



PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center

Volunteer Handbook

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Dear Volunteer,

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center. Volunteers are a vital part of our program! As said by many, “Volunteers help bring the magic of horses to persons with special needs.”

Therapeutic horsemanship uses equine-oriented activities for the purpose of contributing positively to the cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being of people with disabilities. The benefits range from improving coordination to bettering self-esteem and confidence. By volunteering, YOU can help our students gain such benefits!

Poway Valley Therapeutic Riding Center (PoVa) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization offering therapeutic horseback riding to children and adults with special needs. PoVa is a place dedicated to encourage the interaction of disabled and able-bodied children, of all ages, by providing educational and recreational activities. Since 2011 we have served children and adults with special needs. Additionally, space permitting a few family members of our students also ride.

With over 65 lessons a week, our essential goals with our volunteers are:

- Community integration and participation
- Personal choice
- Self – respect and respect for others
- Competence and self-reliance

Please complete the forms included with this letter. It is necessary to attend a training sessions prior to volunteering at PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center. The training takes two hours. You only need to be trained once! When you attend the volunteer training sessions please bring the completed packet with you. If you have any questions please contact Mary, our volunteer coordinator, at povavolunteer@gmail.com.

Thank you very much for sharing your time and talents with us. Volunteers are an essential part of our lesson program and we value each and every one of you.

Sincerely,

PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center Employees

Introduction to PATH International

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH International) is a non-profit organization headquartered in Denver, Colorado that exists to promote equine activities for individuals with disabilities.

Formed in 1960, PATH International members are individuals and centers that participate in therapeutic riding programs. Individual members are volunteers, riding instructors, disabled students and their families, physicians, therapists, teachers, researchers and concerned individuals. The PATH International centers are the heart of the riding for the disabled community as they bring together all the necessary individuals, horses, equipment, and program knowledge. PATH International centers range from small, one-person programs serving half a dozen students to large operations with several instructors serving up to 200 students each week.

PATH International promotes therapeutic riding primarily through public awareness campaigns and educational events. Above all, PATH International is concerned with safety and service to members and students. Consequently, PATH International has developed several programs that are designed to benefit everyone concerned with therapeutic riding.

Accreditation

This program assures that the PATH International center is running a safe and medically appropriate program and that it is following the PATH International Standards. All PATH International centers are expected to complete the accreditation process within the time frame prescribed. PATH International centers must renew their accreditation periodically.

Instructor Certification

This program provides criteria for competency and a process to recognize levels of capability for PATH International instructors to achieve professional certification. Three levels of certification are available: Registered, Advanced and Master Instructor.

For more information on PATH International, please visit the PATH website at www.pathintl.org.

PoVa Students

PoVa works with both children and adults, starting as young as age 2. Prior to riding, all participants are required to complete paperwork including a signed physician's statement, they are then assessed by staff to determine that riding is a safe, appropriate activity, one they will benefit from. An individual riding plan is developed by their therapeutic riding instructor, which includes each student's goals and the objectives (activities) to meet their goals. Students participate in at least one lesson per week for the length of the session. Sessions include activities such as learning horse care, riding skills, exercise, games, obstacle courses and trail rides. Progress is documented after each session.

A Brief History of Therapeutic Riding

References to the physical and emotional benefits of therapeutic horseback riding date back to writings in the 1600's. However, when Liz Hartel of Denmark won the silver medal for dressage at the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, despite having paralysis from polio, medical and equine professionals took active notice. It wasn't long before therapeutic riding was being used for rehabilitation in England and then in North America. The first centers for therapeutic riding in North America began operation in the 1960's. Today, there are more than 500 PATH International affiliated centers worldwide.

Benefits of Therapeutic Riding

Physically, it is the horse's movement which has a dynamic effect on the student's body. The horse stimulates the student's pelvis and trunk in a manner that closely resembles the normal gait of a human. This movement can be used to produce specific physical changes in the student including normalization of muscle tone and improvement in posture, balance, coordination, and increased endurance.

Sensorial, the horse and the riding environment offer a wide variety of input to participants. Movement exploration on the horse combined with other sights and sounds encountered during the riding lesson contribute to the overall sensory experience.

Emotionally, the success of overcoming fear and anxiety and the ability to achieve riding skills help a student to realize self-worth and increase self-esteem. Relationships developed between students, volunteers, horses, and staff and are all an integral part of a positive, emotional experience provided by a therapeutic riding program.

Cognitively, riding sessions incorporate activities and games on horseback designed to help each student achieve goals such as following directions, staying on task, color, number and shape recognition, and reinforcing existing skills as well as learning new ones.

Socially, therapeutic riding programs and their associated activities provide an excellent opportunity for participants to interact with their peers, program volunteers and staff in a positive and enjoyable environment.

The horse, student, instructor and volunteers make up a unique treatment team providing an opportunity for physical, emotional, social, recreational and educational gains for participants with disabilities.

Volunteering At Poway Valley Therapeutic Riding Center

Volunteer Training: Due to insurance restrictions, volunteers must be at least 14 year old. All volunteers who work with the students as leaders and side walkers must be physically fit to walk approximately one – two hours and jog occasionally. Volunteers are required to attend a training session which are held at least once a month.

Volunteer Paperwork: Volunteer paperwork must be completed prior to volunteering at PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center

Volunteer Sign-In: It is important for you to sign in when you come to PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center. Maintaining records of volunteer hours is a requirement of accreditation, helps with fund raising, and provides an accurate record for those who need verification of hours. **REMEMBER** – please sign in and out **EVERY TIME** you volunteer. Sign-in sheets are located in an alphabetized three-ring binder in the instructor's office.

Arrival and Departure Times: Please plan to arrive 30 minutes prior to scheduled lesson time and to stay 15 minutes after the conclusion of the lesson.

Volunteer Information: We want to keep you informed of everything that happens at PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center. To do so, we post all announcements on a white board outside the instructor's office.

Absences: In order for the program to be consistent and successful, volunteers are expected to commit for a specific time period (such as Tuesday from 2 – 4 for the entire session). We realize that emergencies can occur. Please contact Mary if anything should occur 619-990-4732. Remember, the students depend on **YOU**.

Cancellations: At times it may be necessary to cancel a lesson due to inclement weather such as extreme heat, high winds or heavy rains. If you have any questions as to whether a lesson may be canceled, please call or text Mary 619-990-4732.

Restrooms: Restrooms are located next to the tiki hut across from the cross-ties.

Parking: Volunteer parking is located in a marked parking area on Creek Road/Beeler Canyon Road. If this area is full, there is parking located further down the road across the street from the end of the Cascade trail. Do **NOT** park on the side of the road as these are people's private property.

Cell Phones: All cell phones should be left in your vehicle when volunteering. The only exception would be an emergency in which case you may carry your phone on vibrate.

Dogs: No dogs are allowed at PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center.

In Case of an Emergency: Please inform us of any accident, no matter how minor it may seem to you. First aid supplies are located in the instructor's office. If you are asked to call for assistance, the directions and emergency procedures are posted in the inside of the instructor's office.

Feedback: As a PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center volunteer, your feedback is a valuable resource. Your ideas, comments and suggestions help us to constantly improve the program. There is time set aside immediately following riding lesson for your input and questions. Everything said is confidential.

When You Can No Longer Volunteer: Please let us know as far in advance as possible of your plans to leave your volunteer position at PoVa Therapeutic Riding Center. If possible, find a replacement that is as dependable, enthusiastic, and dedicated as yourself!

GENERAL VOLUNTEERING INFORMATION:

Preparing for Lessons

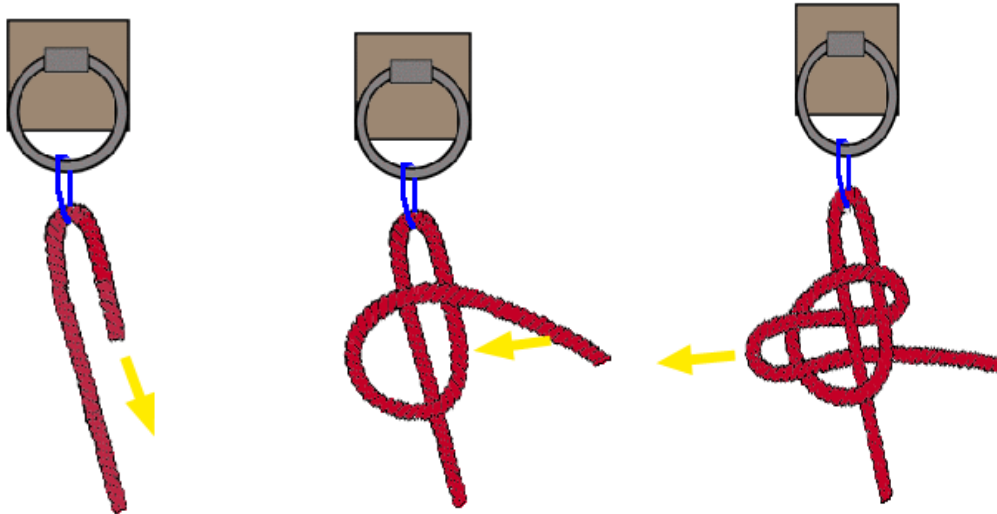
It is important to arrive 30 minutes before lesson time for grooming/tacking horses and volunteer assignments. Some of our students come early to groom and tack their horses with your assistance. It is especially important that you are timely for these lessons.

- Please have your name tag on and record your hours on the sign in sheet.
- Check Class assignment sheet for horses and tack to be used.
- Each horse has its own grooming tools. Look for the horse's name on the grooming buckets in the tack room.
- Once the horse is brought up, tie the horse on the hitching post using a quick release knot.

Safety Rules around the horse

- Be calm and quiet. Sudden movements can cause a horse to shy (jump sideways) or kick out.
- When grooming and tacking, tie your horse up. Never leave a tied horse unattended. When tying, use a quick release knot so that if your horse gets scared and pulls he can be freed quickly.
- Never stand directly behind a horse. When walking around a horse, stay close to his tail and keep your hand on his rump.
- Do NOT kneel around a horse. It's hard to get out of the way quickly. Bend from the knees and waist instead.
- Do NOT duck under the neck of a tied horse because he may be startled. Safety first — go around.
- The safest place to stand is beside your horse's shoulder where you can see each other, or at least 10 feet away.
- When going through a gate (in or out), be sure that YOU are the leader and move into the space first, leading the horse, rather than allowing the horse to be the leader. When going through a gate, make sure the gate is wide open and the horse is turned so that he goes straight through the opening, allowing him to maneuver and turn once through it. Approaching at an angle and/or through too narrow an opening, may cause the horse to run into the gate startling him or causing an injury.

Tying a Quick Release Knot



Grooming the Horse

- Grooming keeps the horse's coat clean and healthy, eliminates dirt, dried sweat and loose hair that can irritate the horse under the tack. Grooming also stimulates nerve endings of the skin and helps to relax and warm up the muscles.
- Use the hoof pick to thoroughly remove dirt and debris from all four hooves. If you feel uncomfortable doing this, or find it difficult, ask for assistance. It is vital to not skip this task.
- Use the rubber curry comb in the large muscle group areas (neck, shoulder, back, chest, gently around the barrel, and hindquarters) to loosen the deepest layer of dirt, mud and dead skin from the horse's hide. Use a firm, massaging touch in a circular pattern, working from the horse's head to the rear. Be sure to smooth your hand across the horse's chest (between the front legs) to check for cuts, scrapes, or mud that you can't see.
- Use the dandy or body brush (stiffer bristles) to lay the hairs down on the skin. Brush in the direction of hair growth, starting at the horse's head and working towards his tail. Use the dandy or body brush (stiffer bristles) on large muscle group areas only.
- Use the polishing brush (soft bristles) to do a final sweep of dust from the hair. Again, brush in the direction of hair growth, starting at the horse's head and working towards his tail. You can use this brush all over the body—all the way down the horse's legs (where it is skin on bone) and on the face, gently working around the eyes and nostrils and not brushing dirt into the eyes.

At Lesson Time

Leaders

- Check to make sure your horse is properly tacked and tighten the girth if necessary before. Lead the horse with the lead rope attached to the halter.
- PoVa horses should never be tied with the lead rope attached to a bridle. An instructor, staff member or certified volunteer will bridle for you just prior to departure.
- Proceed to the mounting area designated by the instructor. The instructor will do the final tightening and tack check at mounting.

Sidewalkers

- Check with instructor as to how you can assist prior to mounting the student.
- All students must wear a safety helmet. Helmets will be fitted to each student the first day of class and sizes recorded. Check to make sure that the students' helmet fits properly and that the chin strap is fastened.
- If your student wears a gait belt or safety belt, make sure it fits properly on the outside of jackets.

Mounting Procedures

During mounting, leaders hold horses in the designated holding area. Mounting is conducted by the instructor; volunteers assist as directed.

There are three types of mounting:

Ramp Mount - Used for students using wheelchairs or otherwise not able to climb stairs. Used for small students to get to stirrup level.

Block Mount – Used for students that are tall enough and capable of reaching the stirrup from the green block.

Lift-On Mount – On occasion, instructors will lift small students. As the sidewalk, be prepared to assist by reaching your hands across the horse's back and helping to position the student.

When using the mounting ramp or block the leader should:

- Approach ramp or block in the direction requested by the instructor, turning to face the horse just upon entering.
- Position the horse close to the spot where the student will be positioned for mounting. The sidewalker will help with this task.
- Do not put pressure on the lead rope; this may cause the horse to back up. If the horse should back up, do not pull. Simply release pressure on the lead and go with him — he will stop.
- Allow the horse to relax, holding him quietly and not restricting his head.
- Once the student is mounted and the cue is given by the instructor and student to “walk on”, guide the horse out slowly and quietly while still facing him. Once the horse is clear of the ramp or block, then turn to face forward and walk into the arena and stop in the center with the horse's tail towards the gate.
- Sidewalkers join the student so that support can be given while the instructor adjusts the stirrups.
- Once stirrups and girth are adjusted and the student has said or otherwise indicated “walk on”, lead the horse slowly and quietly to the rail and continue around the arena.

When using the mounting ramp or block the sidewalker(s) should:

- Position yourself at the end of the ramp or block when called by the instructor.

- Support student as directed by instructor.
- If you are the sidewalker during mounting at the block, position yourself close enough so that the horse has to stay close to the block.
- When instructed to by the student, pull down the stirrup into riding position. As the student mounts, put weight into the offside stirrup or pull down on the stirrup leather to balance the weight being added by the student on the near side. You may also need to help the student's right leg clear the horse's back. Help the foot into the stirrup.
- If you are acting as the sidewalker during a ramp mount, follow your instructor's requests. You will be positioned on the horse's right side. Your main job will be to support the student's back and help them bring the right leg into position.

Learning to Lead a Horse

- Hold the lead rope 6 - 8 inches from the snap to allow for the natural motion of the horse's head. Hold the extra rope in your left hand, doubling the excess back and forth across your palm. Never wrap it around your hand.
- Always lead on the left side of the horse, just behind the horse's head, holding the lead line.
- Make sure the lead rope is between the reins, not over them.
- Keep a minimum of 2 horses length distance between your horse and the horse in front of you. Make turns gradually; sharp turns can throw the student off - balance. Allow space for sidewalkers when next to a fence, rail or obstacle. Make a big circle or cut across the arena to avoid getting too close. Let the sidewalkers and student know when you are about to turn, circle or cut across the arena.
- When the horse is stopped, the leader stands at a 45 - degree angle in front of the horse, toes pointed at his chest, to keep the horse stationary. Allow the horse to move his head and stretch, but keep him quiet and calm by petting him or softly speaking to him.
- To halt, say "whoa", or "halt". If the horse does not stop, tug slightly backward on the lead, then release. If the horse does not respond immediately, repeat with several small tugs.
- Students are urged to control their horses to the maximum of their abilities. A horse leader must never take the place of the student, but should be there to assist as directed to keep the horse in control. Check with your instructor before the lesson regarding your student's level of ability in controlling their horse.
- When the student is controlling the horse, allow a little more slack in the lead (12 inches or as directed by instructor) so that you will not inadvertently influence the horse. The horse may become confused if he feels a tug both on the lead line and the reins, and may not respond to the reins as he should.
- When changing pace, have the horse follow your pace rather than you following the horse's.
- Transition the horse from a walk to a fast walk into a trot by increasing your own walking pace and lengthening your stride, rather than jogging.
- Conversely, make a downward transition from the trot by slowing down to a fast walk, then to a walk. This will make for a smoother transition and will not throw the student off balance. Avoid making gait transitions on the turn (in the corner of the arena).
- Hold the horse's head straight, especially at the trot. If his head is too high, the horse will hollow his back and unbalance the student. If his head is too low, the horse will pull the student forward.
- Pulling the horse will distort his gait and make him move crookedly; the student will become unevenly seated and lose the rhythm of the gait.

- Even steps of the horse are crucial to maintain the student's balance. Short tugs work better than a steady pull on a poky horse.
- Horses perform best when they are given a command and allowed time to process it. To help keep the student and horse balanced use smooth transitions, clear commands, large circles instead of small ones, and gradual starts and stops.
- If a horse steps on your foot, mentally count "101, 102" (this keeps you focused on something other than the pain!) while leaning against his shoulder to unbalance him. The horse probably doesn't know he is on your foot. Your objective is to not frighten the horse or student with a loud "OUCH."
- Always keep the horse away from any possibly dangerous obstacles such as mud holes, broken fences, trash, wire, etc.
- If you must stop during the lesson for any reason other than making a halt at the instructor's request, come to the center of the ring to stop so as not to create a traffic jam on the rail.
- If the horse should shy or suddenly pull, release the lead in the right hand, but maintain contact with your left hand on the other end of the lead to control the horse.
- When a student is mounted on the horse in this situation, make every effort to maintain control via the lead rope without pulling or yanking.
- When the horse is frightened by an object, let him stop, face the object, look at it, and sniff it (don't let the horse spin and try to flee). Give the horse time to overcome his fear. Reassure him and help to calm him in a slow, soft voice.
- Keep conversation to a minimum so that the student can listen to the instructor.
- When the lesson is finished and the student dismounts, assist the student by running the stirrups up.
- Be sure they walk in front of the horse to get to the other side.

Learning to Be a Sidewalker

- The sidewalker's role is to help the student with balance and reinforce instructions in the lesson.
- If there are two sidewalkers, the inside sidewalker (the one closest to the center of the ring) will clarify instructions. Too many people talking to the student can be confusing.
- Different methods of physical support maybe designated by the instructor, depending on the student's needs. For example:
 - Thigh Hold: Place your arm closest to the student across the student's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle.
 - Ankle Hold: Hold the student's boot/shoe near the ankle.
 - Belt Hold: Hold the student's safety belt or gait belt to assist with balance. This is done while supporting the legs.
 - Spotting: Walk beside the student's leg to assist when needed (i.e., at the trot or to reinforce directions).
- If you are not clear on what you should be doing, ask your instructor.
- The sidewalker's responsibility is the student: interpreting instructions; providing physical support; offering encouragement; and supervising the student while in vicinity of the horse.
- Observe the student with your front or side vision at all times. Never become so relaxed that you are not totally aware of the student, horse, leader, instructor, and activities around you.
- Be sure not to lean on the horse or student since this pressure may unbalance the student and/or irritate the horse.
- When the student is using body and leg aids and does not need to be supported, do not touch the horse, saddle, or pad, since this may interfere with the aid applied by the student.

- You may need to reinforce the instructor's directions, assist the student in carrying out instructions, or direct the student's attention to the task.
- Listen to the instructor's directions so you can be ready to reinforce when necessary, BUT allow the student plenty of time to process the information before you begin to assist. For example, if the instructor says, "Pull on the right rein towards me," and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, "right."
- Talking to the student while having a lesson is not recommended since it interferes with the communication between the student and instructor. Many students with a disability have difficulty focusing on instruction, so all unrelated talking should be kept to a minimum.
- Refrain from talking to the other sidewalker or leader during the lesson unless it has to do with the student's position, balance, or horse. Be sure that you do not talk with other teams as they pass you.
- Any unnecessary talking distracts the student, shows disrespect for the riding lesson, and diverts the attention of the team.
- Students who need moderate support, especially support to the back, will need more attention. Be sure you understand and are comfortable with the method of support, both mentally and physically, before moving into the riding area.
- If you become tired during the lesson and would benefit by switching sides, let the instructor and leader know. The leader will bring the horse to the center of the arena, and the instructor can provide support to the student while you walk to the other side of the horse.
- Be careful to not inadvertently pull the student towards you when you are physically supporting them.
- When your student is dismounted, make sure he or she always walks in FRONT of the horse when going from one side to the other.
- Always stay with your horse and student, unless otherwise instructed.
- ALWAYS: If you are not able to support the student with the requested hold, let the instructor know. There are often other volunteers available to take your position while you rest. You may also be able to trade places with a sidewalker that is working with a student that does not require as much support.
- Be patient with your students; give them time – and – a - half to respond, or try to do the task. The rewards, no matter how small or large, make your volunteer work very worthwhile.

After the Lesson:

- The leader will remove the bridle if necessary while waiting for the carrots.
- Take the horse back to the grooming area and check to see if the horse is done or needs a tack change.
- If the horse is not to be used again, remove the saddle. Brush the saddle and girth area.
- Pick out his hooves. If your horse is sweaty, check with your instructor about sponging the sweaty areas, or running the hose over him in the shower area.
- Put away all tack in its proper place.
- Take the horse back to his/her stall or into a holding pen.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS IN CLASS:

It is always appropriate to ask the leader to stop the horse if...

- The student is off balance and cannot regain it while the horse is moving.

- The saddle pad has slipped or the girth is loose.
- The stirrups need adjusting.
- The student's helmet needs to be adjusted.
- The student is fatigued, in pain, or needs to stop for other reasons.
- You need to change sides, or if you are having some difficulty carrying out your job in comfort or efficiently.
- When changing sides, have one volunteer change at a time.
- NEVER leave the student unsupported.

Although leaders and sidewalkers are vital to our students, the student is here for a LESSON. To the extent possible, keeping safety in mind, allow the student to be in control of the horse and decisions made in the lesson.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency during a lesson, all leaders must immediately stop horses and assume halt position in front of horse. Sidewalkers must assume a thigh hold position on all students. Falls off a horse are rare, but they can happen. Don't panic! Leaders stop all horses, and each volunteer tends to their student or horse. The instructor is responsible for the fallen student.

If a student loses his/her balance during a lesson:

- Leader stops horse.
- Sidewalkers try to keep the student in the saddle by stabilizing them with an arm over their thigh. If possible gently push the student back into the saddle.

If a student must be removed from the horse (Emergency Dismount):

- Leader should stop the horse and the student will be dismounted to ground quickly and quietly. Designate which sidewalker will do the emergency dismount if instructor is not acting as a sidewalker. This is most often the person to the inside of the arena or in some cases the one who is on the side that the student is already falling to.
- Student's feet should be removed from the stirrups. Sidewalker will assist student's leg over the horse.
- If the horse will not stand quietly, the leader should circle the horse around him/herself as the stronger sidewalker hugs the student around the waist from behind and slides the student off and away from the horse.
- Once student has been dismounted; leader should circle the horse away from the student (so hindquarters are NOT towards the student) or back the horse away from the student.

If a student falls from the horse:

- Sidewalkers should make sure student's feet are out of the stirrups.
- Sidewalkers should try to soften the student's fall if possible.
- Leader should halt the horse and move the horse away from the fallen student by either circling so that hindquarters are NOT towards student, or backing the horse away.
- NEVER move a fallen student - wait for the instructor.

Things to keep in mind:

- Communicate with everyone involved in the emergency in a calm, concise manner.
- If a horse suddenly pulls backwards, **DO NOT** pull against him. Slowly and calmly follow the movement of the horse until he stops.
- All of those involved with an emergency situation should stay calm and do the best that they can to keep the student as safe as possible.

IN THE EVENT OF A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

The safety and well-being of all individuals is a priority. By following basic safety procedures most emergencies can be avoided. However, if an emergency does occur, please try to remain calm. Take a deep breath. In all emergencies, only a trained individual may apply first aid (a staff member who is certified in first aid is always on site during program activities). A volunteer may be called upon to assist.

Below is a general list of guidelines to follow during an emergency:

- Survey the scene for safety.
- A staff member trained in First-Aid/CPR attends to the student.
- A volunteer may be asked to retrieve the First Aid kit and a blanket from the office.
- The horse leader attends to the horse, leading it far from the student if there has been a fall. Talking to the horse in a soft, soothing tone may assist in calming it.
- If other participants are present, they should stop what they are doing and leave the scene if possible. The instructor will decide on a plan of action.
- If further assistance is needed, a designated person will be instructed to call 911 and tell the dispatcher what happened, the condition of the injured person, what help is being given, the location of the injured person and directions to PoVa (Creek Road Ranch, 11319 Creek Road/Beeler Canyon Road, Poway, and .8 Miles off Pomerado Road). If extra people are available, assign them to meet emergency personnel at first bend in road before Creek Road turns to Beeler Canyon Road.
- A person will be designated to open all gates from accident site to end of driveway after all horses have been secured. This person will wait for EMS to turn off lights and sirens, and to direct them to the injured person.
- The Instructor will notify the parent/guardian.

What to do when there's a Loose Horse

If a Horse is Loose DO NOT CHASE IT. Wait for instructions from the instructor. (If the horse is calm and positioned so that you can approach from the front, please walk up slowly in an attempt to catch the horse.)

*If you are a leader or a sidewalker stay focused on your horse/student.
DO NOT attempt to catch loose horse.*

If instructed to do so and/or you are not in a lesson, you may attempt to catch the loose horse by:

- Walking slowly, approaching the horse from the side
- Talking in a low, soothing tone of voice
- It may help to look at the ground when approaching the horse, so you are not a "threat"
- A small amount of grain or carrots may encourage the horse to wait or come to you
- Put the lead rope over the horse's neck first, then put the halter on with the lead rope attached.
- Do not lead the horse with just the halter and no lead rope. You could be injured if the horse bolts.

Loose Horse in the Ring while other horses are being ridden

- Have all students halt.
- Horse leaders should attach lead ropes and stand in front of the horse's head.
- Sidewalkers should remain with their student. Use an over the thigh hold and prepare to assist with dismounts if the instructor has decided to do so.
- If necessary, horse leaders will be asked to lead horses from the ring. Sidewalkers or designated volunteers will be asked to assist the students to a safe location.

In the Event of a Fire:

Instructors/staff will designate someone to call 911

Dismount and evacuate all participants

- If a class is in session the instructor will give directions for evacuating participants.
- Volunteers may be assigned to help students to a safe area.

Once all students have been dismounted and returned to parents/caretaker, staff will focus on horse evacuations if necessary. Detailed evacuation instructions are posted in office.

UNDERSTANDING HORSE BEHAVIOR EQUINE SENSES

When developing relationships and working with horses, communication is key. It is critical to provide a safe environment in a therapeutic riding setting. Beginning a process of understanding the horse senses, instincts and implications is a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks and increasing positive relationships.

SMELL: The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and it allows him to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations.

Implications:

- Allow horses the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment by smelling.
- It is recommended that treats are not carried in your pocket since horses may desire to go after them.
- Volunteers should be discouraged from eating or having food in the arena.

HEARING: The horse's sense of hearing is also thought to be very acute. The horse may also combine their sense of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds. "Hearing and not seeing" is often the cause of the fright/flight response. Note the position of the horse's ears. Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest. Ears that are laid back often communicates that they are very upset and/or showing aggression towards another horse or person.

Implications:

- Horses are wary when they hear something but do not see it. If your horse is acting nervous, talk to him in a quiet and calm voice for reassurance.
- Avoid shouting or using a loud voice. This can be frightening to a horse.
- Watch your horse's ears for increased communication. Stiffly pricked ears indicate interest. Drooping ears indicate relaxation, inattentiveness (easily startled), exhaustion or illness. Flattened ears indicate anger, threat or fear. Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest.

SIGHT: The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head; there is a good peripheral (lateral) vision, but poorer frontal vision. A horse focuses on objects by raising and lowering its head. The horse's visual memory is very accurate. Horses are thought to see quite well in the dark, due to the large size of their ears. There is still controversy as to whether or not horses see in color.

Implications:

- The horse may notice if something in the arena or out on the trail is different. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects. Introduce new props that the horse may be unfamiliar with.
- The horse has better peripheral vision; consider a slightly looser rein, enabling him to move his head when taking a look at objects.
- Although the horse has good peripheral vision, consider two blind spots; directly in front and directly behind. The best way to approach a horse is to his shoulder. It may startle him if you approach from behind to directly in front. The horse may be unable to see around the mouth area, which is a safety consideration when hand feeding.

TOUCH: Touch is used as a communication between horses and people. Horses are sensitive to soft or rough touch with a person's hands or legs.

Implications:

- Handlers should treat the horses gently but firmly
- Each horse has sensitive areas, and it is important to be familiar with them (i.e. flank and belly areas).
- Watch student's leg position. Students may need appropriate assistance to reduce a "clothes pin" effect with their legs. Ask the instructor what is the best handling technique.
- Horses will often touch or paw at unfamiliar objects. For example, a horse may paw at a bridge or ground pole before crossing it.

TASTE: Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects.

Implications:

- Taste is closely linked with smell or touch; therefore, a horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people. Be careful, as this could lead to possible biting.

SIXTH SENSE: Horses do have a "sixth sense" when evaluating the disposition of those around him. Horses can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of the handlers and students. A good therapy horse is chosen for their sensitive response to the student. At times there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and horses. It is important to let the instructor know if you're having a difficult time relating or getting along with a particular horse.

FLIGHT AS NATURAL INSTINCT: Horse's would rather turn and run away from danger than face and flight it.

Implications:

- At a sudden movement or noise, the horse might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly.
- A frightened horse being held tightly might try to escape by pulling back. Relax your hold or untie him quickly and usually he will relax. Be sure not to stand directly behind the horse.

- If flight is not possible, the horse could either turn to kick out or face the problem and rear, especially in a tight area like a stall. Use a halter with a lead rope to maintain control while working around the horse in a stall.
- If a horse appears to be frightened or fearful (note the position of the horse's ears), alert the program staff.
- Most horses chosen to work in a therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to feel. The horse may look to you for reassurance. It is helpful if the volunteer remains calm and talks to the horse in a soothing voice.

HERD ANIMAL: Horses like to stay together in a herd or a group with one or two horses dominant, and a pecking order among the rest.

Implications:

- Be aware that a horse may not like being alone. This is a consideration when horses are leaving the arena or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride.
- Be aware that if the horse in front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also attempt to trot or canter.
- If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected
- For safety, it is recommended to keep at least two horse's length between horses when riding within a group to respect the horse's space and pecking order.

Disabilities Frequently Encountered

This list provides a brief, non-medical description of some of the disabilities and condition of PoVa students. It is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability but rather as a general overview, along with an explanation of how therapeutic riding is a beneficial treatment aid.

Autism – a neural development disorder, characterized by impaired social interaction and communication and by restricted and repetitive behavior. Asperger Syndrome is another disorder within the autism spectrum that lacks the cognitive development and language delays that characterizes autism.

Benefits: Working with horses can improve the student's communication and social skills, teach them to focus on one task at a time, improve motor skills and respond to verbal cues.

Cerebral Palsy ("CP") - a non-progressive disorder, thought to be due in part to loss of oxygen to the brain. Speech, hearing, vision, learning and/or memory deficits may be present; however, normal intelligence is generally not affected unless further brain damage has occurred. There are three main types of cerebral palsy:

1. Spastic: Occurs in approximately 70% of all cases. It may affect motor function in one or more limbs. The muscles stay flexed and tense, and the facial muscle movement may affect speech. Balance is poor.
2. Athetoid: Occurs in approximately 20% of all cases. There is constant movement in a disorganized, uncontrolled manner. Often worm - like movement. The use of arms and hands for support, grasp, and holding on are inadequate. It appears more obvious during periods of emotional tension. Speech functions are usually involved.
3. Ataxic: Occurs in approximately 10% of all cases. Weakness, poor coordination, and difficulty with quick and fine motor movements result in loose, "rag-doll" appearance.

Benefits: Riding may improve balance, posture, and the ability to relax. It also strengthens weakened muscles.

Down Syndrome (also called Trisomy 21 or Trisomy G) -It is one of the more easily and widely identified hereditary disabilities. Individuals with Down syndrome have an average IQ of about 50, and are physically and cognitively developmentally delayed.

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

Emotional Disabilities ("ED") - A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies. In general, emotionally disturbed individuals have trouble coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relationships. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia, or schizophrenia may be exhibited.

Benefits: Riding can provide structure to a disorganized thought pattern, increase feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness, and provide appropriate social therapy.

Fragile X -a genetic syndrome which results in a spectrum of physical and intellectual limitations and emotional and behavioral features which range from severe to mild in manifestation. Individuals with Fragile X may exhibit delays in speech, language and motor skills, as well as cognitive impairment.

Benefits: Riding can increase motor skills and coordination and provide practice in social skills and communication.

Hearing Impairment -May vary from mild to severe and may be congenital or acquired. True deafness is defined as hearing loss in both ears severe enough to prevent communication through the ear even with amplification. Communication with the deaf may involve lip reading, finger spelling (the manual alphabet), or sign language.

Benefits: Riding helps increase self - confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

Intellectual Disability ("ID") - A genetic defect where the individual develops below normal rate in terms of intelligence. It may also involve delayed physical and emotional development.

Benefits: Riding helps increase group activity skills, balance, coordination, posture, gross and fine motor skills, and eye - hand coordination.

Learning Disabilities ("LD") - "Learning disabled" is a catch - all phrase for individuals who have problems processing, sequencing and problem -solving, but who appear to have otherwise normal intellectual skills. New learning generally takes time to be integrated and may need to be reviewed frequently to ensure retention.

Benefits: Riding may increase attention span, group activity skills, cooperation, receptive and expressive language skills, posture, and coordination.

Multiple Sclerosis ("MS") - A slowly progressive central nervous system disease usually occurring in adults between 20 - 40 years of age and more frequently in women than in men. Symptoms and manifestations include weakness in one or more limbs, visual impairment, minor gait disturbances, weakness on one or both sides of the body, emotional highs and lows, and inattention. MS runs a course of progression with periods of remission. There is no known cure for MS.

Benefits: Riding maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides highly recommended opportunities for emotional therapy.

Muscular Dystrophy ("MD") -A hereditary disorder usually appearing in infancy or early childhood. It is characterized by progressive skeletal and muscle deterioration. There is no known cure for this disease, which often severely shortens life. People with MD are easily fatigued, especially when it is hot or cold. Benefits: Riding may slow muscle tone degeneration and maintain muscle function. Riding provides appropriate opportunities for social interactions and elevating emotional depressions.

Spina Bifida- A congenital defect where, at birth, there is incomplete closure of the spinal column. There are usually varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs; however, life expectancies are not necessarily shortened.

Benefits: Riding improves balance, posture, and muscle strength.

Traumatic Brain Injury ("TBI") - Head injuries cause more disabilities in people under the age of 50 than any other neurologic cause. Injuries may be closed head (CHI), where intracranial bleeding causes pressure, or open penetration where profuse bleeding and open wounds insure permanent damage. Deficits may include gross and fine motor skills, cognitive disabilities such as long - and short - term memory functions, visual limitations, speech, balance, and psychological alterations.

Benefits: Riding improves balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, and cognitive deficits such as sequencing and processing.

Visual Impairment - Visual deficits may range from severely limited to total, and may be caused by a congenital defect, traumatic illness, or injury. If onset is from birth to five years, the person affected has no visual memory. Impairments occurring after five years are accompanied by memories of people, places, and things. A person is blind only if they have total loss of vision. If some vision is present, then the person is visually impaired.

Benefits: Riding helps orient the body in space and improves balance, posture, coordination, and self - awareness. The voice of the instructor is a point of orientation in space for the student; therefore, unnecessary sounds should be avoided, as they are a distraction.

When you meet a Person with a Disability...

- Have fun! Talk about the same things you would with any person. A disability does not limit or dampen a person's sense of humor.
- Remember that a person with a disability is a person like everyone else.
- Be yourself! Don't be sickly sweet. Don't offer pity or charity. Be honest and genuine at all times.
- Don't make up your mind about the person ahead of time. You may be surprised at how wrong you are at prejudging the person.
- Avoid asking embarrassing questions. If a student wants to tell you about his disability, he/she will bring up the subject themselves.

- HELP only if requested by the student. When in doubt ask – May I help you?
- Don't separate the student from his wheelchair or crutches unless the student asks you to remove them.
- Be patient, let the student set his own pace in walking or talking.
- Self-satisfaction is important for the student. Use help sparingly because it is important that the individual experience the satisfaction of accomplishing a task himself.
- Respect the confidentiality rights, dignity and privacy of the student.
- Be optimistic about life in general and the student's outlook in particular, however, don't encourage unrealistic goals or attitudes.
- Be supportive and encouraging.
- Please use proper terminology when you are on the premises.