

R I D G E B U R Y R I D E R S

VOLUNTEER MANUAL



WWW.RIDGEBURYRIDERS.ORG

Ridgebury Farm & Stables
484 Ridgebury Road
Ridgefield, CT





Hello there!

Volunteers are critical to the success of our programs. We could not provide such a high quality program without your help and your support allows us to serve a diverse population of participants. Your compassion, enthusiasm and gift of time add an important dimension to our participant's lives. We hope your experience with Ridgebury Farm and Stables will bring you joy, personal growth and fulfillment. Your spirit of volunteerism is a valuable asset and our saying "thank you" barely expresses our sincere appreciation for your time and talents. We welcome you as a member of our team!

Our goal is to offer our clients a positive experience that addresses each client's strengths and builds opportunities that enhance client goals. It is our wish to challenge our clients to fulfill their goals and even exceed their expectations both physically and mentally. You are a big part of that.

Please familiarize yourself with our policies and procedures and join us in our efforts to continuously evolve as a premier therapeutic riding facility. We greatly appreciate your interest and time.

Thank you for taking the time to read this manual, in which you will find information pertinent to your experience as a volunteer.

Executive Director, Ridgebury Riders





Volunteer Opportunities

As a volunteer, you will be working as part of a team that generally includes:

- **Therapist/Instructor**— AHA certified therapists or experienced instructors who manage the entire session, provide instruction, and support clients and volunteers.
- **Clients**— both participants with and without disabilities.
- **Horses**— specially trained animals, from a variety of backgrounds.
- **Horse Leaders/ Handlers**— experienced individuals who are responsible for leading and managing the horse during the session, including bringing the horse to the arena and returning the horse to the barn. They must have significant horse experience and a willingness to attend horsemanship training sessions to keep handling skills consistent for our horses.
- **Side Walkers**— individuals who act as an extension of the therapists and instructors, helping to safely guide the client through the lesson and achieve their goals. They are responsible for walking/jogging alongside the horse while the client is riding. This may involve a safety hold of the client for an entire lesson, or more a hands- off approach depending on the needs of the client.

Assistance is needed in all aspects of our program and there are many opportunities for volunteering: barn, facilities, fundraising, special events, etc.

However, weekly session program volunteers are the backbone of our program and we are so appreciative of your commitment of time and care.

Program sessions may include mounted or unmounted integrated activities, games and skills, and be held inside or outdoors. Each client has a team that may include some combination of horse handler and one or two side walkers.

Session Terminology

ARM OVER THIGH HOLD – Hold onto the front of the bareback pad or front flap of the saddle, placing the forearm over the middle of the client's thigh. Exert pressure on the thigh. The therapist will guide you on the level of support for the client. Care should be taken not to involve the client's knee or hip joints in the hold.

THIGH HOLD – Loose hold onto client's mid thigh with hand. This hold is generally used to instill confidence in the client vs. for physical support. The therapist will advise if more or less pressure or contact is needed.

ANKLE HOLD – Hold onto the front of the client's lower leg, just above the ankle. This hold may be used to assist the client in keeping their leg in a safe position. If the client is side sitting on the horse the sidewalker may hold both ankles to support.

SPOTTING – The sidewalker will stay in line with the client's hip. The sidewalker will remain hands off but ready to assist the client as needed.



Session Terminology

SIDE SITTING HOLD - Client will be seated facing the sidewalker. In this position the sidewalker may grab the front of the bareback pad and apply their forearm across the middle of the clients thighs applying moderate pressure. Therapists may ask the sidewalker to switch to an ankle hold depending on the activity.

SUPINE SIDE SITTING HOLD - Client will start in a seated position facing the sidewalker. The therapist will help the client lay back onto or towards the therapist. The sidewalker may apply maximum assistance as directed by the therapist.

GAIT BELT HOLD - Client will be side seated towards the therapist. The sidewalker may hold the gait belt at two points as directed by the therapist.

REAR FACING HOLD - Client is seated backwards on the horse. The sidewalker will have two points of contact on the client; one arm over thigh and one hand on the client's heel.



Mounting & Dismounting

HORSE HANDLERS AND HORSES WILL GENERALLY ENTER THE ARENA AND WALK HORSES UP TO AWAIT MOUNTING AT THE MOUNTING RAMP. CLIENTS MOUNT WITH THE AID OF THE INSTRUCTOR AND THE SIDE WALKER.

STANDARD CROUP MOUNT

The Standard Croup Mount can be used with riders of varying abilities and experience, and the amount of assistance can increase or decrease depending on the rider.

Riders will mount their horse from the block or the ramp with guidance from the trainer/therapist, and the side walker will assist as needed. In general, the rider will mount from the left side of the horse.

The side walker will wait across from the mounting block or ramp, on the 'off side' of the horse during the mount. Side walkers will be ready to assist if necessary.

The rider will place both hands on the front of the saddle or bareback pad. If using stirrups, the rider will place their left foot in the stirrup and swing their right leg over the horses back, careful not to hit the horses rump with their foot. If there are no stirrups or the stirrup hangs below the mounting block or ramp, the rider will keep their left foot on the block and swing their right leg over the horses back. The rider will sit gently in the saddle or bareback pad, and as a team everyone will walk on as instructed by the therapist or trainer.

CREST MOUNT

The Crest Mount is used in certain circumstances where the rider needs maximum assistance, such as high muscle tone, non weight bearing, and limited range of motion.

Crest Mounts will always be done from the ramp, with the therapist or trainer assisting the rider from the ramp, and the side walker assisting from the off side of the horse.

The side walker will wait across from the ramp on the smaller mounting block. Once the horse is in position, as close to the ramp as possible, the rider will be backed up towards the horse with the guidance of the therapist or trainer. The therapist/ trainer will then guide the rider down to the saddle or bareback pad, and the side walker will help guide the hips down.

Once the riders bottom is seated, the side walker will continue to support their hips from the back, and the therapist/ trainer will begin lifting both of the riders legs and pivot them into a forward seated position. Both legs will be lifted over the horses crest, and then gently lowered on each side.



Every
person can
make a
difference,
and every
person
should try.

— John F.
Kennedy



Mounting & Dismounting

STANDARD CROUP DISMOUNT

The standard croup dismount will generally be done to the ground, and the rider will be assisted by the trainer or therapist. As the side walker, you will be on the right side of the horse and the rider will dismount to the left.

If necessary, the rider will remove both feet from the stirrups. Once their feet are free, the rider will lean forward and "give their horse a hug". At this point, the side walker can prompt the rider to bring their leg up and over the horse's back. They may need some assistance lifting their leg high enough over the saddle, so the side walker can help guide the leg into position, and the trainer or therapist will guide the rider to the ground from there.

If appropriate, the side walker can help the rider roll up their stirrups and say thank you to their horse. The side walker can walk their rider back to their guardian.



Emergency Protocol

Accidents and emergencies do not happen often, but it is important that we all know what to do if they do occur. No matter what happens during a session, the therapist or trainer is in charge, but sometimes things can happen very quickly (ex: a spooked horse, a hazard on the trail, branches or snow moving on the arena roof). It is important to work as a team to help keep everyone as secure and safe as possible. In an emergency, the horse handler will focus on the horse, while the side walker and therapist will focus on the client.

DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN AN EMERGENCY

- If you are the **horse leader** and are involved, try to stop the horse and stay as straight as possible.
- If you are a **side walker** during an emergency in an OT, PT or Speech session, the therapist will either perform an emergency dismount or give instruction on how to proceed with a stabilizing hold.
- If you are a **side walker** that is involved in an emergency during a typical or EAT session, the side walker will assess the situation and either use an arm over thigh hold to stabilize the rider OR perform an emergency dismount if necessary.

INDIRECTLY INVOLVED IN AND EMERGENCY

- If you are a **horse leader** and are not directly involved in an emergency, stop your horse and try to keep them calm. Face the "emergency", ie: a fallen rider or loose horse. The trainer or therapist will give further instruction.
 - If you are a **side walker** with a client other than the one involved in the emergency, apply the "arm over thigh" hold and quietly communicate your client's needs to the horse leader and/or the other side walkers. Work together to keep your client calm.

IF AN EMERGENCY DISMOUNT BECOMES NECESSARY

- When a trainer/therapist calls for an emergency dismount, the horse leaders halt and turn to face their horse.
- Trainers/ therapists or side walkers inform the rider that they will be dismounting them. If there are two side-walkers, the rider dismounts towards the inside of the arena.
- Make sure the rider's feet are free from the stirrups and hands are free from the reins. Place arms around the rider's waist and gently guide rider off as you step away from the horse, the rider will remain in front of you.
 - Move the rider safely away from the horse.
- The horse leader moves the horse safely away from the rider, making sure to keep hindquarters facing away from the rider and volunteer pair.
 - Leader remains with the horse.
- The off-side side-walker moves out of the way of the horse, and then returns to the rider.

ALL EMERGENCY DISMOUNTS SHOULD BE LOGGED IN THE EMERGENCY DISMOUNT BOOK KEPT IN THE FARMHOUSE OFFICE.

Emergency Protocol

FALLEN CLIENT OR MEDICAL EMERGENCY

If a client falls from a horse, becomes injured, or has a medical emergency during a session, all horses are halted and all activity should stop. The therapist is responsible for managing the incident, including applying any necessary first aid. Volunteers may be asked to assist by retrieving a first-aid kit.

The horse handler of the horse involved should take care of the horse only, carefully turning the haunches away from the client, moving the horse away, and then halting. The side walker should stay with and reassure the client. Be prepared to give the therapist an account of what happened to the client as they fell, to help in the assessment.

All other horse handlers should halt their horses and head them off. Leaders remain at the horses' heads. All other side walkers are to apply "arm over thigh" support and calmly stay with and reassure their clients, awaiting further direction from the therapist.

The therapist can then assess the situation to see whether the client is able to return to the session or needs further assistance. If the client is not injured, but chooses not to continue riding, the horse is taken away and the client is brought to the farmhouse for further assessment.

If the client is in serious condition, the emergency plan goes into effect. The therapist makes sure that the injured client is in a safe location and the client is not to be moved in any way until medical personnel arrive. All incidents are to be documented in the office with a written report.

EMERGENCY PLAN

The Emergency Plan goes into effect if a client has a suspected serious injury or loses consciousness for any period of time. As in any emergency, the therapist/ trainer will take charge and give instructions, which may look like:

911 is called when a serious injury is suspected. Generally, the therapist or a volunteer will call the office and ask them to call Emergency Services (911) from the landline in the office. The client is given any necessary first aid and kept warm. Someone will wait by the street to direct the emergency personnel to the client. The other clients and horses should be taken to a safe location to clear the way for the emergency vehicle.

In the event of an emergency requiring evacuation (ie: a fire): if you are in the barn or indoor, move to the parking lot area next to the office.

More Information

STAFF DIRECTORY

Katy Schermann, Executive Director- 203-943-9951
Whitney Wildman, Assistant Director- 203-610-1875
Ian Schermann, Director of Operations- 203-943-9985
David Wildman, Barn Manager- 203-913-0883
Phil Allen, Property Manager- 919-883-8489
Michele Farrelly, Clinical Director-203-260-1588
Haley Levesque, Program Coordinator/ Trainer- 914-960-1534
Katie Levis, Trainer- 908-752-0228

Cancellations and Weather Closings

Ridgebury Farm asks if you are unable to attend your session, notification must be made by calling (203-801-5254) or emailing (whitney@ridgeburyfarm.com) the office. Sufficient notice of at least 24 is needed so that we may communicate with the therapists, barn staff, and volunteers.

If a session you are scheduled is canceled, the farm will let you know via text or email as early as possible. In the event of inclement weather, you will be notified of a cancellation via text or email. We will also post on our Facebook page if we will be closed due to the weather.

Length of Sessions

Hippotherapy Sessions are 45 minutes long. EAT Sessions and Typical Sessions are 30 minutes long.

VOLUNTEER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Non-discrimination Policy

Ridgebury Farm provides programs to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, color, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, economic class, or age.

Commitment and Availability

Your support is critical to the success of our program and the safety of our clients. Consistency can be very important for our clients, so we ask all volunteers directly involved with our program (horse handlers and side walkers) to commit a minimum of one and a half hours each week on the same day and time for the length of a session.

Communication

We request most of our communication is done through email, text or phone. If you need to cancel, please contact Ridgebury Farm as soon as possible so that a replacement can be found. If you are canceling on the day of the class, please text us. As part of your commitment to volunteering, we ask that you reserve cancellations for emergencies. In the event that your client has canceled with us, we will do everything we can to contact you in advance via phone, email, or text, so please be sure we have all your contact information on file.

Paperwork

Everyone who volunteers or visits the farm for more than a tour needs to fill out a Waiver and a Volunteer Intake Form before they train or volunteer at the farm.

Arrival and Sign-In

When you arrive, please go to the volunteer check in area in the farmhouse kitchen to sign in on the volunteer log. Then proceed to the barn or the ring (remember to call out "DOOR!" before you enter the indoor arena). Side walker volunteers should arrive at least 15 minutes BEFORE the start of a session in order to assist clients from their cars; horse handlers need to arrive 20 minutes BEFORE to assist in the barn and bring horses to the arena. Please plan to stay 15 minutes after the end of class.

Dress Code

Please wear appropriate footwear and clothing. Long pants and boots with a small heel are ideal, but any closed-toed shoes with a flat sole or small heel are appropriate. Be prepared to be inside or outside in any weather. During winter, think layers, hand-warmers, and good gloves. During warmer weather, use sunscreen, bug spray, and bring water. Do not wear dangling jewelry.

More Information

Smoking and Alcohol Policy

Ridgefield Farm is a smoke-free environment. There is no smoking outside or inside on any part of our property. There is a no-tolerance policy with regard to alcohol and other controlled substances. Staff reserves the right to require an individual to leave the premises if they appear to be impaired.

Cell Phone Policy

We ask that you do not use your cell phone while you are volunteering in class with us at Ridgefield Farm. We encourage our staff, clients, and volunteers to be fully present and in the moment, giving your client/horse your full attention. If you have an emergency that may need your attention, please discuss this with the therapist before the start of class.

Conduct, Behavior, and Dismissal

As a volunteer, you are a representative of our organization. All volunteers are expected to set a good example for the students. Inappropriate language, disruptive behavior, or behavior that threatens the health and/or safety of others is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. If you are subject to any type of inappropriate behavior by a client or anyone else, please notify a staff member immediately; do not approach the client. Appropriate action will be taken by staff to correct the situation.

Confidentiality Policy

Out of respect for those who take part in the programs at Ridgebury Farm we ask that you keep all client information confidential. The professional relationship between Ridgebury Farm and our clients requires there be no disclosure of any information about an individual client without proper authorization. By signing the Volunteer Registration Form, you acknowledge an understanding of this policy. Please do not give any identifying information about participants, information about their diagnosis or symptoms, or overly detailed information about a program session to anyone outside of the session. Only very general information should be discussed (i.e. "my student had a great ride"). Please discuss only in private settings.

Therapists will only disclose medical information or diagnoses that the volunteers must know to maintain their rider's safety. For example, if a student has a seizure disorder the instructor will tell the volunteer team and brief them on the plan that should be implemented in the event that the rider has a seizure.

No photos are allowed during sessions or of the clients unless specifically instructed by staff to do so.

Medical Issues

If you have severe allergies, such as bees, wasps, or nuts, please be sure to carry your EpiPen on your person at all times when you are on property. If you have asthma, carry your inhaler. Be sure to clearly indicate any health issues that could affect your participation in programs on the registration form and to Ridgebury Staff

Safety

Safety must always be taken into consideration when working with horses. Volunteers are taught emergency procedures and accident prevention in the case of a fallen client, a hurt/sick horse, or an unsafe environment for all parties. Please inform staff immediately of any concerns regarding the behavior of the horses such as biting, kicking, etc. Please respect the instructor at all times and follow all directions given.

Working with People with Disabilities

Working with a special-needs population may be a new experience for some volunteers. At Ridgebury Farm we aim to treat everyone—our clients, our horses, and each other—the same way: with respect and kindness, being considerate and sensitive to individual needs. If you are ever uncertain of what to do or how to act, just ask the instructor how you can be of assistance.