



Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association (LBTRA)

Volunteer Training Manual

Updated: July 2026

Located at:

Whitemud Equine Learning Centre Association
12510 Fox Drive, Edmonton
780-476-1233

Volunteer Coordinator: volunteers@littlebits.ca

Riding Administration: info@littlebits.ca

Website: www.littlebits.ca

Welcome to Little Bits!

Our mission:

To ensure that persons with physical, cognitive or emotional challenges across the Capital Region can enjoy the benefits of therapeutic riding.

Volunteers play a vital role in the Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Program. This manual is intended to provide you with the information you will need to help you become a successful volunteer acting as a Leader, Sidewalker, and/or Barn Assistant. Please do not 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 staff, riders, and their families.

Thank you for volunteering with us! We hope that you have a fun and positive experience!

Sincerely,
Little Bits Staff

General Information

Parking

Volunteers can park in the large parking lot located at the end of the driveway at Whitemud Equine Centre. When driving in, please watch for pedestrians, riders and horses. The speed limit is **25 km/hour**.

The designated smoking area is found on the north end of the parking lot.

Cell Phones

We ask that you do NOT use cell phones either in the barn area or during a lesson, as we need to concentrate on the rider's safety. If you do need to carry your phone, please ensure it is on silent, and only check it once the lesson is over, your rider has dismounted and you are no longer in charge of the horse or rider. Please do not take photos of the riders.

Clothing

Please wear comfortable clothing that you don't mind getting dirty. Dress in layers, as temperatures can change, and be prepared for both indoor and outdoor activities. We recommend long pants made from sturdy fabrics (such as denim) and avoiding shorts, tank tops, or midriff-baring clothing for added protection.

Avoid loose scarves, dangling clothing, and excessive jewelry (including hoop earrings and long necklaces). Wear supportive, closed-toe footwear such as hiking boots, work boots,

cowboy boots, or sturdy athletic shoes. Sandals and open-toed shoes are not permitted. Steel-toed shoes are not recommended.

You will be doing plenty of walking and some jogging. On days we head outdoors, sunscreen, insect repellent, and a hat are recommended.

When you arrive

- Come into the classroom, sign in at the computer, and put on your name tag
- Please arrive at least 5-10 minutes before your first class
- If you would like to assist in the barn, please arrive 30 minutes before your class
- Help yourself to snacks and refreshments before and after classes. These are provided by parents as a thank you for volunteering. There is a refrigerator and microwave available if you wish to bring your own snack with you.
- While we try to maintain some consistency week to week, due to the nature of our programming there are many last minute changes that take place. Please be flexible and understand that if you are moved to a different spot last minute, or are with a different rider or class it may be due to many factors (in other classes, volunteers away, horse/rider schedule changes etc)

Safety

Safety is important for all volunteers to be aware of, regardless of what role you are assigned.

Please speak up if you are uncomfortable with something, or see something that is unsafe.

- Never go in front of a horse that is tied to the wall, or behind a horse in cross ties
- Always move safely around the hind end of a horse
- Monitor horse body language - they will tell you when they are uncomfortable or upset
- Ensure safe spacing always (in the barn, lining up, in the arena, and in classes): there should always be a minimum of 2 horse lengths (nose to tail) between horses
- 2 hands on the lead rope at all times
- Hold excess lead rope in a figure 8 (never wrap a loop around your hand)

Horse Body Language

- Keep an eye on the horse's head/tail/ body to see how they are feeling. If you see any warning signs, tell a staff member as soon as possible. Some things to look for are:
 - Ears pinned back
 - Tail swishing
 - Turning towards you
 - Stomping/ trying to kick or bite
- If you notice any cuts, scrapes or anything out of the ordinary, please show a staff member

Volunteer Positions/ Scope of Duties

Classes: all class activities are conducted under the supervision of certified and trained instructors and staff.

Leader:

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.

Overview

- Follow instructor directions at all times
- Leather gloves are highly recommended for leaders
- Maintain calm, controlled handling of the horse; if you need support or are unsure of horse behaviour please ask. Be kind and consistent with your commands, and encourage your horse with your voice and body. The horse should always take the first step when walking on.
- Monitor safety of the horse (if no sidewalker, also monitor the rider).
- If at any time you are unsure/uncomfortable or your horse is acting up, it is your responsibility to speak up and an instructor or staff member will help you. A firm “no” is the only acceptable correction if a horse is misbehaving. Please let a staff member know if you need additional support.

Positioning

- Use proper lead rope handling and positioning (hold 10-12” from the halter, and fold the excess rope in a figure 8 in the other hand. Never hold onto the buckle of the rope/halter. Allowing the horse to move their head and neck freely is very important.
- Maintaining a proper leading position (between the shoulder and head of the horse) is important. Lead from the inside so you can hear the instructor better.
- If you have sidewalker(s) with you, remember to give them room between the wall and the horse so they do not get squished. The sidewalker will also need extra room when the horse is being steered around barrels, pylons, fence posts, trees, etc.

Role/Responsibilities during class

- Your main responsibility is to control the horse. Assist riders when appropriate and required (verbal and emotional support only - 2 hands should remain on the lead rope at all times) If the rider needs assistance with something besides verbal support, please call out to the instructor to come over and assist.
- Assist the rider in safely following the instructor's directions while encouraging as much independence as possible. Give the rider every opportunity to complete tasks on their

own, even if it takes a little longer, providing assistance only when needed or safety is compromised.

- Trot the horse only when requested to do so by the instructor. 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: when we go outside we share Keillor road with the public. The instructor will communicate with other users as needed.
- You are part of a team which includes your horse, rider, and up to 2 sidewalkers. It is important to know the names of your whole team. It takes practice to be able to work together as a team. Sharp turns or abrupt stops may unseat a rider; you can help by warning the rider/team of a "halt" or "walk on" or a turn.
- If your rider has Sidewalker(s), let them do most of the communicating with the rider.
- If YOUR rider falls off the horse, **You will need to HOLD ON to the horse and move it away from the fallen rider and come to a halt.** All other leaders should halt. The instructor will tend to the rider and give instructions as per the emergency plan.

Sidewalker:

The sidewalker is responsible for the safety of the rider and should stay at the rider's side to give physical, emotional, and/or social support and 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.

Overview

- Since the duties of the Sidewalker vary greatly, the instructor will inform you of a rider's requirements, needs, and special considerations
- Assist with balance, posture, and stability when directed to do so, or in case of emergency
- At the beginning of the lesson (during the mounting of the entire class), you can keep your rider interested and occupied until all riders are mounted and class is ready to begin.
- A sidewalker's role is to give the rider encouragement, a sense of security, and friendship. Some riders may also require physical support.
- Walk riders to the arena door to exit after dismount, ensure safe movement around horses (may require hand holding or support to maintain safety). Ask for assistance if the rider is noncompliant.
- Emergency procedure (sudden dismount, trip or rider falls & flight risk, etc): sidewalker is to try to keep the rider mounted. If that is not possible, try to assist the rider safely to the ground, ensuring the rider's feet come out of the stirrups. Keep a hold of the rider or stay close by once the rider is off of the horse, and do your best to keep them safe.

Positioning

- Walk in line with the rider's leg. Be ready to provide assistance if necessary. Do not put your hands in your pockets.

Physical Supports

Only provide physical holds/ supports under the direction of an instructor

when performing a hold, always keep your thumb in line with the rest of your hand

- Hand over Hand: use your hand to gently guide the rider through a maneuver (typically used to help with steering)



- Heel Support: used for riders with good balance who may need a little support to steady their leg position or be encouraged to keep their heel down. Gently “cup” the rider’s heel with your hand.



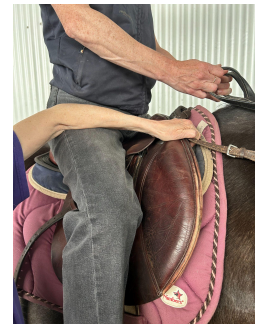
- Knee Support: place your forearm just above or below the knee joint with your hand holding the saddle flap. Take care not to put pressure directly on the knee joint.



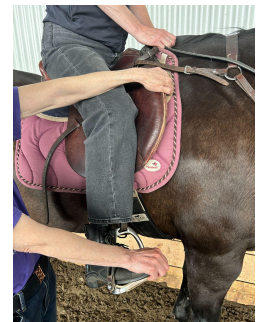
- Thigh Support: hold the saddle flap and provide light pressure across the rider’s thigh with the fleshy part of your forearm.



- Hip/Pelvic Support: hold the saddle flap and provide light pressure across the rider’s hip with the fleshy part of your forearm. *this hold is only used with a sidewalker on each side doing the same hold*



- Thigh/heel/toe Support: Both hands are involved with this hold. The arm nearest the rider does a thigh hold with the fleshy part of your forearm across the rider's thigh. The outside arm supports the rider by holding onto either the heel or toe of the rider. (this gives the rider’s lower leg a maximal amount of stability)



In class

- One sidewalker may need to repeat the instructor's directions and help the rider carry those instructions out. If there are 2 sidewalkers, decide beforehand who will take the lead in communicating with the rider.
- Supporting a rider who requires physical assistance can be tiring for sidewalkers. If you need to switch sides, alert the instructor. The horse will be halted off the track, and the instructor will coordinate a safe, one-at-a-time switch in front of the horse. If needed, another sidewalker may replace a fatigued volunteer.
- If the rider only has 1 sidewalker, then the sidewalker will generally walk on the opposite side of the leader so that they don't interfere with each other. If you need to switch sides, make sure you communicate with the instructor first and then your leader. The horse should halt, and you should go around the front of the horse.

Barn Assistant

If you would like to assist in grooming and tacking up horses, please speak to the barn manager first. Please note that too much help in the barn can be stressful for the horses. All barn activities are supervised and under instruction from the Little Bits barn manager, instructors & staff.

Please ask for assistance if you are unsure of anything. Follow procedures set out by LBTRA/WELCA.

Overview

- Getting horse from outside: staff will direct volunteer to bring horses in prior to lesson
- Grooming
- Tacking
- Post lesson care: untack, groom, and return horses to appropriate stall or pasture
- Barn support: assist with cleaning, tack maintenance, and general facility upkeep
- Feeding: only feed horses if asked to do so by a staff member

General

- As the lesson horses are handled by many different people, we want them to know that the routine will be the same every time they are brought into the grooming/ tacking stalls.
- Horses prefer to be patted on the neck or shoulder, so please avoid touching their faces.
- You will always be paired with a knowledgeable/trained volunteer before you are asked to work with a horse on your own. If you are uncomfortable with what is being asked, please speak up. If you have not been trained on how to do something (ie bridling), it is your responsibility to ask for help.
- When approaching a horse (in box stall, grooming stall, arena, pasture), ensure the horse is facing you and you talk to them so they know that you are approaching
- Maximum of 2 people in grooming stall at one time

Grooming

- If you have not been shown how to get a horse from a box stall, please ask a staff member or seasoned volunteer for assistance
- All horses are tied with a Quick Release knot, or in cross ties (horse dependent). When tying a horse, ensure you tie to the binder twine on the metal O ring (not the metal O ring itself).
- Groom in the following order:
 - Hoof pick (Left front, left hind, right hind, right front)
 - Curry comb
 - Dandy brush/ Body brush

If the main or tail are knotted and look to require some brushing, please talk to a staff member.

- Always start brushing on the left side of the horse, then proceed to the right side. 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. Make sure to run your bare hand (take off gloves) to ensure that the essential areas of girth and saddle are free of mud/ debris.

Tacking

- Tack each horse with its specified equipment. This information will be posted on the horse list or you can ask the barn manager.
- From the horse's left side, 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 the girth **slowly and gently** until the girth is just snug. The instructors will do the final tightening in the arena. Ensure you are monitoring the horse's body language while tightening girth.
- The bridle is the last piece of equipment to go on. 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 staff member for help.
- Place the bridle over the halter. Fasten the noseband under the halter, allowing two fingers of space, and secure the throatlatch over the halter with four fingers of space. Leave the horse tied with the halter and lead rope until entering the arena—never tie a horse by the reins. Secure the reins and stirrups, and never leave a tied horse unattended. If you need to leave, ensure someone is watching the horse and let them know you're stepping away.

Concerns regarding horse care may be sent via email to info@littlebits.ca.

Class changeover

- When entering the arena, the horse should go through the middle of the doorway. Ensure hind feet are in the arena before turning. Maintain safe spacing with the horse in front of you. Turn left and prepare for a trot in hand. Trot approximately from K to E and turn into centerline. Leave enough room beside horses on the centerline
- At times, there may be a volunteer changeover as we get the assigned leader/sidewalker(s) ready for the coming class.
- Instructors will come check tack and tighten girths. Please pay attention and do not hand off a horse during the tack check.
- Some horses may be staying for a second class, and some may be leaving. A staff member will direct you as to where the horse is going.
- If you are taking a horse back to the barn, make sure the stirrups are run up and the reins are secure prior to moving forward to the track.

Mounting

All mounting and dismounting must be facilitated by an instructor.

- Mounting may take place from a mounting block, the mounting ramp, or from the mechanical lift under the assistance and supervision of an instructor.
- For safety, the least amount of people around the mount the better

Leader's role:

- When a rider is mounting, the leader must hold the horse as still as possible. Stand between the head and shoulder of the horse and turn to watch the mount, switching your hands on the lead rope. If needed, your right hand may gently hold the cheekpiece in addition to the lead rope to provide extra control during this time. Your left hand should hold the remaining lead rope and can be placed on the horse's shoulder (this will help you feel if the horse is going to move forward)
- When directed by the instructor, leave the mounting block slowly and as straight as possible. Walk to the track and proceed past the E, then find a safe space to line up on centerline for a staff member to do the stirrup check.

Sidewalker's role:

- During the mount, the sidewalker will be asked to hold down the stirrup leather on the opposite side of the horse to counterbalance the weight the rider uses to mount and to prevent the saddle from slipping. Do not put your hand in the stirrup iron as the rider may step on your hand.
- The instructor will give you guidance in all types of mounting as needs vary per rider.

- You may 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. Riders with spasticity need time to get their bodies in the correct position on the horse. Be sure to never pull on the leg of the rider to get it in place - give the rider time to relax and then you can gently assist.
- If you are the second sidewalker, wait on the wall approximately ½ way between A and the entrance until the rider is ready to walk away from the block.

Dismounting

- The leader is to keep the horse as still as possible during the dismount.
- Upon direction of the instructor, the sidewalker's job is to ensure the rider's right foot is completely out of the stirrup before dismounting, and to hold the opposite stirrup in place.
- The sidewalker will then walk the rider out of the arena. Keep a hold of the rider or stay close by once the rider is off of the horse, and keep them safe.

Emergency Action Plans

Emergency action plans are posted around the arena. Please follow the directions of staff on site.

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 halt.
- All the 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.
- An incident report will need to be filed and the volunteer team may be asked to assist with it.

First Aid Stations

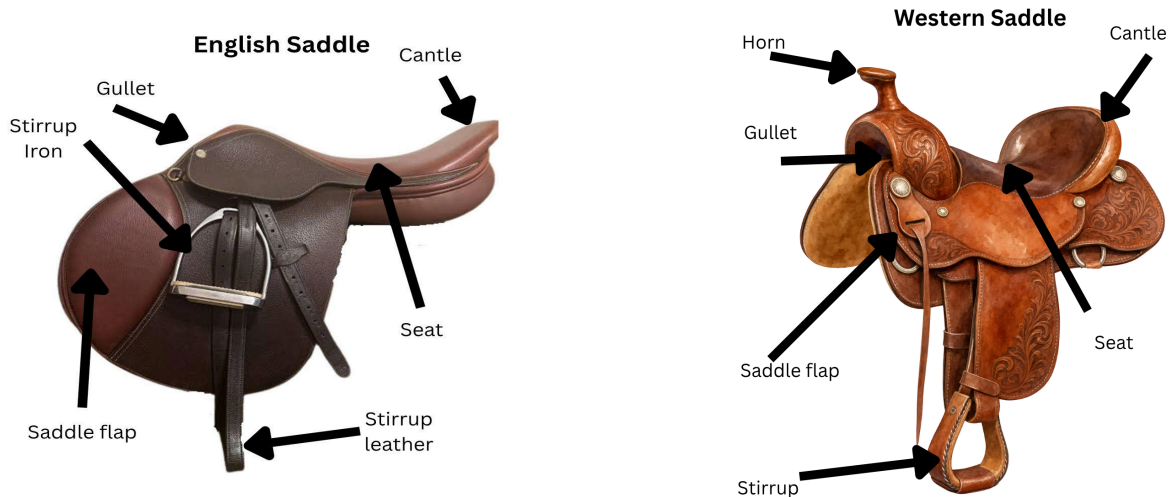
Please inform a staff member if you get injured so that they can record the incident and provide you with assistance/ first aid.

First Aid kits can be found:

- In the black locker in the arena (with rider's helmets and belts)
- In the cupboards above the sink in the classroom
- On the table inside the main entrance to the Little Bits tack room in the barn
- On top of the boarder lockers in the barn

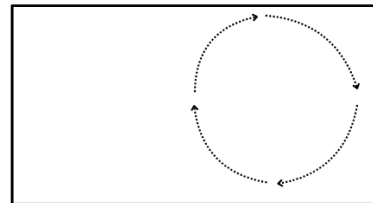
Thank you for being a volunteer with Little Bits! We look forward to meeting you!

Terminology

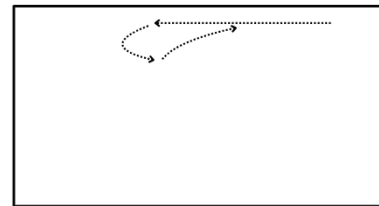


Letters of the arena: Large signs of A, K, E, H, C, M, B, F accompanied by pictures are located around the arena. They are often used by instructors as points to begin or end a maneuver (ie “halt at letter E”, “halt at the elephant”)

20 m circle/ warm up circle: after the stirrup check, you will be instructed to go to the warm up circle. Typically at the far end of the area, walk in a circle that is approximately 20 meters in diameter



Half circle reverse: shoulder check that the horse behind you is a safe distance, then turn the horse towards the centre of the arena and a half circle bringing it back onto the track, going the opposite direction.



Go large: go around the whole of the arena without doing any obstacles

Track/ Rail: the outside of the arena that riders ride on