



Volunteer Training Manual

Welcome to Little Bits Volunteer Training!

Volunteers play a vital role in the Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Program for Persons with Disabilities. In fact, we couldn't do this without you!

This manual is intended to provide you with the information you will need to help you become a successful volunteer acting as a leader/horse handler, side-walker, spotter and /or barn assistant.

Volunteers are encouraged to do "a little bit of everything". We try to provide continuity for the rider and horses by matching them with the same volunteer from lesson to lesson. This helps those riders who thrive on a more familiar routine. As a rider advances in their riding skills, their volunteers may be switched, new volunteers added or removed as requested by the instructor. If you wish, part of your time can be spent in the barn catching, brushing and tacking/un-tacking horses.

Please don't hesitate to ask if you have questions or concerns. Remember, no question is too minor, and your observations and comments are appreciated.

The commitment of your time and efforts are valued by the staff, riders and their families.

Thank you for volunteering with us! We hope that you have fun and that the experience is therapeutic for you too.

**Sincerely,
Little Bits Staff**

When you arrive...

- Come into the Volunteer Room, sign in at the computer and put on your name tag. If you don't have a name tag, make one. This helps everyone learn who you are and helps you make new friends.
- Please arrive a minimum of 5-10 minutes before your first class. If you would like to assist in tacking the horses for your class, please come 30 minutes before class.
- Please help yourself to a snack or refreshment provided.
- Secure your personal belongings either in the office or the trunk of your car. If you have anything with you that you would prefer to have locked in the office, see the Volunteer Coordinator or an Instructor.
- If you would like to assist in grooming and tacking up the horses, go down to the barn and talk to the barn manager, Ros. She will show you what to do or assign you to work with an experienced volunteer. If you choose not to groom or tack up, wait in the arena and we'll get you connected with a horse and rider. We try to start lessons on the hour and dismount 5 minutes to the hour.
- If there is enough help in the barn, please make yourself available in the arena for the next class changeover. Spotters, side-walkers, and horse handlers (leaders) may be required.
- We appreciate you volunteering as regularly as you can. If you must cancel, please call the office at: 780-476-1233 or email: volunteers@littlebits.ca as early as possible. This gives us time to try to get a replacement volunteer.

Notices

Check for any notices in the volunteer room or on Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association "Facebook" Page.

Newsletters are distributed at least twice a year. You can also check out our website at: www.littlebits.ca

Parking

Volunteers can park in the large parking area located at the end of the driveway at Whitemud Equine Centre. When driving in please watch for pedestrians, riders and horses on the roadway and obey the 25kms/hour posted speed limit.

Cell Phones

We ask that you do NOT use cell phones either in the barn area or during a lesson. We need to concentrate on the rider's safety. **If you do need to carry your cell phone please have it set to silent and check once the lesson is over and your rider has dismounted and you are no longer in charge of the horse or rider.**

Clothing

Due to the nature of riding activities, please wear comfortable clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. Avoid wearing loose scarves or anything that dangles and could get caught. Keep jewelry to a minimum (no loop earrings or long necklaces). Wear footwear with lots of support that are comfortable. We suggest hiking boots, work boots, cowboy boots or sturdy athletic shoes. **Sandals are not allowed!** You will be doing a lot of walking and some jogging - inside as well as outdoors.

Please wear appropriate clothing. Crop tops, low cut shirts, or anything with messages that may be offensive or inappropriate in nature is discouraged. We want this to be a welcoming environment for everyone.

Dressing in **layers** is highly recommended because the temperature in Alberta tends to fluctuate. Wear gloves rather than mitts because they allow a better grip. In hot weather, sunscreen, insect repellent and hats may come in handy.

Refreshments

The riders, parents and Little Bits provide light snacks and refreshments for the volunteers. You will find them in the volunteer room so please help yourself. There is a refrigerator and microwave oven available if you wish to bring your own snack with you. Please put your name on whatever you bring. Anything in the fridge marked with "LBTRA" is for our volunteers while at Little Bits. Please clean up after using the microwave and any kitchen utensils.

Gum

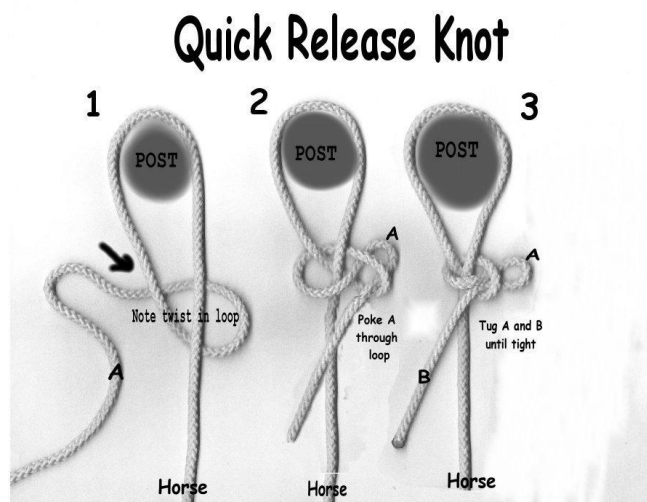
We ask that you DO NOT chew gum while you are here. The riders aren't allowed to chew gum as it is a choking hazard.

SMOKING (while discouraged on site) is PERMITTED ONLY IN ALLOTTED SECTION OF THE PARKING LOT AREA.

Helping In The Barn

If you would like to assist in grooming and tacking up the horses, please speak to the barn manager first. Please note that too much help in the barn can be stressful for the horses.

- You will always be paired with a knowledgeable/trained volunteer before you are asked to work with a horse on your own.
- When entering a horse's stall, remember to speak to it first.
- Call the horse's name so it is facing you before you go in. Close the door behind you (but do not lock it). Make sure the horse is facing you before you approach it and advance towards his left shoulder. Slowly put the lead rope around the neck and then slip his nose into the halter and secure over his head. When exiting the stall, make sure the stall door is completely open and lead the horse straight into the aisle, checking that the horse's hindquarters are clear of the door before you turn him. Position yourself between the head and the shoulder of the horse.
- Make sure you know if and how the horse is to be tied up in the grooming area. If tying is appropriate, use **only a quick release knot** and attach the lead rope to the binder twine rings attached to the O-rings on the wall. If the horse is to be cross-tied facing the alley please attach the quick release clips from the ropes attached to the rings on either side of the stall posts to the rings on the sides of the horses halter.



- Because the lesson horses are handled by many different people in a week, we want them to know that the routine will be the same every time they are brought into the grooming/tacking stalls. Grooming order is always the same for every horse - hoof pick, curry comb, dandy brush and body brush. When using a hoof pick to clean

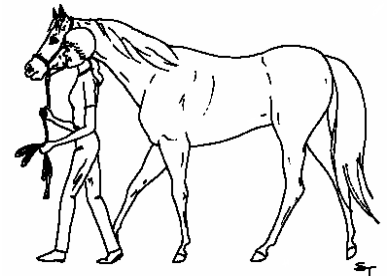
the horse's hooves, follow the pattern (**left front, left hind, right hind, right front**). Always start brushing on the left side (near side) of the horse. Then proceed to the right side (off side). This provides a routine for the horse that everyone must follow. Never go in front of a horse that is tied to the wall, and never go behind a horse that is cross-tied.

- Use all grooming equipment in an appropriate manner. Some horses are very sensitive. After first picking the hooves, the essential areas of girth and saddle should be well groomed. Make sure to run your bare hand (take off gloves) to ensure that the areas are free of mud/ debris. If you are not sure about a grooming item, please ask our Barn Manager or one of our staff. Return the grooming items to the horse's grooming bag and return all grooming items to the tack room at the end of the last class.
- Tack each horse with its specified equipment. This information will be posted on the horse list or you can ask the barn manager. It will also be listed in the daily schedule as tack changes do occur. If a saddle is being used by another horse in the previous class, ensure that the horse is ready for a quick change with a clean saddle pad. Do not leave the horses in the tacking stall with the pad and no saddle on it's back.
- Put all the pads on first, then the saddle. Next pull the saddle pads up into the gullet of the saddle so they do not cause undue pressure on the horse's withers. Tighten up the girth **slowly, gently and evenly** on both sides until the girth is just snug. The instructors will do the final tightening in the arena. Some horses may take a nip at you when tightening the girth so always be aware.
- The bridle is the last piece of equipment to go on the horse. Untie the horse first. **Please do not attempt to bridle a horse unless you are sure how to do so. Ask the barn manager or an instructor for help.**
- The bridle goes over top of the halter and the nose band should be secured under the halter with room for two fingers to fit between noseband and horse. The throat latch should be secure over the halter with a fist space between the throat latch and the horse's throat.
- After the bridle is on you can leave the horse tied with halter and lead rope until you are ready to go into the arena. **Never tie a horse by the reins.** Make sure reins are secure and that the stirrups are up and secure. Never leave a tied horse alone in the barn. Be sure someone is there to watch the horse if you plan to leave.
- Ask for help if you need it either from our barn manager or one of the instructors.

Leading /Horse-handling

The leader is responsible for the horse at all times. You may be asked to lead a horse in from the barn or you may take over a horse that is already in the arena.

- If you are the first horse to enter the arena please call out: "DOOR" before opening the door to the arena. It is wise to peek into the arena to be sure the horses are at the opposite end from where you are entering. When entering the arena, remember that you are leading a horse, so give it lots of room through the doorway.
- Gloves are highly recommended for leaders/horse-handlers. Hold the lead rope in your right hand 10" to 12" from the halter and loop the excess in your left hand in a figure 8. Remember to never wrap the lead rope around your hand. If the horse bolts, your hand could be injured. **Always have two hands on the lead rope.**
- If the rider - once mounted, at any time, needs assistance with anything please do not attempt to help them. The sidewalker may help them or please call out to the instructor to come over and assist. Your responsibility is the control of the horse.
- A good leader anticipates problems and acts in such a way as to avoid them. Watch your horse's body language; it will let you know how it is feeling.



Mounting

- An instructor will assist a rider to mount. When a rider is mounting, the leader must hold the horse as still as possible. The leader should stand in front of, and just off to the side of the horse's head opposite the side that the rider mounts. Light, firm pressure on the cheek piece of the halter should be enough to steady the horse, but some horses may need to be held only by the rope. **Take care not to hold too tightly as this may aggravate the horse.** Lay your opposite hand with rope end on the horse's shoulder, this will help you feel if the horse is going to walk forward.
- Leave the mounting block as slowly and as straight as possible and with the horse and rider as directed by the instructor. Line up on the center line facing the classroom, with lots of space between horse/rider combinations.

Spotting

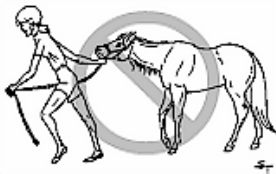
Spotters perform an essential safety role when assisting the instructors in helping the rider to mount or dismount from the horse.

- All of the mounting and dismounting of riders must be done under the direction of an instructor.
- When mounting/dismounting the rider may be at risk. It should be carried out quietly, smoothly and efficiently which will help the horse stay patient, trusting, and calm.
- Mounting and dismounting usually, but not always takes place on the left side of the horse. This procedure is specific to an individual rider's needs.
- Mounting may take place from a mounting ramp, from a mounting block, or from the mechanical lift.
- During mounting, the spotter will be asked to hold down the stirrup strap on the opposite side of the horse to counterbalance the weight the rider uses to mount. This prevents the saddle from slipping. You may also be asked to help **guide** a rider's leg over the horse's back to ensure that the rider's leg clears the horse's croup safely.
- Be sure never to pull on the leg of a rider to get it in place - give the rider time to relax and then you can **gently assist**. Riders with spasticity need time to get their bodies in a correct position on the horse. The instructor should give you guidance in these instances.
- Please do not put your hand in the stirrup iron as the rider may step on your hand.
- The spotter may assist the rider (from the opposite side) as they are transferred from a wheelchair into the saddle. The spotter receives the rider's hips while they are being lowered into the saddle, and may assist the instructor in bringing the rider's legs over the crest of the horse if asked by the instructor to do so. This type of mount usually occurs at the mounting ramp. During this type of mount the rider may also need some support of his or her back, and again the instructor will give you directions.
- The instructor may lift a smaller rider directly onto the horse. Here the spotter would ensure that the rider does not go too far onto the opposite side of the horse. At the block during this type of lift, an extra spotter may be asked to stand behind the instructor and give support for added stability as the rider is carried up the steps to the horse. This is an added safety precaution to facilitate a safe mount.
- Most riders will be dismounted directly to the ground. Occasionally other methods are needed.



Leading A Horse With Rider

- All leaders should be wearing gloves.
- Leading a horse from the left side may be standard practice but in the arena we will ask you to lead the horse from the right side when traveling on the left rein. This brings you closer to the center of the arena and enables you to hear the instructor better and the instructor can see you. When at the HALT please turn to face the horse and rider if there is no side-walker with you. When leading during a lesson outside, you may remain on the horses near side (left side).
- If you have side-walker(s) with you, remember to give them room between the wall and the horse, otherwise they could get squished. The side-walker will also need room when the horse is being steered around barrels, pylons, fence posts, trees etc.
- The instructor will tell the rider what to do with the horse during the lesson. The leader's job is to assist the rider in carrying out these instructions safely while giving the rider every opportunity to do as much on their own when possible. It is important to allow riders to do as much as they can independently even if it takes a bit longer to initiate and finish the task.



- Remember not to DRAG the horse around the arena. When in the leading position (between the horse's head and shoulder), be kind and consistent with your commands to the horse. Encourage the horse with your voice and the rider to use his or her legs. The horse should ALWAYS take the first step when walking off.
- When leading, always allow for the horse to be able to move his head and neck freely.
- Never poke a horse in the ribs. Most horses only walk as fast as the leader is going, so try to keep an even, brisk pace so that the rider gets the full benefit of the horse's movement.

- Trot the horse only when requested to do so by the instructor. Check to see that the rider and side-walker(s) are prepared for the trot. Stay level with the horse's head to allow room for the side-walker(s) to run beside the rider.
- When trotting, keep the horse in a straight line and an even pace. If you find the horse's pace a little fast, slow down your pace, gently pull back on the lead rope and say "easy".
- Be aware of your surroundings. Leave one-two horse lengths between the horse you are leading and the horse in front of it. Sometimes horses will kick if they're being "tailgated" so be mindful of their body language and keep an appropriate distance,
- Many times, the instructors will request that school figures or turns be started at a specific letter on the wall so it is always good to be aware of where the letters are located.
- If riding outside, be aware of the surroundings around you. We share the roadway and paths with others so be mindful of any occurrence that might upset the rider or horse.
- Sharp turns or abrupt starts or stops may unseat a rider. You can help by turning the horse as smoothly as possible and warning the rider of a "halt" or "walk on."
- Remember that the instructor will give instructions to the rider so it is good to know your riders name. Rarely will they use your name or the horse's name unless they are not getting any response from the team.
- On occasion, the instructor may ask you to let the rider go off lead and you may be asked to remain in the leading position so that you can assist or take back control if necessary. At times a rider may ride independently; in that case, please stay in the arena's viewing area or arena in case you are needed.
- If YOUR rider falls off the horse, all other leaders should halt with their riders. **You will need to HOLD ON to the horse and move it away from the fallen rider.** The instructor will tend to the rider and give instructions as per the emergency plan.
- Please always control the horse, as a loose horse can cause a lot of trouble for other riders in the class.
- If a horse nips you or is misbehaving, you must remember that there is a rider aboard that horse. Therefore, discipline must be carefully considered. **A firm "NO" is the only acceptable discipline allowed, especially if there is a rider mounted.** Smacking a horse in the face is NEVER allowed. Ask the instructor for help with the horse if necessary or to switch positions if needed.

Side-walker(s)

The side-walker is responsible for the safety of the rider and should stay at the rider's side to give physical support or to assist the rider in carrying out the instructor's directions. Please DO NOT leave your riders side unless a replacement is there to take your place.

- Since the duties of the side-walker vary greatly the instructor will inform you of a rider's requirements, needs and special considerations.
- At the beginning of the lesson during warm up you can keep the rider interested and occupied until all riders are mounted and class is ready to begin.
- Please limit conversation in order that the riders, leaders and you can hear and follow the instructor's directions.
- One side-walker may need to repeat the instructor's directions and help the rider carry those instructions out. If there are two side-walkers, talk it out beforehand who will take the lead in communicating with the rider.
- If a rider has only one side-walker, then that side-walker will generally walk on the opposite side of the leader so they don't interfere with each other.
- Sometimes, a side-walker is there simply to give the rider encouragement and a sense of security. They might also repeat the directions if the rider is hearing or sight impaired.
- Do not hold on to anything attached to the horse or rider. And please do not rest your elbow on the horse's back. This is where a horse's kidneys are and they are sensitive in that area.
- Be ready to provide assistance if necessary, don't walk with your hands in your pockets. Have electronic devices off or on vibrate. Wait until all riders have been dismounted and you are out of the arena to check your device.
- The instructor may ask you to assist the rider by placing your hand over the rider's hand in order to help them turn, stop or back-up. This is called the "hand over hand" method. Before you do this, let the rider know you are going to touch their hands and what you and the rider will be doing.
- A rider who needs considerable physical support can wear out the side-walkers quickly. You may need to switch sides during a ride to avoid muscle fatigue. Alert the

instructor, who will direct the rider or leader to take the horse off the track and halt. The instructor facilitates the switch by replacing the first side-walker who goes around the front of the horse and takes the place of the second side-walker who then goes around the front of the horse to replace the instructor. (this is done one at a time for maximum safety). If necessary, another side-walker may need to come in as a replacement.

- If your rider starts to slip off the horse, don't panic. Gently hold the rider in place to avoid further slippage. Notify the instructor and if directed try to help the rider get centered again. You will need to ask the leader to halt before you try. Otherwise support the rider and go to the middle of the arena for assistance.
- If a rider does come off the horse, try to guide him or her to the ground as gently as possible. NEVER MOVE A RIDER WHO HAS FALLEN. Secure the area and the instructor will come to the fallen rider and take charge of the situation. Falls are rare but safety must always be our first concern. If you are unsure what to do, please ask.

Support Techniques For Side-Walkers

During all types of supports your thumb should be held adjacent to your pointer finger.

Heel Support

The heel support is used for riders with good balance that may need a little support to steady their position or be encouraged to keep their heel down. Gently "CUP" the rider's heel in your hand.



Knee Support

In this hold your forearm is placed just below the knee joint with your hand holding the front of the saddle. Take care not to put the hold directly on the knee joint.

Thigh Support

The thigh hold is used for riders who require more support. Hold the front of the saddle and provide light pressure across the rider's thigh with the fleshy part of your forearm.



Hip / Pelvic Support

When a rider needs a lot of support this is an effective hold. It is like the thigh support except the side-walker's forearm provides support at the rider's hip joint rather than at

the thigh. The hand then holds the front of the saddle. **This hold is only used with a side-walker on each side doing the hip/pelvic support.**

Thigh/Ankle/Toe Support

Some riders will need this support throughout the lesson. Others may only need it when trotting or riding up and down hills.

Both hands are involved with this hold. The inside arm (nearest the rider) supports the rider with the fleshy part of the forearm across the thigh. The outside hand supports the rider by holding the rider's foot at either the ankle or the toe. This gives the rider's lower leg a maximum amount of stability.

Dismounting

- For riders who mount or dismount with minimal assistance, the spotter's job is simply to ensure the safety of the rider. During the dismount, the spotter, under the direction of an instructor, ensures the rider's foot on the off side of the horse is completely out of the stirrup before dismounting.
- Once a rider is dismounted, the spotter may be asked to assist/escort the rider out of the arena.

What to Do After Class

The horse you are leading may either stay in for the next class or go back to the barn. The instructors, barn manager or volunteer coordinator will advise you.

- If you are taking the horse back to the barn, make sure the stirrups are run up and the reins are secured.
- Once in a tacking stall, remove the bridle slowly, keeping one hand on the horse's nose to steady it. Wait for the horse to drop the bit so you don't hurt them by hitting the bit against their teeth as this can cause damage. **Do not try to take a bridle off unless you are sure how to do this without hitting the horse's teeth.**
- Remove the girth, saddle and pads. Pick the horse's feet and brush the horse lightly.

- Ask the Barn Manager where the horse should go – in a stall or back to its outdoor pen.
- Make sure the grooming kit and tack are put away and the barn is clean and tidy before you leave. A tidy barn makes a happy barn manager.

Emergency Action Plans

Fire

- “**STAY CALM**”, leaders take the horses and riders to the end of the arena away from the fire and stay with them.
- An instructor will appoint someone to call 911.
- Following the instructor's directions, side-walkers help dismount riders and escort them to a safe place away from the fire. (Muster point)
- Leaders take the horses to a safe place away from the fire area. DO NOT let them go.
- MUSTER: Gather in the parking lot for a head count. This is essential for both riders and volunteers.
- DO NOT enter the fire area.

Tornado

If there has been a tornado warning issued, riding may cease at the discretion of the Instructors and Riding Program Administrator. If stopped, horses will be put away quickly and safely. Riders, volunteers, spectators and staff will be asked to go to one of the following places:

- (A) Into the basement area of the Stone House Cabin.
- (B) The washrooms in the new facility.

DO NOT stay in the arena or barn area as these are danger zones and you will not be safe.

Severe Thunderstorms

In cases of heavy rains or severe thunderstorms, riding may cease at the discretion of the Instructors and the Riding Program Administrator.

- If stopped, leaders will line the horses up as directed so that the instructors can dismount the riders.
- Any side-walkers or spotters, please help escort dismounted riders to the common area where you will receive further instructions from the Little Bits staff. Please stay with riders until otherwise indicated by Little Bits staff.
- Leaders will be asked to take horses calmly to the barn to have their tack removed and put into a stall. Once the horses are safely in their stalls please go directly to the common area.

Fallen Rider

- “**STAY CALM**”, the leader of the riderless horse must **NOT** let go of the horse. Walk the horse a safe distance away from the fallen rider and soothe the horse.
- All other horses in the class are to halt a safe distance from the fallen rider. Following the instructor's directions, line up in a safe and orderly fashion.
- **Do not move the rider** unless absolutely necessary.
- The Instructor will assess injuries and proceed as appropriate. The second on-site Instructor and available staff will assist.
- If the injuries are serious, the instructor will appoint a person to call 911 and request an ambulance.
- If parents or guardians are not present, the instructor will appoint a staff member to access the rider's medical file and notify the parents or guardian.
- After the rider has been taken care of, the team and the Instructor of the fallen rider will be required to fill out Incident Report Forms.

First Aid Stations

There are **THREE** areas that have first aid kits that can be used if needed at any time. If you do get injured, please inform the staff so that they can record the incident with your assistance.

The **FIRST** is located in the black locker with the rider helmets and belts in the arena area.

The **SECOND** is located in the cupbards above the sink in the classroom.

The **THIRD** is on the table just inside the main entrance to the Little Bits tack room in the barn.

Thank you for being a volunteer with Little Bits. With your support, we can continue to help those with disabilities reach new levels in their lives.



Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association (LBTRA)

Located at:

Whitemud Equine Learning Centre Association

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