



Volunteer Orientation

Welcome

Promise Ranch Therapeutic Riding is a non-profit organization that serves students of all ages and many different disabilities. Promise Ranch was founded in 2009 and its' continued success is dependent on the commitment of volunteers. We welcome you to our program and hope you will love it as much as our riders and current volunteers do!

What is Therapeutic Riding? Who benefits from it?

Therapeutic riding programs, like Promise Ranch, offer horseback riding opportunities to students who may not be able to participate in such activities at a regular riding stable. Our students have disabilities ranging from cognitive and behavioral, to physical; and often have a combination of several impairments. Horseback riding helps these students in many ways. Riders learn communication skills, cooperation, and acceptable social behaviors, as well as care and responsibility for another being. Horseback riding exercises and strengthens muscles, improves tone and stamina, increases balance, and helps relax tightness and spasticity. Horses provide a type of therapy that cannot easily be explained or reproduced by humans.

Why are you here?

Volunteers are the backbone of the Therapeutic Riding program. Their continued efforts and commitment are crucial to the success of the program. You not only help with the physical need for horse leaders, but provide the students with the best learning and therapy environment - as their friends, role models, and an extension of the instructor. Most importantly, volunteers provide the safety needed to conduct a program such as this. People volunteer for many reasons - love of horses, helping children, doing something important, or serving their community. We encourage you to come as often as you can and tell others about your experiences.

Attendance & Cancellations

Lessons for our students are dependent on volunteers. We ask that you be as committed to attendance as our students are. If you are unable to attend the classes you are scheduled for, please inform both your Instructor and the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible to allow us enough time to find a replacement. If an emergency arises, please call or text your instructor right away.

If your instructor needs to cancel class for any reason (emergency, weather, etc.) they will send out a text to all scheduled volunteers as soon as possible. Please let us know if you cannot receive text messages. Call your instructor if you have any questions about class cancellation.

Safety

Safety is the #1 concern and commitment of this program. It is the Instructor's job to oversee the safety of not only the riders, but the volunteers and the horses as well. As hard as we try, we only have 1 pair of eyes – we need all volunteers to be on the same page when it comes to safety. Any safety issues should be brought to the Instructor's attention immediately so they can be addressed.

Dress Code

Ideal dress for our volunteers includes: jeans, riding pants, or other opaque pants that cover the ankle; a polo shirt, button-up shirt, or t-shirt; hard-soled, closed-toe, and closed-heel shoes/boots at ALL times; and work/riding gloves are recommended.

Dress appropriately for the weather and wear layers - bring warm hats/gloves in the winter; sunglasses, baseball hats, sunscreen, and water in the summer.

Please leave loose and dangly jewelry at home as it can be a potential safety hazard when working with horses and children. Please do not wear perfumes, colognes, etc. Low-cut/revealing tops, spaghetti-strap tank tops, short shorts, and baggy clothing are unacceptable. *Never wear steel-toe boots!*

Why does dress code matter?

- We want to be professional
 - Your appearance can create a positive or negative impression that reflects directly on you, our culture, and our organization as a whole
- We want to be safe and protect ourselves from injury
 - While volunteering at the ranch, you may encounter biting insects, ground wasps, rattle snakes, uneven terrain, horse hooves, and more
- We want to be comfortable, but practical
 - All clothes must be appropriate for working in a ranch/outdoor environment, with children and adults with disabilities, and with horses and other farm animals
- We want to be respectful of the sensibilities of others
 - All clothes must be clean, neat, and non-revealing. Discernible rips, tears or holes, and offensive or inappropriate designs/images aren't allowed

Horse Safety

Horses are large animals - we trust them with our own safety when riding and handling them. It is important that we handle them properly to ensure our own safety as well as the safety of our riders and the horses themselves.

- **Horse handling:** Please handle the horses gently, as you would like to be treated if you were a horse! Remember to move slowly and talk to your horse as you are working with them or moving around them. Report any behavioral problems immediately.
- **Leading:** 2 hands on the lead rope at ALL times. Do not loop the rope around your hand - "butterfly" or fold the rope instead. Stay parallel to the horse's eye and use your body to help slow or quicken a horse. Do not let the horse get in front of you and do not drag your horse behind you.
- **Tack check:** Make sure all tack is safety checked by the instructor before students are mounted. If you notice that any tack is broken or needs repair, report it to the instructor before any riders are mounted.

- **Tie -up:** Horses should be tied with a quick - release knot only. They will be tied to the orange break - away loops in the arena or in a designated hitching area. Do not tie horses to the railing of the ramp, arena barrier, or other structure unless specifically directed to do so by the instructor. Do not “ground tie” horses.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency, everyone needs to be familiar with the proper procedures.

- 1) Listen to the instructor for directions! This is very important to prevent further chaos. Do not take matters into your own hands. Stay focused on your job.
- 2) Emergency information will be provided in the arena and office. This will include a human first aid kit, equine first aid kit, and a list of phone numbers, facility address, and directions to provide to the emergency dispatch. A designated person will be sent to call 911 if needed.
- 3) In the event a rider falls, do not panic. Stay calm and listen for instructions. Keep other students on their horses if in a group lesson. Horse leaders will lead all horses to “parking places” at the end of the arena farthest away from the rider who has fallen. Side helpers will keep riders calm and distracted. In the event that emergency vehicles need to be called, all riders will be dismounted and escorted back to their parents or caregivers.
 - a. If you are leading the horse that a rider falls from, make sure the rider is not entangled in the tack and the tack is not impeding the horse’s movement. Once the rider is cleared and unsafe equipment removed, immediately move the horse away from the fallen rider and also away from any other riders and horses. Side-helpers for this rider will stay with the student until further instructions are given.
- 4) In the event of severe storm or weather emergency, riders will be dismounted if riding is deemed to be unsafe. One side-helper for each student will immediately remove students from the riding area. The other side-helper will un-tack the horse quickly and quietly. Horse-leaders will keep horses in-hand. DO NOT TIE horses in this case. As soon as all tack is removed and riders are safe, horses will exit the arena and be put away.

Job Descriptions

There are several jobs available for volunteers. All jobs are equally important to the program. We will try to accommodate your preference, but your job may be assigned or changed as necessary.

- **Horse-Leaders:** Your focus is on the horse! Please try to arrive 15-30 minutes early to get your horse properly groomed and tacked for the session. Walk your horse around to warm him/her up before the session and establish yourself as the leader. Practice turns, whoa, back up, and trot. If you have any horse-handling questions, please ask. Instructors will be happy to help you work out any problems or concerns you might have. During the lessons, your primary function is handling the horse. When stopped and standing, stand slightly in front of your horse, facing him/her. Limit interactions with the rider or side-helpers unless specifically asked to do so, or expressing a danger or concern. If you are distracted you will not be able to read a horse and react as quickly should something happen. Allow the rider to control the horse as much as possible and reinforce their efforts. Please listen to the instructor’s directions; at times, a rider may not be controlling the horse purposefully. Alert the instructor immediately if you have any concerns or problems with the horse.
- **Side-Walkers:** Your primary focus is the rider and facilitating the lesson being taught by the instructor. Please be respectful by avoiding chatter when the lesson is in progress, and being alert and attentive to the instructor’s directions. Alert the instructor to any issues involving your rider. Although you are a vital part in assisting the lesson, you are not the instructor-please refrain from teaching your

own lessons during the class unless specifically asked to do so by the instructor. You may assist your rider by verbal prompt, demonstration, or hand-over-hand involvement, but be sure you have given your rider enough time to process the task and try before you get involved. Please pay attention to the progress and problem areas your rider is experiencing and communicate these with the instructor at the appropriate times.

- **Instructor's Assistant:** Should there be an excess of volunteers, one or more volunteer may be asked to serve as an instructor's assistant. Your job is to help the instructor carry out what needs to be done. This may include but is not limited to: arena set up/tear down, passing out props, helping facilitate a game, being a spotter, and fixing tack (tightening girth, adjusting stirrups, etc.) as directed by the instructor. You are also an extra set of eyes; if you see any safety issues, please inform the instructor.

Disabilities

At Promise Ranch we teach people with disabilities of all types, and although many have similarities, we need to remember that each student has their own set of unique abilities and restrictions.

Definitions

It is important that we do not define a student by their impairment, disability, or handicap. Understanding these terms and their meanings will help us understand our students.

- **Impairment:** is a descriptive term referring to the loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function. The loss or abnormality may result from disease, genetic disorder, accident, or environment.
- **Disability:** is any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or way considered normal function. An impairment causes a functional challenge (disability).
- **Handicap:** is a disadvantage for a person that either limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal for that person. Usually a handicap is social in nature and has external causes. It affects relations with peers and society. It can be caused by lack of opportunities, environmental barriers, or social attitudes. Most handicaps can be lessened or eliminated - this is what we strive for!

Physical Impairments: may be characterized by abnormalities in muscle tone, range of motion, and/or motor function. (CP, MS, Brain injury, Stroke, Spinal cord injury, etc.)

Cognitive Impairments: a discrepancy between chronological age and cognitive maturity. This may be characterized by low IQ scores or irregular social skills. (Developmental delay, Downs Syndrome, FAS, Autism, brain injury, stroke, etc.)

Learning Disability: compromised ability of the brain to receive, process, analyze, or store information, although the IQ may be normal. (ADD, ADHA, Dyslexia, etc.)

Emotional/Behavioral Impairments: inability to function or behave in a manner which is acceptable to society or appropriate for a particular setting. (Anxiety, Depression, personality disorders, Autism, Reactive attachment disorder)

Sensory Processing Disorders: inability of the brain to process information brought in by the senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing). This manifests itself as poor motor planning, poor sensory regulation, or both. (Autism, Developmental delays, CP, etc.)

Language Impairments: the loss or impairment of speech and/or the inability to understand speech. (Brain injury, Stroke, Autism, CP, etc.)

Promise Ranch Policies

Confidentiality

Please remember that this is a therapy program. You may be given information on a student's medical history or condition in order to help you facilitate learning and provide a safe environment. It is expected that you respect the students' privacy and do not share sensitive information with other parties.

Sexual Harassment

Promise Ranch is committed to providing a safe environment for everyone and will not tolerate verbal or physical conduct which harasses, disrupts, or interferes with the instructor's work or makes students, instructors, or volunteers uncomfortable.

Communication

Communication is an important part of helping this program run smoothly and effectively. Please feel free to address the Instructor with any concerns, comments, issues, or suggestions at an appropriate time (before or after class if not an immediate safety concern). If you feel uncomfortable speaking to your instructor for any reason, issues may be brought up with the Head Instructor or Volunteer Coordinator and will be addressed by them. Horse related issues may be brought up to the Equine Manager if you feel they have not been addressed by your instructor.

If you would like additional training or information on any aspect of Therapeutic Riding or our program, please let us know! We will be happy to assist you or point you towards the information you seek.

Head Instructor and Equine Manager: Carol Crisp (303) 589-0293
Executive Director and Program Director: Sharon Tiraschi (408) 489-5351