

# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



# VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES

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# Welcome!

*“Be the change you wish to see in the world”*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

You have chosen to give some of your valuable time to volunteer to help improve the lives of the disabled children and adults at The BiNA Farm, Inc. (TBF). We hope that in doing so, you will find that your own life has been enhanced as well. All of us at TBF are proud of the fine work we do, and the extraordinary results that we see. Thank you for becoming a part of our growing organization.

This manual has been developed to provide you with some guidelines for working with our disabled riders. **Please read it carefully.** The information it contains is important, and will improve the quality of your work.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. We want you to know that every person you are helping at TBF is aware of and grateful for your help. Without you, this program could not exist. You are valuable to us, and we appreciate all that you do.



## The BiNA Farm, Inc. Volunteer Program

Thank you for your interest in Volunteering at The BiNA Farm, Inc. The BiNA Farm's volunteers provide tremendous support to our programs and the time and energy you contribute will always be greatly appreciated!

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The BiNA Farm (TBF) is committed to providing a comprehensive therapeutic environment utilizing Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT), a Life Skills Program and Creative and Complementary Therapy Programs. We bring together those with and without special needs by offering a variety of inclusive enrichment programs that will ultimately help them to thrive personally and to make their best contribution to society.

### **ABOUT US**

The BiNA Farm program consists of three components: Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies, Life Skills Programs and Creative and Complementary Therapies. Our programs do not focus on our clients' limitations but rather on what they can achieve. Our services are open to any person with a disability who could benefit from these special forms of therapy. These therapies do not replace other forms of treatment, but rather augment them and help our clients to reach their full potential. In fact, our instructors and therapists may work closely with the clients' physicians to create the best treatment plan.

The BiNA Farm is committed to the following goals:

- Providing a nurturing therapeutic environment that focuses on the unique challenges of each client.
- Creating an atmosphere that transcends the usual rehabilitative model.
- Bringing together those with and without special needs through a variety of enrichment programs for siblings, parents, caregivers and friends.
- Providing both short and long term support for our clients and their families.
- Treat all clients, their families, friends, staff and animals with respect, dignity, kindness and compassion.

# Who do you call?

## **Volunteer Cancellations**

Volunteers are critical to the success of the program. When you commit to your volunteer role, your support is truly needed to serve our participants and care for our equine friends. Please reserve canceling your scheduled day and time for emergencies. If you must cancel, we ask that you call The BiNA Farm as soon as possible so that a replacement can be found.

## **Who do I call if I can't come?**

If you know ahead of time that you can't come, please call our office at 508-651-2426(BiNA) or email our volunteer coordinator: Maura Gilbert at [maura@binafarm.org](mailto:maura@binafarm.org). If it is a last minute emergency and you can't make it, please call our Program Director, Terry Snow at (508) 479-6232.

## **Who do I call if I need more information or if I have questions?**

You can call our office at 508-651-2426 or email [Maura@binafarm.org](mailto:Maura@binafarm.org)

## **Who do I call to find out if classes are cancelled due to weather or holidays?**

Check our website calendar.

## **How do I sign in?**

Please sign in and out in the Volunteer Record Book.

## **Where are the fire extinguisher and phone located?**

Please refer to the emergency instructions at each facility.

## **What do I do in an emergency?**

There is more information on this in the manual, but basically, you follow the directions of the instructor of the class, the head instructor, or the program director.

## General Guidelines

**Please dress neatly.** To prevent foot injuries, wear closed shoes (no sandals or loafers); hard shoes with heels are preferred. Unless it is extremely hot, please wear long pants. Avoid loose clothing and jewelry, as they can be obstructive and cause injury. Wear sun glasses or a hat to protect your eyes.

**Cell phones are not allowed in the arena.** If you are expecting a call, please leave your cell phone with one of the volunteers or parents who is not in the arena. Answering a call takes your attention away from your most important job – the safety of our riders.

**Chewing gum, eating and drinking are not allowed in the arena.** This is both for your safety and the safety of the riders.

**Don't forget to sign in.** If you are getting school credit for volunteering, we need proof that you were here. We also use it to make us eligible for certain kinds of funding. Your hours are also noted by us for use in volunteer recognition and volunteer rewards.

**We depend on you to be here.** If you can't come, please let us know ahead of time so that we can arrange for a substitute. We really appreciate your consideration.

**We treat our horses GENTLY.** Never kick or hit a horse. If a reprimand or schooling is necessary, let the instructor do it.

**We treat our students with RESPECT.** Talk to them appropriately for their age, and never yell. Use positive rather than negative reinforcement. Be patient. Count to 30 before repeating a request, especially if a student is learning disabled. He or she might need extra time to process what you asked. Be understanding of fear, but if you can't handle a problem with a student, ask the instructor for help.

**Keep what happens at the farm confidential.** We know you are excited about what you do here, and want to share it with others. Please do so in a way that does not identify the riders. They have a right to privacy. See Confidentiality Agreement.

**Keep busy.** If you have a long break, there are plenty of things you can do to help out. Clean up the tack room or office, wash out buckets, clean the toys, pull weeds, groom a horse that isn't being used, muck the stalls, pick up rocks from the arena, or just ask us how you can help.

**Have fun! Smile, laugh, and enjoy yourself.** Your enthusiasm is contagious!

# Mounted Activity Emergency Plan

## ***If there is an emergency while a lesson is in session:***

1. All horses will be halted.
2. All leaders will position themselves in front of the horse. The leaders are responsible ONLY for the horse, not the riders.
3. All sidewalkers will stabilize their riders (arm over leg support). If there are two riders on the same horse, the sidewalker on the left supports the rider in front and the sidewalker on the right supports the rider in the back. The sidewalkers are responsible ONLY for the rider, not the horse.
4. The instructor will supervise the dismounting, either verbally or personally. If there are two riders on the same horse, the sidewalker on the left is responsible for dismounting the rider in front. The sidewalker on the right is responsible for dismounting the rider in back.
5. In the event that a rider must be removed from the horse quickly, as in a seizure or a spooked horse, the sidewalker on the left is responsible for dismounting the rider.
6. If circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated, the riders will be escorted out first by their volunteers (if used) and the horses will be removed by their leaders to an appropriate place, after the riders are out of danger.
7. The instructor will determine if medical personnel are required and will request assistance in contacting specific personnel.

# Keeping Our Program Safe

## **FARM SAFETY**

Fire is an ever-present danger. Please do not smoke when you are here.

If you are driving on the property, please drive SLOWLY. The speed limit is 5 miles per hour. Horses spook at fast cars, and there are dogs and children around that you may not see.

Running is not allowed, for your safety and the safety of the horses. If a horse is loose, WALK over to catch it. The same is true of any other emergency.

Dogs can frighten horses, and many of our students are afraid of them. Please don't bring dogs.

## **SAFE TACKING AND UNTACKING**

**1.** Think of a horse as having a 6-foot “danger zone” surrounding it. Within 6 feet, the horse can kick, buck, cow kick (kick to the side), bite, or rear – and you or a student can be seriously injured. Approach the “danger zone” with caution.

- If you must walk behind a horse, approach from the side, touch the horse and speak to it. Keep touching it as you walk very closely around the horse.
- Warn a horse that you are approaching. Use your voice and a gentle touch.
- Approach from the side, NEVER from the rear.
- When standing next to a horse, stand VERY close. If the horse kicks, he can't kick very hard if you are close.
- Keep your feet away from the horse's hooves and from beneath the horse. You might get stepped on.
- Never walk under a horse's neck (it might rear from fright). Never walk under a horse. You might not be that short, but some children are.
- Never stand directly in front of a horse except to hold the horse for a rider. Never stand behind a horse for any reason.
- Hand feeding is an invitation to have your fingers bitten. After the food is gone, your fingers still carry the smell. A horse can't tell the difference between a carrot and a finger that smells like a carrot. Keep your hands away from the horse's mouth. ALL horses bite!
- Don't yell, run or make sudden movements near a horse. Be slow and gentle.

**2.** Keep horses well away from each other at all times. Fighting horses are a danger to everyone nearby. Keep an eye on their heads and rear ends. If the ears are flattened the horse is about to fight. If he lifts his leg, he is getting ready to kick. **DO NOT ALLOW HORSES TO SNIFF EACH OTHER.**

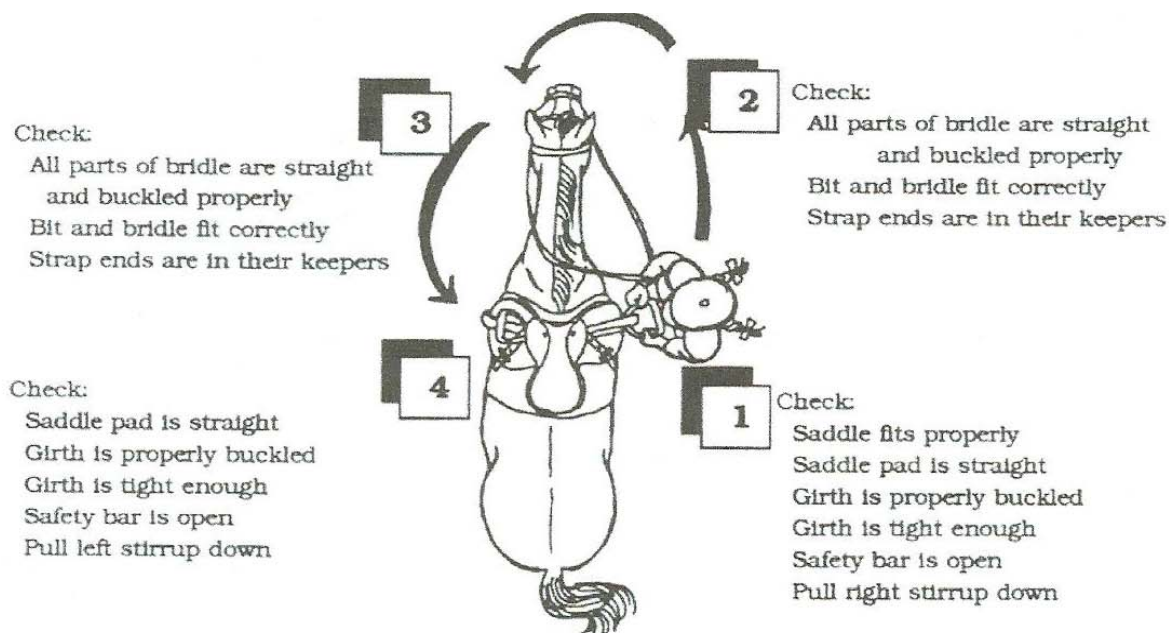
**3.** Never tie a horse to the arena or fences. Use the tie rails or hold the horse.

**4.** Always use a halter to tie a horse in the crossties. NEVER tie a horse by his bit or his reins.

**5.** Always lead a horse by his lead rope and halter, not by the reins.

**6.** If a tied horse rears or pulls back, or otherwise acts upset, **STAY AWAY.** Let the instructor handle the problem. A panicked horse is very dangerous.

## How To Do A Safety Check



### ***Why do we do a safety check before we mount?***

No matter how carefully we check when we saddle the horse, or how many times we have done it before, there is always the possibility that we overlooked something. An incorrectly fitted saddle or saddle pad can irritate or hurt the horse, and an unhappy horse may hurt the rider. A loose girth will cause the saddle to slip when mounting or riding. If the bridle is not properly fitted and buckled, it may come off while riding. An extra minute is all it takes to do a safety check by walking around the horse before mounting and following these steps.

# Mounting

Never mount a horse while the horse is tied. If the horse pulls back, the rider and the horse could be injured. Never mount next to a fence, car, another horse, or any solid object that the rider could be thrown into. Never mount on pavement.

Lead an un-mounted horse on your right. Use two hands – the right hand should be about 6 inches below the snap, and the left hand holds the FOLDED (not coiled) end of the lead rope. Don't let the lead rope drag on the ground. It could trip you or your horse could step on it. Don't throw it over your shoulder. It could get tangled and choke you.

Always check the girth for tightness before mounting or helping a student to mount. Check that the saddle and bridle are placed properly on the horse, the stirrups are the correct length and are down, and that nothing is broken or worn. **MAKE SURE THE RIDER HAS HELMET ON SECURELY.** Don't assume that someone else will do this. Better to check twice than not at all.

All riders must be mounted by the instructor or under the instructor's supervision.

When mounting from the ground, one volunteer stands at the head of the horse and holds the lead rope. A second volunteer stands on the off-side of the horse and puts weight into the stirrup to counter-balance the rider. The instructor may assist the rider to mount as necessary. If the saddle starts to slip or the horse starts to walk forward during mounting, stop the mounting and remedy the situation before continuing.

If a rider is mounting with a "leg up", be sure that both the rider and the person giving the leg up know what they are doing. Do not use your knee as a mounting block, even for a small rider. You could get hurt.

Ask for assistance if the rider is unable to mount unaided. Do not attempt to help the rider alone. Assisted mounting from the mounting ramp is always done by the instructor or therapist. You may be asked to assist on the opposite side of the horse.

When assisting at the ramp, stand on the block, not on the ground. It is dangerous to be standing between the block and the horse, especially if the horse spooks or moves.

## In The Arena

Students should never be in the arena other than when mounted except to mount or dismount and leave the arena, or as part of a supervised activity.

The arena gates must be closed and latched at all times when there are horses in the arena.

If you are leading a horse, walk between the horse's head and shoulder, NOT in front of the horse.

When leading or holding a horse with a mounted rider, always inform the rider BEFORE moving or changing directions. Avoid sharp turns or sudden stops.

Allow the rider to initiate all movement if possible. Give the rider time to give commands to the horse. ALWAYS let the rider do as much as possible.

Help your rider if he or she needs it, but first allow plenty of time for the rider to perform independently. Responses often take longer than we expect. Allow the rider to perform at his or her own pace. But do make sure the rider understands the instructor.

Riders should always stay at least 2 horse lengths apart from each other, whether moving or standing still. If your rider's horse gets too close to another horse, ask the rider to circle or cross to the other side of the arena.

When passing another horse, always pass on the inside (the side closest to the center of the arena) and at least 6 feet away from the horse being passed.

Do not circle a horse near another horse. Watch that no other horses are in the way.

All horses should be going in the same direction. If one rider reverses, all riders must reverse. A reverse is always made by turning in toward the center of the arena.

Never trot a horse up to or past a walking horse. Never canter up to or past a walking or trotting horse.

When leading a rider in the arena, always walk on the inside (closest to the center of the arena). Do not allow the horse to get too close to the fence.

It is very important to pay attention to the rider and instructor. Don't chat with riders or other volunteers while the class is in session. Be friendly, answer direct questions from the rider briefly, but keep your ears on the instructor and your eyes on the rider.

You may reinforce what the instructor is saying by showing the rider or touching the appropriate area. Try not to talk. If you are talking, you might miss an emergency instruction.

Never yank on the reins or lead rope to stop the horse. Pull slowly and steadily on the lead rope or reins. Yanking frightens the horse and can cause rearing or backing up. If a horse pulls back, do not resist. Move with him, holding the lead rope. The harder you pull a horse, the harder he will resist you.

**NEVER HIT OR KICK A HORSE.** If a horse is misbehaving, call the instructor for help.

If the horse or rider you are working with is nervous or upset, walk the horse to the center of the arena and ask the instructor if you should dismount the rider. Horses should be calm and riders should be alert. If this is not the case, bring it to the instructor's attention immediately.

If you aren't comfortable for any reason with your horse or rider, tell the instructor immediately. You are often the first person to be aware of a potential problem. Trust your instincts.

During classes, horses should not stand at the rail (fence) except under the instructor's directions. If your rider needs to stop, come off the rail and move to the center of the arena so you don't block the movement of other riders.

If a horse is running away, (with or without a rider) **STAY CALM.** Do not yell and do not run. Halt *your* rider and stay with him/her. Wait for instructions from the instructor. If you are not with a student, but are spotting, walk slowly toward where the horse is running to and wait for instructions.

If another rider has a problem or a fall, **DON'T** rush to assist. Stay with your rider and listen for instructions. The instructor will handle the problem and ask for assistance if needed. The rider you are assisting is **YOUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY.**

If your rider falls, the horse leader or leader/sidewalker is responsible for the horse, not the rider. A loose horse is a danger to every rider in the arena. Stop the horse, get it away from the rider and call for the instructor. The sidewalker stays with the rider until the instructor arrives, and then follows the directions of the instructor.

When dismounting to the ground unassisted, make sure the rider takes **BOTH** feet out of the stirrups before lowering himself to the ground. Assisted dismounts should always be done by the instructor.

## The Tack Room

The tack room is where we store saddles, bridles, reins and other horse related equipment, collectively known as “tack” A well-organized tack room makes the job of the volunteers easier. Knowing your way around the tack room and keeping things in order is vital to the smooth running of the program.

### ***Rules for the tack room:***

All saddles are numbered, as are the saddle racks. Saddles are to be stored on the same numbered rack. They are placed on the rack facing the wall, with the rear of the saddle facing you. Saddles can be covered by dry saddle pads to keep them free of dust. Saddle pads must be allowed to dry out before putting them away. English and dressage girths are stored separately from the saddles. DO NOT leave them attached to the saddle. All girths are numbered. Try to put them back on the girth rack in numerical order. EG girths are English Girths and are stored on the top rack. DG girths are Dressage Girths and are stored on the bottom rack. Each horse has his own halter/bridle combination and bit. They are stored on bridle racks on the wall. Each rack has a horse's name above it. Halter/bridles and bits also have the horse's name on them. Please be careful to put the halter/bridles and bits away under the correct name. The halter and lead rope used to put away the horse is stored on the horse's stall. Extra lead ropes and halters are on a rack in the tack room. Reins are stored on their own rack. DO NOT leave them attached to the halter/bridles. Grooming tools are kept in grooming boxes. There should be at least one body brush, rubber curry, mane comb, and hoof pick in each box. The tools are shared by all the horses. After you use a tool, please put it back in the grooming box. Many volunteers put the hoof picks in their pockets and accidentally take them home. Please check your pockets before you leave. Thank you for keeping our tack room neat and clean.

# Horse Leading

The responsibility of a horse leader is to control the horse. For this reason, a horse leader should be someone with some experience in horsemanship. The rider has a leader because he or she is unable, at this time, to control the horse fully. The goal is to allow the rider to be as independent as possible. Although the leader is responsible for guiding the horse, stopping and starting, the leader should allow the rider to do as much of this as possible, assisting only when necessary.



## ***How to lead a horse:***

- 1.** The leader usually stands on the side of the horse closest to the center of the arena, next to the horse's neck (between the head and the shoulder).
- 2.** The leader holds the lead rope, six to eight inches from the horse's head, in the hand that is closest to the horse. The remaining rope is folded, not looped, and held in the free hand. Be careful not to allow the lead rope to drag on the ground or to be looped around the leader's hand.
- 3.** When the horse is stopped for more than a second or two, the leader should stand in front of the horse. The lead rope is held folded in one hand, and the sides of the bit or halter are held gently with both hands to prevent the horse from moving forward. Do not hold the bit or halter too strongly, or the horse will resist and start to move around or pull its head back. You can calm the horse by holding the halter with one hand and stroking the horse below the forelock (on the forehead) with the other hand.

- 4.** When a rider is mounting at the mounting ramp or block, lead the horse to the start of the ramp, then move to the front of the horse and walk backward into the ramp corridor, leading the horse as close to the ramp as possible. Remain standing in front of the horse and keep him as still as possible during the mounting.
- 5.** Walking the horse: Walk next to the horse's neck, between the horse's head and shoulder. DO NOT drag the horse or walk ahead of it. If necessary, slow your speed to that of the horse's. The sidewalker can gently prod the horse on the barrel to encourage a faster pace. If the horse is walking too fast, a gentle tug on the lead rope will slow it down.
- 6.** Trotting the horse: After the rider cues the horse to trot, gently tug the lead rope and move into a gentle trot (not a run) next to the horse. Remain alongside the horse's neck during the trot. Control the speed with a tug backwards on the rope if the horse goes too fast.
- 7.** Pay attention to the instructor at all times. It is important that you not engage in conversation when leading, as this will interfere with your knowing what is going on. The instructor will tell the riders to walk, trot, turn right or left or halt. The leader needs to hear these commands so as not to interfere with the rider's efforts, and to supplement them if needed.
- 8.** Be aware of other horses in the arena, and do not let the horse you are leading approach another horse too closely. There should be a two-horse distance between riders at all times. Horses must NEVER be allowed to put their noses together.
- 9.** If a rider should fall, the leader is responsible for the horse ONLY. Keep the horse calm and move it away from the fallen rider. Stay with the horse. The instructor will take care of the fallen rider.

# Sidewalking

The responsibility of the sidewalker, first and foremost, is the safety of the rider. Sidewalkers assist the riders to the degree necessary. Riders on taller horses should, if possible, have tall sidewalkers. Riders on ponies should have short sidewalkers.



## ***How to sidewalk:***

- 1.** The sidewalker walks next to the rider's leg, helping to support the rider's balance if necessary. The Instructor will inform you if you need to use a support hold. There are three support holds, as follows:
  - a.** Arm-Over-Leg support: This position provides support for the rider without interfering with the rider's trunk control, allowing the rider to build up strong trunk support. Facing toward the rider's head, the hand closest to the horse holds the front of the saddle, with the arm resting lightly across the rider's thigh. In the event that the rider slips, gentle downward pressure with that arm will support that rider in place.

**b. Crutch support:** This is used for riders who have no upper body control. Facing the front of the horse, the hand closest to the horse forms a crutch under the armpit of the rider, with the thumb in front of the shoulder and the fingers behind it. Resting the elbow on the saddle will increase the support and help prevent fatigue on the volunteer's part.

**c. Ankle support:** This is the least restrictive form of support, allowing the rider to use all muscles to provide his or her own support. Facing the front of the horse, the hand closest to the horse encircles the rider's ankle lightly. In the event that the rider slips, a light tug will bring the rider back into alignment with the saddle. **DO NOT** yank on the ankle. **DO NOT** keep constant pressure downward on the ankle. If the rider loses balance forward, gently moving the leg forward will counterbalance the rider. If the rider loses balance backward, gently moving the leg backward will also counterbalance the rider.

**2.** Be aware that it may be necessary to change sides frequently if your arm gets tired. If this happens, ask the leader to stop, and tell the other sidewalker that you need to change sides. As the other sidewalker to support the rider as you move around to the other side. Take the support position on the new side and support the rider while the other sidewalker moves to the opposite side. When the other sidewalker has indicated the or she is ready, inform the leader that you can resume walking.

**3.** At the trot, the sidewalkers must trot alongside the rider at the rider's leg. If providing support, use the arm-over-leg position, holding firmly to the front of the saddle. Additional support may be provided by gentle downward pressure on the rider's ankle with your free hand. Riders using the crutch support should not trot.

**4.** If a rider starts to fall, try to push the rider back into the saddle. If this is not possible, the next best thing to do is to try and break the fall. To do this, the sidewalker on the side of the horse that the rider is falling toward turns and puts his or her back against the rider and goes down to the ground with the rider. This not only slows the fall, it prevents the sidewalker from being injured in an attempt to save the rider.

**5.** Once a rider has fallen, the sidewalkers stay with the rider while the horse leader moves the horse out of the way. **DO NOT** attempt to help the rider – this is the responsibility of the instructor. Be prepared to go for help at the direction of the instructor. Know where the first aid kit is, where the phone is, and where the emergency numbers are.

**6.** Other responsibilities of the sidewalkers include encouraging the rider to pay attention to the instructor, helping the rider to follow directions, showing the rider which side is right and left, assisting in games, demonstrating to the rider where to place the legs and how to keep heels down, encouraging the horse to keep moving (by gently prodding the horse in the side) and providing encouragement and enthusiasm for the rider's efforts.

**7.** It is important that the sidewalkers pay attention to the instructor at all times. Conversations should be non-existent when instruction is taking place. Sidewalkers reinforce, but do not teach, so restrain the urge to tell the rider what to do and how to do it unless the instructor tells you to do so.

**8.** If there is only one sidewalker and no leader, the sidewalker takes on the additional responsibility of control of the horse in the event that the rider has trouble controlling his mount. This is only done when the rider's balance is sufficient to not need support and the rider is beginning to ride independently.

# Glossary of Disabilities

*The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of some disabilities and conditions of participants one might encounter in a therapeutic riding setting. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability. Rather, it is a general overview with an explanation of how therapeutic riding can be beneficial.*

## **Arthritis**

Inflammatory disease of the joints.

**Types:** Osteo, rheumatoid and juvenile rheumatoid.

**Characteristics:** Pain, lack of mobility, deformity, loss of strength.

**Benefits (of therapeutic riding):** Gentle rhythmic movement to promote joint mobility and relieve pain.

## **Autism**

A self-centered mental state from which reality often tends to be excluded.

**Characteristics:** Unresponsiveness to the presence of others; withdrawal from physical contact; severely delayed and disordered language; self-stimulating behaviors; unusual or special fears; insensitivity to pain; unawareness of real dangers; hyperactive; passive; unusual behaviors such as smelling/tasting/licking or mouthing all objects; ritualistic behaviors; developmentally delayed; unusual response to sounds; clumsiness; social withdrawal; resistance to change.

**Benefits:** Interactions in a group setting stimulates interest away from self and toward others and the horses. Postural and verbal stimulation.

## **Cerebral Palsy**

Brain damage occurring before, at, or shortly after birth. It is a non-progressive motor disorder.

**Types and Characteristics:**

**Spastic** – hypertonicity with hyperactive stretch reflexes, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes.

**Athetoid** – extensor muscle tension, worm-like movements, abnormal posturing and slow and deliberate speech.

**Ataxic** – poor balance, difficulty with quick, fine movements and are often described as having a “rag doll” appearance.

**Benefits:** Normalization of tone, stimulation of postural and balance mechanisms, muscle strengthening and perceptual motor coordination.

**Associated Problems:** Seizures; hearing defects; visual defects; general sensory impairment; perceptual problems; communication problems; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; learning disabilities.

## **Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA or Stroke)**

Hemorrhage in brain, which causes varying degrees of functional impairment.

**Characteristics:** Flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of body. May cause mental impairment, impair speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength.

**Benefits:** Promotes symmetry, stimulates balance, posture, motor planning, speech and socialization.

## **Developmental Disabilities (DD)**

A general term applied to children functioning two or more years below grade level.

**Characteristics:** Varied, but can include slow physical, motor and social development.

**Benefits:** Provides arena for success, opportunity for sport and recreation, stimulates body awareness.

## **Down Syndrome**

Condition in which a person is born with an extra chromosome, resulting in mental retardation and developmental delay.

**Characteristics:** Broad flat face, slanted eyes, neck and hand are often broad and short.

Usually Hypotonic, have hypermobile joints and tend to be short and slightly overweight. Prone to respiratory infections.

**Benefits:** Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance, muscle tone, and coordination.

## **Emotional Disabilities**

A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies.

**Characteristics:** Trouble coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia and schizophrenia may be exhibited.

**Benefits:** Increases feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness, and provides appropriate social outlet.

## **Epilepsy**

Abnormal electrical activity of the brain marked by seizures with altered consciousness.

### **Types and Characteristics:**

**Petit Mal:** Brief loss of consciousness with loss of postural tone. May have jerky movements, blank expression.

**Grand Mal:** Loss of consciousness and postural control. Usually preceded by an aura. (Note: an active seizure disorder is a contraindication for horseback riding.)

## **Hearing Impairment**

Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound.

**Characteristics:** Communication difficulties – may use lip reading, finger spelling or sign language. Often phase out and have attention deficits.

**Benefits:** Stimulates self-confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

## **Learning Disabilities (LD)**

Catch-all phrase for individuals who have problems with processing, sequencing, and problem-solving, but who appear to have otherwise normal intelligence skills.

**Characteristics:** Short attention span, easily frustrated, immature.

**Benefits:** Effects depend upon the particular disorder. Stimulates attention span, group skills, cooperation, language skills, posture and coordination.

### **Mental Retardation (MD)**

Lack of ability to learn and perform at normal and acceptable levels. Degree of retardation is referred to as educable, trainable, severe or profoundly retarded.

**Characteristics:** Developmentally delayed in all areas. Short attention span.

**Benefits:** Stimulates group activity skills, coordination, balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Provides a structured learning environment.

### **Multiple Sclerosis (MS)**

Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation.

**Characteristics:** Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40 year old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Fatigues easily. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity.

**Benefits:** Maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides opportunities for emotional therapy.

**Associated Problems:** Visual impairment, emotional lability, and impaired bowel and bladder function.

### **Muscular Dystrophy (MD)**

Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males.

**Characteristics:** Progressive muscular weakness, fatigues easily, sensitive to temperature extremes.

**Benefits:** Provides opportunity for group activity, may slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, and allows movement free of assistive devices.

**Associated Problems:** Lordosis, respiratory infection.

### **Polio**

Infectious viral disease.

**Characteristics:** Flaccid paralysis, atrophy of skeletal muscle, often with deformity.

**Benefits:** Strengthens non-paralyzed muscles, stimulates posture.

### **Scoliosis**

Lateral curve of the spine with C or S curve with rotary component.

**Characteristics:** Postural asymmetry. May wear scoliosis jacket or have had stabilization surgery.

**Benefits:** Stimulates postural symmetry. Strengthens trunk muscles.

(Note: Severe scoliosis is a contraindication for therapeutic riding.)

### **Spina Bifida**

Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure with resultant damage to spinal cord.

**Characteristics:** Varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss.

**Benefits:** Stimulates posture and balance, improves muscle strength and self-image.

**Associated Problems:** Hydrocephalus, incontinence, urinary tract infection, lordosis, scoliosis, and hip dislocations.

### **Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)**

Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function.

**Characteristics:** Paralysis of muscles below the level of injury – can be flaccid or spastic. Fatigue, sensory loss and pressure sores.

**Benefits:** Stimulates posture and balance, strengthens trunk muscles, is an option for sports participation and recreation.

### **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

Accidental injury to the head resulting in intra-cranial bleeding with death of brain cells.

**Characteristics:** Gross and fine motor skills deficits. Often have impaired memory, speech and/or vision. May have psychological effects.

**Benefits:** Stimulates balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, speech and perceptual skills.

### **Visual Impairment**

Moderate to total loss of sight.

**Characteristics:** Insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity, fearfulness and developmental delay.

**Benefits:** Stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture and coordination. Provides social outlet, structured risk taking and freedom of movement.

*NARHA 2000*