show Sheen to eliminate tangles and add shine.

## Tacking

- After the horse has been groomed, it's time to gather the saddle and pad, appropriate sized girth, and the horse's bridle or clip-on reins from the tack room. Always check the tack to make sure it's in good repair. Any fasteners or buckles that are broke CAN NOT be used. Please notify Director immediately that tack should not be used.
- Tack your horse on his **LEFT** side.
- Place the **PAD** on first. Place it on the horse's withers, a bit higher up than normal. Slide it down a little, so all the fur on the horse's body is going in the direction of the saddle and the pad under it.
- Gently lift the **SADDLE** onto the pad, making sure it's properly centered, same amount of pad all around.
- After the saddle is on, pull up on the pad at the withers (just under the pommel) to form a little "tent" and to give space between the horse and saddle.
- Attach the **GIRTH** on the right side of the horse first. Slide it up through the fixed strap/slot at the bottom of the blanket, and then buckle it to two of the three **GIRTH BILLETS** (the two outside straps) found under the flap. Make sure the saddle is secured to the blanket, by attaching the Velcro blanket straps around the girth billets.
- Follow the same procedure to attach the girth on the left side. It's not necessary to **FULLY** tighten the girth at this stage, as the girth should be fully tightened during the tack check, just before the lesson.

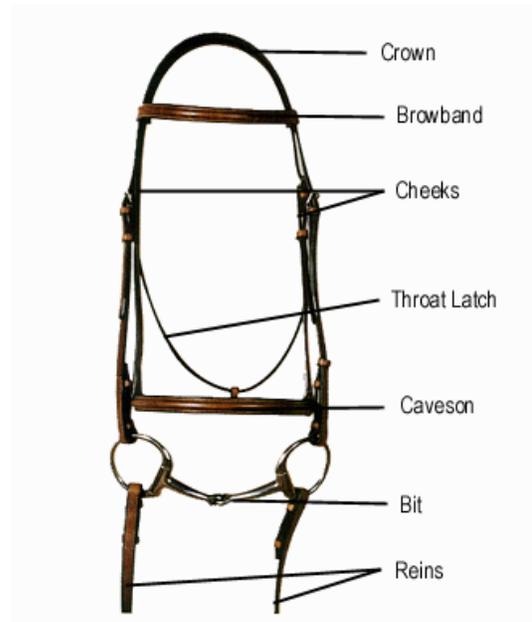
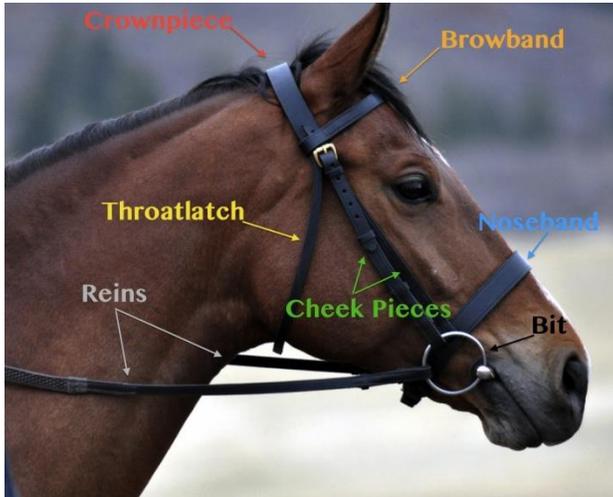
## Parts of the English Saddle



## Bridles

At AOH there are two options for horse headgear during a lesson: 1) a webbed halter with clip on reins hooked to the hardware on each side of the horse's mouth or 2) a bridle placed over top of a rope halter. Check the lesson board to verify which option your horse will use, and then follow the appropriate instructions below.

An experienced volunteer will teach you the proper technique for putting a bridle on your horse, but it will be helpful if you know the various parts of the bridle in advance:



- Bridles are worn OVER the rope halter thereby allowing us to lead the horse with a lead rope hooked to the halter.
- Put reins over the horses head.
- Place the bit near the horse's mouth. Hold the bridle up over the horse's nose with your right hand. Using your left hand fingers, hold the bit against his mouth, and insert your thumb into the space between the front and back teeth. Be careful not to knock the bit on the horse's teeth.
- Gently pull the headstall over the horse head, putting the horse' right ear in first, left ear next.
- Tighten the throatlatch so you can fit about 4 fingers to a fist between it and the horse's neck.
- Tighten nose band or caveson (if the bridle has one) so you can fit one or 2 fingers next to the horses nose/chin.

## Volunteer Positions - Leader

As a volunteer, one of the most challenging duties is the position of leader. A leader's primary responsibility is the horse, but must also follow the instructor's directions, and be aware of any potential hazards in or around the arena. In addition, a leader needs to consider the side walkers by making sure there is enough room along the fence and around obstacles for them to pass. Here are some tips for leading:

General Guidelines for Leaders:

- Never wrap the lead line around your hand. If a horse was to spook you might get tangled up and be injured.
- Allow the rider some time to process the verbal instructions to them from the instructor. Be patient; do not execute an instruction for the rider before he/she has time to process the information and make an effort to comply on their own. The goal is for the STUDENT to direct the horse to their maximum ability.
- Therapy horses are to be lead with slack in the lead line. Do not hang onto the halter. Your hand should be 6" from the clip.
- Do not walk backwards (except when taking a few steps backward to line the horse up at the mounting ramp).
- While at the halt for more than a few seconds, the Leader stands facing the horse, with their left shoulder directly in front of the horse's nose. In other words, the Leader should stand **slightly** to the right of the horse.
- If there is an emergency or the rider falls off, lead the horse away from the student. **STAY WITH YOUR HORSE AND KEEP THEM CALM!**
- Follow the mounting guidelines as described below.
- **ALWAYS STAY 2 HORSE LENGTHS BACK FROM THE HORSE IN FRONT OF YOU.**

## Volunteer Positions - Sidewalker

A Sidewalker's primary responsibility is the safety of the rider. Since every rider has different abilities, a Sidewalker's role can vary greatly from rider to rider, but generally falls into two categories—"Passive Sidewalking" or "Active Sidewalking" as described below.

**Passive Sidewalkers** are generally used with experienced riders who have demonstrated good balance on the horse. The Passive Sidewalker is responsible for keeping an eye on the body position of their riders, but do not actually hold onto the rider. They may also be responsible in assisting to communicate commands to the rider from the instructor either by tactile or verbal commands. Sidewalkers can offer verbal support and encouragement, but conversation that distracts the rider from the lesson is strongly discouraged. In an emergency situation the Passive Sidewalker immediately becomes an "Active Sidewalker" and is responsible for the safety of the rider.

**Active Sidewalkers** are responsible for physically keeping a rider centered or balanced on the horse using a variety of holds. The instructor will direct you on the type of hold to use depending on the abilities of the rider. The two holds that are most frequently used are the "arm over thigh" and "ankle" holds as described below.

The **Arm Over Thigh Hold** provides support for the rider without interfering with the rider's trunk control, allowing the rider to build up strong trunk support. The Sidewalker grips the front of the saddle with the hand closest to the rider. Then the forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh. Be careful that the elbow doesn't accidentally dig into the rider's thigh or the horse' back.

The **Ankle Support Hold** is the least restrictive form of support, allowing the rider to use all muscles to provide his or her own support. If a rider slips, a light "tug" will bring the rider back into alignment with the saddle. In an emergency situation the side walkers are responsible for the safety of the rider.

## General Guidelines for Sidewalkers:

- The instructor will tell you how much assistance a particular rider requires and which leg hold to use (if applicable).
- Help the rider pay attention to the instructor. Avoid unnecessary talking with the rider and/or other volunteers. Too much input can be confusing for the rider.
- Be sure to give the rider time to process the instructor's direction. If the rider seems confused, go ahead and give some help. For example, if the instructor says "turn right," wait for the rider to attempt to turn the horse right, then help the rider by taking their right hand. It is our goal for the student to attempt as much success as they possibly can.
- The sidewalker should position themselves next to the rider's leg. They should stay between the horse's shoulder and rider's leg at all times. Being too far back or too far forward will make it difficult to assist the rider and could position you in the horse's kick zone.
- Follow the mounting and dismounting guidelines as described below:

## Mounting and Dismounting Riders

Each rider has different abilities; therefore there is no "standard" method for mounting and dismounting a horse in a therapeutic riding environment. The mounting and dismounting process can vary greatly from student to student. The guidelines below should be helpful, but always follow the directions given by the instructor for any particular rider.

### Mounting Guidelines:

- Mounting is always done under the supervision of a CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR.
- Prior to mounting, the **Leader** should thoroughly check the tack, and tighten the girth. Don't hesitate to ask the Instructor to double-check the tack if you are unsure of anything.
- When leading a horse to the mounting ramp, the **Leader** should guide the horse as close to the ramp as possible, walking between the offside barrier (small steps and platform) and the ramp.
- The off-side barrier and **Sidewalker** will act as a "wall" as the **Leader** guides the horse between the off-side barrier and the mounting ramp, in order to get the horse as close to the ramp as possible.
- Once the horse is between the off-side barrier, **Sidewalker**, and the ramp, the **Leader** should turn around, facing the horse, and take the last few steps backward. This will allow the **Leader** to see the horse's exact position in relation to the ramp and to make corrections as necessary.
- When the rider is ready to mount, the **Leader** keeps the horse as still as possible by standing in front of and slightly to the right, while facing the horse.
- After the student has mounted, wait for the go-ahead from the instructor, then lead the horse into the arena where any necessary stirrup adjustments can be made and the girth can be checked one more time.

### Dismounting Guidelines:

- Dismounting is always done under the supervision of a CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR.
- **Leader** stands in front facing the horse to discourage the horse from taking a step forward. The leader is responsible to keep the horse still and calm.
- The **Sidewalker** should follow the instructor's direction, as different students required different levels of assistance while dismounting.
- Once the rider has dismounted, give him/her a chance to say "thank you" and "goodbye" and to give the horse and a pat on the neck.
- Encourage the rider to run up their stirrups on English saddles.
- Encourage the rider to help lead and/or help un-tack and groom the horse, **but note that the rider must keep his/her helmet on when walking or grooming a horse.**

**YOU ARE APPRECIATED FOR ANYTHING YOU DO!!!**

## Non-Horsey Volunteer Opportunities

Please contact the Director if you are interested in any of these areas.

- **Fundraising/Special Events:** Interested individuals are welcome to join the fundraising committee and help the program to meet financial needs. The fundraising committee plans and executes the many events done each year by contacting clubs that are interested in offering financial assistance, getting donations, contacting vendors and so on.
- **Office/Computer Help:** We can use help in the office with filing, thank you notes, data entry, etc. Please contact the Director if you are interested.
- **Grant Writing:** Experienced grant writers are needed to help identify foundations or grants with a potential for donating to the program, and to assist to write these grants. Please contact our Director if you are interested.
- **Public Relations/Marketing:** Submit periodic press releases as directed. Work to obtain more media coverage so AOH can have higher community awareness. Help to maintain a Facebook or Twitter account, periodically post pictures of new horses or special events. Please contact our Director if you are interested in helping here.
- **Board Members:** If you are interested in becoming a board member talk to a current Board Member or the Director. AOH is always looking for professionals to volunteer their experience to help guide our program.
- **Barn/Facility:** Please contact our Director or Facilities Director if you are interested in helping with projects around the property. AOH would not look as amazing as it does without the help of our “handy” volunteers to do repairs and upkeep. Occasionally, volunteers will be asked to help feed and clean to ensure that our four legged angels are properly cared for.

