

Lesson Volunteer Manual



HIGH & MIGHTY™
THERAPEUTIC RIDING AND DRIVING CENTER INC.
501 (c)(3)



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Lesson Volunteering

At High & Mighty, safety is our number one priority. Lesson volunteers help us to ensure the safety of our riders so that they can work toward being as independent as possible.

There are three different types of lesson volunteers: horse handler/leader, sidewalkers, and spotters. Each position has different responsibilities, which are described throughout this manual. All of our lesson volunteer positions require a volunteer to be able to walk for about an hour, and may require the volunteer to help lift or move equipment or a participant. If you have any reasons why a particular lesson volunteer position might be physically uncomfortable or not possible, or you have an injury that could prevent you from performing your volunteer duties, let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Working with Our Participants

It is a part of our mission at High & Mighty to foster the physical, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive growth of our participants through equine-assisted activities. Each of our participants has different needs, and it is important to remember that regardless of where each participant is at in their journey, we provide them with support in the most respectful manner possible. So here are a few things that may be helpful:

- Ask first before trying to help, even if the participant may not be able to respond verbally.
- Focus on the person, not the “disability.”
- Use person-first language (ex: “Sally has an emotional disability” instead of “Sally is emotionally disturbed.” Or “They have a learning disability,” instead of “They are learning disabled.”)
- Assistive devices, such as a wheelchair or a walker, help the participant to live their life. Please ask before you touch them.
- If someone has a service animal, only approach or touch them with explicit permission.
- We will not disclose any participant’s diagnosis or medical information, but we will always talk to our volunteers about what kind of support will be most helpful to the participant.
- If you’re not sure, just ask.

Attendance and Punctuality

We ask that you arrive at least **15 minutes** prior to the lesson. We also ask that you give us at least 24 hours’ notice if you will not be able to volunteer for a regularly scheduled lesson (including if you are sick). If you know you will be out-of-town or unable to volunteer for any reason, let us know as soon as possible. Many of our lessons require volunteer support for safety reasons, and if we cannot do a lesson due to a volunteer’s inconsistent attendance or lateness, we may find a replacement for your volunteering slot for the remainder of the session.

Risk Management

High & Mighty requires that all volunteer read and understand the safety risks, regulations and rules that are detailed in this manual. There is an inherent risk in working with horses because they have a mind of their own. Because of the potential risks, your complete cooperation in all safety protocols are of utmost importance to keep you, our participants, our staff and our horses safe.

Please see the orientation manual for our barn and horse safety rules.

Emergency Lesson Procedures

If an emergency occurs, follow the instructions of the riding instructor:

- Stay with your team.
- Leader will halt and head up the horse.
- Side walker will remain with participant.
- Side walkers will move to the arm over thigh and ankle hold position to secure participant. They will remain close to the horse.
- Stay calm and listen to your instructor. Follow their directions.
- The instructor may ask for additional assistance from the volunteers.
- If a participant must be dismounted, follow the emergency dismount procedure learned in the volunteer training.

If the participant were to take a fall and is on the ground:

- **Side walker:** Stand between the participant and the horse. Stay calm and give assurance to participant. Do not move participant. Wait for instructor's directions.
- **Horse handler:** Immediately lead the horse away from the participant.
- **All other teams:** Immediately halt and side walkers move to arm over thigh and heel hold position until/unless told otherwise by instructor.

If emergency personnel must be called:

- Instructor- Ask one volunteer to go to the phone and call emergency personnel.
- Dial 911:
 - location of emergency
 - 71 County Route 21C, Ghent NY
 - telephone number of the phone being used
 - caller's name
 - what happened
 - number of victims
 - condition of victims
 - help being given
 - NO SIRENS close to barn
 - stay on the line for further instructions
- Contact the barn owner/manager

Fire & Emergency Drill Procedures

Emergency drills are designed for the safety of all of those involved. It is important to be prepared in the event of emergency and know the appropriate steps required to get everyone to safety in the calmest and most efficient way possible.

When Practicing Drills:

- Instructor discusses the purpose of emergency drills.
- The instructor indicates the designated area to go after the dismount.
- Following the explanation of the drill, the instructor announces the practice drill.
- Upon completion of the drill, the instructor resumes class.

Emergency Meet-up Locations:

- In the event of a fire or other emergency in the barn or the indoor arena, evacuate immediately and meet in the OUTDOOR ARENA.
- If an emergency occurs at a different location of the property, please follow the direction of the instructor on where to meet.
- Under no circumstances is any staff member, volunteer, participant, or visitor to return to a burning building for any reason. This includes:
 - Retrieving personal belongings
 - Assisting those still in the building
 - Assisting animals still in the building

Horse Handler/Leader

The Horse Handler's primary responsibility is the safety and wellbeing of the horse; they are directly responsible for their assigned horse during program.

Responsibilities

Prior to the lesson...

- Bring your assigned horse up to the arena prior to their lesson (if rider is not assisting with grooming/tacking).
- When entering the arena, call out "coming in" before entering so that others are aware of your arrival.
- Use a lead rope attached to the grooming halter to lead the horse. Never wrap a lead rope around your hand or body part.
- Follow the instructor's directions regarding warming up your horse. This will help you to assess your horse's behavior and introduce your horse to any equipment being used in program.
- Once warmed up, line up at the end of the arena by "A" for the instructor's tack check (girth and stirrups). Leave plenty of space between your horse and the other horses in the lesson.

- After the tack check, lead the horse into the mounting area (by the ramp) once the instructor has directed you to do so.

Mounting in the Ramp...

- Enter the ramp/mounting area *before* the horse.
- Walk backwards, have the horse follow you.
- Keep the horse as close to the mounting ramp as possible.
- Face the horse. The horse needs to stand square and quietly while the participant is mounting.
- After the participant has mounted, wait until the instructor directs you and your participant to “walk on.”
- Follow the instructor’s directions.
- Stay on the far side of the arena until the instructor directs you to use the whole arena.

During Games...

- Follow all directions from instructor.
- If the directions are unclear, please ask instructor to repeat themselves.
- Have fun!
- Be careful not to get too competitive.

At the Trot...

- The participant needs to be ready to trot by sitting up tall, holding the hand hold/reins (depending on ability level) and giving the verbal cue to “trot.”
- Only begin trotting once an instructor has given you explicit directions to do so.
- Remember the horse will respond to your energy. If you ask the horse to trot, you must also trot.
- During the trot, if the participant becomes unbalanced, the side walker will ask you to “halt.” Always be aware of your team.
- Keep the trot slow and consistent.
- Work for a smooth transition between the walk and the trot and the trot and the walk.

Dismounting...

- Follow the instructor’s direction as to where to bring the horse for dismount.
- Face the horse. Keep the horse quiet and still while the participant is dismounting.
- The only person who is allowed to dismount is an instructor or a designated volunteer.
- Before returning to the barn from the indoor arena, be sure to pick up your horse’s feet.

Back at the barn after the lesson...

- If your participant is returning to the barn, help them to lead their horse to the barn.
- Cross tie horse in aisle or tie in stall.
- Help participant to remove tack.
- Properly wash and dry the bit.
- Put all tack away in its designated place.
- Pick your horse's feet (if they haven't been done already) and brush the horse's coat.
- Put your horse in their stall, take off the halter and hang it on the stall door.
- Be sure your horse has plenty of water, the stall is clean, AND THE DOOR IS CLOSED SECURELY!

Things to remember when horse handling

- Any prolonged stops require you to head up the horse (stand in front of the horse facing them) to encourage them to stand. Their head can have freedom of movement, but refrain from allowing them to walk. To encourage them to stand you may talk quietly to them and/or rub his neck. Communicate with your side walkers if you need support.
- Be aware of the space your side walkers safely need: i.e. do not get too close to the wall, fence or any object where their safety can be compromised.
- Know your horse and how to best to respond to them. Handle the horse according to the instructor's directions.
- Your body language/energy influences how your horse moves and behaves.
- When holding the lead rope, do not hold with weight in your hand. There is a connection, but do not pull down on the lead rope. The weight in your hand should be "active" not "heavy or passive."
- Keep your eyes up and face where you are going.
- Listen for and follow the instructor's directions during the lesson.
- You want to stay between the horse's head and shoulder so you can see your horse's head and especially their ears, which are big communicators.
- Our goal is to assist our participant in controlling the horse. Different participants have different skill sets. Ask the instructor regarding your role with each participant and horse.
- Always keep a safe distance (one horse length) from the horse in front of you.
- Know all emergency procedures that are included in this manual.

Sidewalker

The Sidewalker's primary responsibility is the safety and wellbeing of the participant.

The Sidewalkers assist the participant in understanding the directions from the instructor, as well as providing support and encouragement throughout the lesson.

There are two basic holds used during lessons:

- **Arm-Over Hold:**
 - The side walker grips the front of the saddle flap with the hand closest to the participant. Your forearm rests gently on the participant's thigh. Do not press down hard. Be aware of your elbow and make sure it does not accidentally dig into the participant's leg.
 - This hold provides an unbalanced participant with more stability.
- **Heel Hold:**
 - The hand closest to the participant cups the participant's ankle gently from behind. Do not pull down on the participant's leg.
 - This hold provides a rider working toward independence with additional stability and keeps the rider's heel/leg from sliding back on the horse.
- **Double Hold:**
 - Includes both an arm-over hold and a heel hold.

Some participants do not require the "holds" and you may instead be asked to walk alongside to provide other assistance.

Program Responsibilities:

During the Lesson...

- Maintain focus on the participant AT ALL TIMES. Assist the participant by focusing them on the instructor's directions.
- Never leave a participant unattended. As a sidewalker you must stay at their side. If you need to leave your participant for any reason, discuss with the instructor prior to doing so.
- Do not manipulate the participant's body to better their position. Ask the instructor for assistance.
- Be aware of your participant's foot position in the stirrup. A foot shoved forward in the stirrup compromises the participant's safety.
- You should maintain your position at the participant's knee in order to assist with instructions and/or provide security.

Mounting at the ramp...

- The instructor will indicate how to assist in mounting.
- Typically, you will
 - 1) help stabilize the saddle during the mount
 - 2) receive the participant's leg as they mount
 - 3) reassure the participant
 - 4) aid participant with putting their feet in the stirrups

During Games...

- Follow the instructor's directions regarding the level of support to the participant (i.e. walk beside, hand on ankle, arm-over-thigh).
- Follow the instructor's rules and directions for the game.
- See if your participant understands the directions and encourage the participant as appropriate.
- Be enthusiastic about the task at hand. This will help the participant to be engaged.
- Allow the participant to do as much as possible on his/her own within the confines of safety/ability.

At the trot...

- Follow the instructor's directions regarding the level of support to the participant (i.e. walk beside, hand on ankle, arm-over).
- Make sure the participant is ready before trotting. Communicate with the horse handler if your participant is not ready.
- With participants that require more assistance, tie the reins in a knot.
- Be sure the participant is holding the handhold with both hands (unless told otherwise by instructor).
- Be sure participant is sitting in the center of the saddle.
- Keep up with your participant and horse when trotting—if you are behind the horse do not run behind the horse to catch up.

Dismounting...

- The instructor will typically dismount the participants in the center of the arena. Assist the instructor as directed. Assistance is usually given on the "off" or right side..

Back at the barn after the lesson...

- If your participant is returning to the barn, help them to lead their horse to the barn.
- Cross tie horse in aisle or tie in stall.
- Help participant to remove tack.
- Properly wash and dry the bit.
- Put all tack away in the designated place.
- Pick the horse's feet if not already done and brush the horse's coat.

- Put the horse in the stall, take off the halter and hang it on the stall door. Be sure the horse has plenty of water, the stall is clean, AND THE DOOR IS CLOSED SECURELY!

Things to remember when side walking:

- Some participants need additional time to process directions. Give an appropriate amount of “wait time” and then offer assistance if needed.
- You must be physically able to complete the tasks of a side walker. You must be comfortable with and able to walk beside a horse, walk for an hour and have your arm lifted between your waist and shoulder for extended periods of time.
- Know all emergency procedures that are included in this manual.
- Watch for signs of participant discomfort and inform instructor.
- We encourage you to switch sides to help balance your body—your physical wellbeing is important.
- You may be asked to escort the participant to the barn/arena/ring/mounting ramp as directed by instructor.
- Post lesson: Assist the participant in returning tack, thanking horses, volunteers, and staff, and saying goodbye. Escort them to their families/guardians. Ask the instructor if there is anything they should share with the families or guardians.

Spotter

The job of a Spotter is monitoring the safety of participants who are working on their independent riding skills and assisting them if/when necessary. We utilize Spotters for riders who no longer need a horse handler or side walker, but still benefit from the additional support of a volunteer devoted just to them. Spotters should be comfortable both as a horse handler and a side walker as spotting usually combines skills from those two roles.

Program Responsibilities:

During the lesson...

- Maintain a position between the horse’s shoulder and the rider’s leg, several steps away to allow independence. This allows you to more easily assist with the horse or the rider as needed.
- Assist the participant by focusing them on the instructor’s directions.
- Be mindful of your participant’s foot position in the stirrup. Independence requires shifts in balance which may cause a rider’s feet to shift in the stirrups as they grow accustomed to independent riding.
- Encourage the rider to be as independent as possible and perform skills without assistance as is appropriate.

Mounting at the Ramp...

- The instructor will indicate how to assist in mounting.
- You may be asked to
 - 1) help stabilize the saddle during the mount
 - 2) guide the participant's leg as they mount
 - 3) reassure the participant and/or the horse
 - 4) assist participant with putting their feet in the stirrups

During Games...

- Be sure you understand the instructor's rules and directions for the game.
- See if your participant understands the directions and inform instructor if anything is unclear.
- Be enthusiastic about the task at hand. This will help the participant and the horse to be engaged.
- As always encourage as much independence as possible while maintaining safety.

At the Trot...

- Follow the instructor's directions regarding support (if any) to give to the participant. Some participants may be independent at the walk but require some assistance at the trot.
- Make sure the participant is ready before trotting.
- Be sure their rein length is appropriate before trotting.
- Be sure participant is sitting in the center of the saddle.
- Keep up with your participant and horse when trotting.

Dismounting...

- The instructor will typically dismount the participants in the center of the arena. Assist the instructor as directed. Assistance is usually given on the "off" or right side.

Back at the barn after the lesson...

- If your participant is returning to the barn, accompany them to down to the barn and assist as needed.
- Cross tie horse in aisle or tie in stall.
- Help participant to remove tack.
- Properly wash and dry the bit.
- Put all tack away in the designated place.
- Pick the horse's feet if not already done and brush the horse's coat.
- Put the horse in the stall, take off the halter and hang it on the stall door. Be sure the horse has plenty of water, the stall is clean, AND THE DOOR IS CLOSED SECURELY!

Things to remember when Spotting

- While your main focus is still the safety of your rider, keep in mind that the goal is for them to gain independent riding skills and you should only give assistance if necessary.
- If a rider would like to perform a skill independently but cannot do so safely, inform the instructor so they can instruct you on how to proceed.
- You must be physically able to complete the tasks of a spotter. You must be comfortable with and able to walk beside a horse and walk for an hour. You must also be comfortable providing assistance with basic riding skills.
- Know all emergency procedures that are included in this manual.
- Watch for signs of participant discomfort and inform instructor.
- You may be asked to escort the participant to the barn/arena/ring/mounting ramp as directed by instructor.
- Post lesson: Assist the participant in returning tack, thanking horses, volunteers, and staff, and saying goodbye. Escort them to their families/guardians.

Working as Part of the Team

- Always check the chalkboard in the barn for any special instructions.
- Always speak to the instructor if you have any questions or special requirements.
- Greet participants and families/guardians when they arrive. If needed, introduce yourself.
- Arrive at least 15 minutes before class begins.
- Understand the procedures of a typical lesson.
- Your primary goal is to assist the participant to achieve their goals.
- Know the participant's goals and follow the instructor's methods for achieving these goals.
- Be aware of the participants' special abilities.
- Remember, participants will not fully benefit if you do everything for them. Encourage the participant to be as independent as possible within the confines of appropriate safety and ability levels. Check with the instructor as to the level of assistance each participant requires.
- While conversations that include other team members are appropriate, conversations between volunteers that exclude the participant are not appropriate. Save catching up with friends for before or after program.
- Keep all conversations with the participant brief, as you should be assisting the participant in focusing their attention on the instructor.
- Your main responsibility is your assigned job as outlined above. However, if you see something going on which should be addressed, i.e. participant in front of you is off balance, tell the instructor.

- Remember that sometimes participants have tough days. Do not take it personally and do your best to support them in a professional, appropriate manner.
- Any situation that would compromise the safety of the participant, team, or horse should be brought to the instructor's attention immediately.
- Following your volunteer session, please bring any questions, concerns or comments to the instructor. These are some of the most valuable insights for the participant's progress. This also helps us and our horses to become better teachers.

Tacking Instructions

ALWAYS BRING ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS REGARDING A HORSE, TACK, PARTICIPANT OR VOLUNTEER TO THE INSTRUCTOR'S ATTENTION. COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY TO HUMAN AND EQUINE SAFETY ALIKE.

Please note that you must have had High & Mighty training and instructor's approval before tacking. If you are interested in this training, please inform the instructor.

- Check the board or with the instructor for any changes in tack/assigned horses.
- Each horse has his own grooming bucket, grooming halter, and bridle.
- When a horse is on the cross ties, they must be in a halter.
- Get correct grooming bucket for horse and groom horse. This includes picking feet (needs prior training & approval), currying, brushing body, brushing mane and tail. This may be done with participants or prior to a lesson as per instructor.
- If grooming with a participant, your body needs to be at the hind end of the horse.
- Saddle the horse first. Make sure everything is lying smooth and flat- no twisted leather, folds, wrinkles etc.
- Stirrups must be run up on both sides to prevent them getting caught on items. This is not possible in a western saddle.
- Note: some horses use bareback pads or fleeces. Follow instructor's directions.
- Ask the instructor before bridling!
- If the horse resists bridling, ask for help. Do not get into a tug of war.
- Check to make sure all the keepers are in place and that there are no straps flapping.
- Instructor where reins should be attached (bit or halter) and place them through the hand hold of the saddle, therefore avoiding any potential accident with a horse stepping through a rein.
- **IMPORTANTLY:** If you notice any part of a horse's equipment is missing or broken bring it to the attention of the instructor immediately.

Leader Skills Checklist

Skill	Yes	No	In Progress
Be able to walk for 30-60 minutes, sometimes on uneven or hilly terrain			
Be able to jog next to a horse for at least one long-side; if unable to do so, make instructor aware of any potential accommodations necessary			
Groom horse independently	Halter		
	Quick-release knot		
	Cross-tie		
	Use correct grooming tools for intended purpose		
	Saddle without assistance		
	Bridle (if pre-approved)		
Lead horse independently	Able to stop horse using body and voice cues		
	Able to ask horse to walk on while maintaining correct body position (i.e., walking in between horse's head and shoulder)		
	Able to line horse up, head them up, and keep them standing at the ramp.		
	Recognize basics of horse behavior (ear signals, body signals)		
	Able to verbally communicate and physically demonstrate their role as leader during an emergency dismount or when a horse spooks		
Untack horse independently	Return all tack to the tack room in its correct place		
	Remove bridle (if pre-approved)		
	Return horse to cross-ties, stall, or paddock without assistance		
Completed a volunteer orientation and leader/sidewalker training			
Shadowed a veteran volunteer for at least 2 lessons			

Sidewalker Skills Checklist

Skill	Yes	No	In Progress
Be able to walk for 45-60 minutes, sometimes on uneven or hilly terrain.			
Be able to jog next to a horse for at least one long-side; if unable to do so, make instructor aware of any potential accommodations necessary.			
Be able to communicate your own needs or concerns related to the participant to the instructor.			
Be able to communicate instructor's directions to the rider.			
Participate in role of sidewalker in an emergency dismount.			
Completed a volunteer orientation and sidewalker training.			
Shadowed in a lesson for at least 2 lessons.			

Spotter Skills Checklist

Skill	Yes	No	In Progress
Be able to walk for 45-60 minutes, sometimes on uneven or hilly terrain.			
Be able to jog next to a horse for at least one long side; if unable to do so, make instructor aware of any potential accommodations necessary.			
Be able to communicate instructor's directions to the rider.			
Completed training and checklists for both sidewalker AND leader volunteer positions.			
Participate in either role of sidewalker or leader in an emergency dismount.			

Barn Volunteer

Skill	Yes	No	In Progress	
Complete barn work independently or with minimal supervision	Mucking fields	w/ wheelbarrow		
		w/ Gator		
	Fill water buckets			
	Muck stalls			
	Distribute hay	In stalls		
		In fields		
Sweeping				
Dusting				
To assist with preparation for lessons	Leading horses (for turnout/turn in); bring horses in for a lesson			
	Groom horses			
	Tack horses			
	Clean and organize tack			

Driving Skills		Yes	No	In Progress
Be able to walk for 30-60 minutes, sometimes on uneven or hilly terrain				
Be able to jog next to a horse for at least one long-side; if unable to do so, make instructor aware of any potential accommodations necessary				
Groom horse independently	Halter			
	Quick-release knot			
	Cross-tie			
	Use correct grooming tools for intended purpose			
	Saddle without assistance			
	Bridle (if pre-approved)			
Lead horse independently	Able to stop horse using body and voice cues			
	Able to ask horse to walk on while maintaining correct body position (i.e., walking in between horse's head and shoulder)			
	Able to line horse up, head them up, and keep them standing at the ramp.			
	Recognize basics of horse behavior (ear signals, body signals)			
	Able to verbally communicate and physically demonstrate their role as leader during an emergency dismount or when a horse spooks			
Untack horse independently	Return all tack to the tack room in its correct place			
	Remove bridle (if pre-approved)			
	Return horse to cross-ties, stall, or paddock without assistance			
Completed a volunteer orientation and leader/sidewalker training				
Shadowed a veteran volunteer for at least 2 lessons				