

Majestic Equine Connections, Inc.
Innovative Horse Therapy

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

The mission of Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. is to provide therapy through the use of the horse; to offer people with disabilities an opportunity to increase their potential for fulfillment.

www.majesticequineconnections.org

Contact Jennifer for additional classes & Cancellations at 440-668-8364. Thank you.



MAILING ADDRESS:

7460 Wooster Pike Rd.
Seville, Ohio 44273

PHYSICAL ADDRESS:

same

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WELCOME TO Majestic Equine Connections, Inc!

We are so pleased that you want to become a volunteer at Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. (MEC). Volunteers are the backbone of any equestrian program for people with disabilities. Most of our students cannot participate without the physical, emotional, and psychological support of their volunteers. A CTRI PATH instructor and a team of up to three volunteers may be needed for a person with disabilities to ride safely. The expense for two to three additional people, as well as the cost of the lesson itself, would put therapeutic riding out of reach for all but a very few. While the volunteer brings enthusiasm, time, and dedication to a therapeutic riding program, it is the volunteer's understanding, observation, and spirit of cooperation that assists in bringing the team together.

Dedicated people from all walks of life team up to give persons with disabilities an opportunity to experience a sport, which can make a meaningful difference in their physical and mental well being. Though many volunteers find their way to MEC individually, quite a few of our volunteers come from community organizations, schools, learning programs at colleges, as well as large corporations.

The best case scenario is to provide a long-term volunteer team for each rider, so both the riders and volunteers can benefit from continuity and establish a lasting relationship of trust with one another. Moreover, special volunteers will be able to share knowledge, guidance, patience, and love with the rider. A professional, safety-conscious environment for the riders, volunteers, and horses is also of major importance to MEC. Volunteers play a key role in achieving this goal.

As a volunteer, you will be part of a professional team. We also have a lot of fun! Therapeutic riding and hippotherapy, done in a professional and safety-conscious manner, brings feelings of boundless joy and accomplishment for all those involved. . The rewards, no matter how small or large, make your volunteer work very worthwhile. Without volunteers, we would have a tough time making this program a reality.

Volunteer training is an ongoing process. We hope that what you learn in the volunteer training session will be a good foundation for you to build upon as you spend time at MEC. There is definitely “on the job training” that comes with being a volunteer here! This handbook is designed to serve as a reference after your orientation to the program. Volunteer duties, tips on working with horses and persons with disabilities, as well as specific information about Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. are included. Whether you are attending a formal orientation or joining the program after the session has already begun, we hope this information will be of benefit to you and that you refer back to it throughout your stay with us.

Thank you for your volunteer support!

MEC VOLUNTEER CONTACT INFORMATION

Main PH# – Volunteer Manager..... office: 440-668-8364

- Absences, Schedule changes, Questions or concerns

Majestic Equine Connections, Inc.

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

BENEFITS OF OUR PROGRAMS

Horseback riding helps people with mental and physical challenges achieve a quality of life that is enhanced and improved. Based on input from doctors, therapists, teachers, and parents, the student's individual goals are designed to complement ongoing therapy and education. The benefits of horseback riding or hippotherapy are threefold:

1. Physical - The three-dimensional motion of the horse provides the rider hip, back and core action that simulates natural walking. Riding relaxes and strengthens muscles and improves body tone, posture, balance, joint mobility, and coordination.
2. Emotional - Contact with horses and horsemanship training provides a non-competitive setting for learning. New abilities, self-discipline, and improved concentration build self-confidence and emotional well-being. Participation in our programs can also foster a foundation of trust and emotional connection between both animals and humans alike.
3. Social - Horseback riding nurtures a positive self-image. Riders may, for the first time in their lives, experience some independence and a sense of being part of a team. It is an opportunity for them to interact with other students and their team, building relationships that will further enhance their positive self-image.

MEC serves children and adults with a variety of special mental, physical and emotional disabilities. Instructors design and monitor individualized lesson plans for each student to address their physical, emotional, and social needs while they learn skills of adaptive horseback riding or benefit from hippotherapy. Individual and class goals encourage each rider to be the best he or she can be, on and off the horse.

GENERAL INFORMATION

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

All individuals must complete Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. volunteer training to be considered for any volunteer position. Additional training may be required for specific volunteer positions.

Sidewalker: A person who walks beside the horse and offers stability to the rider. This person must be attentive to the rider and the instructor.

Qualifications:

- Commitment to attend class each week for the duration of a session

- Able to walk, and jog periodically, for up to an hour (indoors and outdoors) on uneven surfaces
- Able to hold your arm raised and out to the side for extended periods of time
- Must have adequate vision and hearing to ensure the safety of horses and participants
- Able to work as part of a team and be flexible to changes
- Comfortable working with individuals with disabilities (including physical contact)
- Minimum age of fourteen years
- Horse experience helpful, but not required
- Able to attend initial volunteer training and additional training throughout the year

Horse Leader: A person who is responsible for leading the horse and/or assisting the rider in controlling the horse during class.

Qualifications: Volunteer

- Horse experience - volunteers should be knowledgeable and comfortable around a variety of horses and have experience working directly with horses or have attended a Leader Training session at MEC.
- Able to walk, and jog periodically, for up to an hour (indoors/outdoors) on uneven surfaces
- Must have adequate vision and hearing to ensure safety of horses and participants
- Able to work as a team and be flexible to changes
- **Minimum age of thirteen**
- Able to attend initial volunteer training and additional leader training throughout the year

Floater: An extra person in a class who helps the instructor and fills in for volunteers as needed.

Barn Volunteer: A person who chooses to volunteer in the barn. This person may groom, tack, warm up horses, clean equipment or do general barn maintenance (picking stalls, watering, sweeping, etc).

Qualifications:

- Horse experience preferred, (this varies; but means that volunteer should be knowledgeable and comfortable around a variety of horses, and have experience working directly with horses)
- Able to halter, lead, crosstie a horse
- Able to groom and tack (English or Western) a horse without direct supervision
- Able to work as part of a team and be flexible to changes
- Minimum age of fourteen
- Ability to attend initial volunteer training and additional training throughout the year

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

No one under the age of **13** is allowed to work directly with our horses or participants. Because working with horses can be a potentially dangerous situation, all prospective volunteers must attend volunteer training and have all required forms listed below on file at Majestic Equine Connections, Inc (MEC).

CONFIDENTIALITY

Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. (MEC) has a high respect for all who participate in our programs. Confidentiality in regard to all personal information about participants is essential. **Do not discuss personal information about any participant outside of MEC..**

IMPORTANT FORMS CHECKLIST

The following forms must be filled out and returned prior to your first volunteer opportunity. These forms may be completed online or in paper format.

Without these signed forms, you may not perform any volunteer duties!!

- Volunteer Information and Health History
- Photo Release
- Confidentiality Agreement
- Volunteer Authorization for Emergency Medical Treatment
- Volunteer Liability Release

VOLUNTEER TERMINATION

Volunteering at Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. is a privilege. We do appreciate all the skills, energy and commitment volunteers bring to our program.

Please understand, for the safety, security, and continuation of excellence in programming, an inattentive volunteer, or one who cannot safely and fully perform the functions or duties of their assigned volunteer role will either be reassigned to a different volunteer role or will be relieved of their volunteer position.

Absolutely no volunteer who is intoxicated or chemically impaired will be allowed to volunteer for Majestic Equine Connections, Inc.. If there is a question, MEC staff will err on the side of caution, and will not permit the individual to complete their volunteer duties.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

All staff, instructors and therapists are certified in techniques of immediate first aid and CPR. All volunteers, interns and assistants should follow instructions given by the certified emergency personnel. A basic human first aid kit is located in the barn near the tack room and major medical supplies are located in the marked cabinet in the instructor's office.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL PROCEDURES

A. Major Injury

1. The instructor appoints someone to:
 - Phone emergency number and read directions to MEC located by the phone.
 - Remain at the barn area to direct emergency vehicles and reassure people in the arena.
 - Get the injured person's file from the office and give it to the instructor.
2. The instructor appoints a volunteer to:
 - Go to the road and wait for the emergency vehicle to arrive.
 - Stop drivers and have lights and sirens turned off so the horses and riders will not be frightened.
 - Tell the driver where the accident is and how to get there.
3. Instructor will decide who will remain with the injured person and who will take the class to the safest confined area away from the accident.
4. The class will continue in an orderly manner or return to the barn.

B. Minor Injury

1. The needs of the individual should be met as guided by the instructor.
2. If the injured person is a rider, have the horse taken back to the barn and properly attended to.
3. If the person in need can't or shouldn't walk, a car or gator may be driven to the area if possible.
4. The rest of the class should continue in an orderly manner.

PRE-EXISTING WEATHER CONDITIONS

Riding classes will be canceled in advance in cases where current or approaching weather conditions may impact the safety of our riders, volunteers or horses. Some instances may be: tornado warnings, high heat index, icy or snowy road conditions, electrical storms, extreme cold temperatures and wind conditions. If classes are canceled, phone notification will occur as early as possible to all affected persons.

UNEXPECTED WEATHER CONDITIONS

MEC shall maintain a functional weather alert radio that is monitored when inclement weather is forecasted. If electrical storms or tornado warnings occur during class times, classes will be delayed until conditions are safe. In the event of a **sudden emergency or eminent danger**, horse leaders or staff members will hold the horses. Side walkers will **dismount the riders in the ring** and proceed to shelter

- **Electrical Storms:** Riders will dismount using normal dismounting procedures. Horse leaders will tend to horses and sidewalkers will escort riders to a safe area (barn or car). Volunteers and riders will remain in the waiting area until safe riding conditions return or class time has ended.
- **Tornado Warning:** Riders will dismount using normal dismounting procedures. Horse leaders will tend to horses and sidewalkers will escort riders. If conditions outside permit, all persons in the facility who are physically capable will proceed to the designated shelter area. Directions to tornado shelter:
 - Proceed to the designated area and exit through the main door.
 - Walk across the parking lot towards the house and follow the path to the garage.

FIRE

In case of fire within the riding facility, at the Instructor's direction, the procedures below will be followed:

- Riders will be dismounted.
- Riders and volunteers will vacate the premises immediately and proceed to the **outdoor arena**.
- A call will be made to 911.
- Horses and other animals will be turned out of the barn.
- All staff will vacate the premises and proceed to the outdoor arena.
- Further instructions will be given by the Fire Department

THE VOLUNTEER TEAM

The Volunteer Team is what makes therapeutic riding/adaptive riding possible for many riders. Without a volunteer team, many of our students would not be able to participate. Leaders and sidewalkers form a team to support their rider during a lesson, consequently the quality of the volunteers directly affects the quality of the lesson. We are thankful for all of our volunteer teams and the opportunities they provide for our riders. Following are a few important things all volunteers need to be aware of:

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

Reliability - Regular attendance and/or advanced notice of absences is a must.

Punctuality – Late arrival can be very frustrating to a student who has looked forward to his weekly ride. Tardiness will affect the whole day, not just one rider.

Physical Fitness - Within reason!! Please know your physical limitations and stay within them. Notify staff if they affect your volunteer duties.

Be Relaxed – An anxious volunteer contributes to a nervous rider and a tense mount.

Alertness – Despite your outward relaxation, always anticipate an unexpected emergency.

Empathy – Avoid false sentimentality. It is important to have genuine empathy and regard toward riders.

Patience – Endless patience is necessary to adjust to the often painfully slow movements and reactions of riders with severe disabilities, as well as to delayed learning and challenging behaviors.

COMMON SENSE - ALWAYS!!

SCHEDULING

When you attend Volunteer Training, your available times, skills and interests will be confirmed and then you will be assigned volunteer duties based on your schedule and our needs. Continuity is very important with our students and we hope that you will fulfill your assigned volunteer duties consistently once the session begins.

We do understand that there will be times when you will have to miss your volunteer duties. If you know in advance, please inform staff as soon as you know you will be missing your assigned volunteer time, such as vacations, school commitments, or other scheduled events.

In the event you are unable to come at the last minute due to illness or family emergency, **please call Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. 440-668-8364** as soon as possible so that we can try to find someone to fill in for you. If there is no answer, please leave a detailed voicemail or **TEXT** because the instructor may be handling horses!

If any or all classes at MEC must be canceled for any reason, a staff member will attempt to contact you by phone as early as possible. Please make sure we have a current contact number where you can be reached at the last minute. Remember, we are in OHIO where the weather can change quickly, so if you have concerns about the weather and have not heard from us, please call! Do not make assumptions that we have canceled classes.

ARRIVAL, SIGN-IN PROCEDURES & RECORDING HOURS

It is important that you be on time for your volunteer duties. Many people, including instructors and our students depend on your promptness. When volunteers are late, it can put everything behind schedule. If you know you are going to be late, please call 440-668-8364 so we can cover for you until you arrive.

Upon arrival please do the following:

- Notify the office that you are here
- Put on your name tag
- Check the posted volunteer schedule located in the volunteer area to confirm your assignment for the day. On occasion, such as if a rider cancels or another volunteer is sick, you may be assigned to do something different than your usual duties, so **please check the schedule** each time you come to volunteer.

After all Sports Riding classes please complete the Volunteer Input. Please give it to Jennifer. Improvements are all always considered but funding and resources are limited.

Recording your hours:

- Sidewalkers/ leaders record hours on the Class Volunteer Hours sheet located in the volunteer area.
- Barn volunteers record hours on the Barn Volunteer sheet located on the bulletin board outside the door of the Instructor's office.
- Be sure to record your hours each time you come. ***It is your responsibility to record your hours.***

WHAT TO WEAR

Volunteering at a barn is dirty work so please don't wear your best cashmere sweater or your expensive fashion jeans! You will get dirty! Also, what you choose to wear can affect the way you move. Be sensible and remember that you will need to bend and stretch to be able to support your rider, lead the horse or work in the barn.

For safety as well as comfort, volunteers **should not wear loose, floppy clothing** that could get caught and tangled with equipment. Please zip jackets and secure any loose items. Dress in layers that you can shed as you exercise, especially during cooler months. Bring a jacket, even if you don't need it in town – it's cooler at the barn than you may think! During the summer, be sure you dress coolly and you may want to wear a hat that will not fly off. Sunglasses are a big plus in the sunny months and sunscreen and bug spray are recommended. Also, **avoid dangly earrings**, necklaces and bracelets that can hamper your movements, get pulled by a rider, or distract the horse.

You will be doing a lot of walking and possibly some jogging on uneven terrain, so comfortable shoes are important. It hurts when a horse steps on your foot, so make sure your footwear has closed toes and backs and is sturdy as well. High-heeled shoes, sandals and open heel shoes such as "Crocs" or clogs are not safe footwear for volunteering at MEC and will not be allowed. The best bet is either boots or athletic shoes. Always make sure your laces are tied securely before starting class!

GENERAL VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES AND SAFETY REGULATIONS

As with any program we have a few guidelines and safety regulations to be followed by all volunteers:

- Designated parking areas are reserved for riders. Please park in an area that is not blocking other cars.
- Smoking, drugs or alcohol is NOT allowed anywhere on Majestic Equine Connections, Inc. property during operating hours.
- Please leave pets at home.
- Cell phone usage is not permitted during lesson time.
- Refrain from chewing gum or eating candy while volunteering. Water is available in the Volunteer Coordinator's office. Stay well hydrated, especially in warm weather.
- Only staff, trained volunteers and riders are allowed in the barn or arena. All others must remain in the designated areas.
- Please do not feed the horses without permission from designated staff.
- All volunteers are asked to never be alone with a rider. Should you be asked to take a rider somewhere make sure you are in a group situation at all times. .
- Volunteers should aid the rider only if needed or as directed by the instructor. This includes putting on helmets, belts and during instruction time. If they are capable of accomplishing even a small part of a task, let them do it. For example, if they can get their helmet and put it on their head, but can't buckle it, let them do the parts they can do and help only as needed. Teach and coach your rider to help them increase their skills, independence and confidence.
- Riders need to develop independence, but not at the expense of an accident. Always assess the safety of a situation before making a decision. When in doubt, ask the instructor or another staff member. Always error on the side of caution!
- Once your rider has arrived, always stay with them, unless instructed otherwise. During this time please make sure they are wearing appropriate attire including: long pants, sturdy shoes, helmet and belt if needed. You can also use this time to build trust and friendship with your rider. Please remain with your rider in the waiting area until the instructor calls for your rider.
- During the lesson, please keep conversation very minimal so that the rider can listen to the instructor. Please limit unnecessary conversation with riders during lessons. If they attempt to engage you in conversation, be polite, but direct their attention back to the instructor. Conversation with your rider is encouraged as you greet them before the lesson as well as after the lesson. Be attentive to the instructor at all times to maintain the highest standards of safety.

- If you have any suggestions, questions or concerns about any aspect of the program or your assigned duties, please talk with the instructor or other MEC staff. Please do not discuss concerns with other volunteers or riders.

SIDEWALKER GUIDELINES

The sidewalker(s) help the rider with balance and reinforce instructions in the lesson. If there are two sidewalkers, the inside sidewalker (one closest to the center of the ring) or the person designated by the instructor will clarify instructions. Too many people talking to the rider can be confusing.

- The sidewalker is responsible for greeting the rider, helping them with their helmet and belt, if required, and building a relationship with the rider while they wait for their lesson to begin.
- Check daily lesson schedules prior to each class as there may be changes in your volunteer assignment. If you are uncomfortable with any assignment you are given, please notify staff immediately.
- Different methods are used with individual riders, depending on their needs. Always listen to the instructor for the type of assistance your rider requires. If you are unsure, ASK!!!

The four basic methods of support are:

1. **Awareness position:** Walk beside the rider's leg to assist when needed.
2. **Thigh hold:** Place your arm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle or saddle pad.
3. **Belt hold or back support:** Hold the rider's safety belt to assist with balance. This is done while supporting the legs. It is important to keep your hold light and not apply pressure that might cause the rider to become unbalanced.
4. **Ankle block:** One hand is placed between the rider's ankle and the horse. This is done to keep a rider from digging their heels into the horse's side. Often combined with other holds.



Sidewalker guidelines continued:

- Always ask the rider if it is okay to touch him/her.
- Do not offer any more support than the rider needs.
- Riders who need moderate support, especially support to the back, will need more attention. Be sure you are at ease with the method of support, both mentally and physically, before moving into the riding arena.
- If a rider only has one sidewalker, ask the instructor which side to walk on. Usually it will be the right, opposite side of the leader, but if a rider has a specific weakness you may be needed on the left. Always ask the instructor if you are not sure.
- Observe the rider with your front or side vision at all times. Never become so relaxed that you are not totally aware of the rider, horse, leader, instructor, and environment around you.
- Be sure not to lean on the horse or rider since this pressure may unbalance the rider or irritate the horse.
- When the rider 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 rider.
- You may need to reinforce the instructor's directions, assist the rider in carrying out instructions, or direct the rider's attention to the task.
- Listen to the instructor's directions so you can be ready to reinforce when necessary, BUT allow the rider plenty of time to process the information before you begin to assist. For example, if the instructor says, "Pull the right rein towards me", and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say "right".
- Talking to the rider during a lesson is not recommended because it interferes with the communication between the rider and instructor. Many riders with disabilities have difficulty focusing on instruction; so all talking should be kept to a minimum. If they attempt to engage you in conversation, be polite, but direct their attention back to the instructor. Use your time before and after class to socialize with your rider.
- Refrain from talking to the other sidewalker or leader during the lesson unless it has to do with the rider's position, balance, or horse. Be sure that you do not talk with other teams as they pass near you. Any unnecessary talking distracts the rider, shows disrespect for the instructor, and diverts the attention of the team, which can create an unsafe situation.
- ASK THE LEADER TO STOP THE HORSE IF:
 1. The rider is off balance and cannot regain it while the horse is moving.
 2. The saddle pad has slipped or the girth is loose.
 3. The stirrups need adjusting.
 4. The rider's helmet needs to be adjusted.
 5. The rider is fatigued, in pain, or needs to stop for other reasons.
 6. Your sidewalkers need to change sides, **tie shoelaces** or are having some difficulty and cannot carry out their job in comfort or efficiency. When changing sides, have one volunteer change at a time. Never leave the rider unsupported.

GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

GENERAL APPROACH AND INTERACTION

It is important to remember that every child or adult is an individual and wants to be treated with understanding, dignity and respect, regardless of having a disability or not. Each has his own unique learning rate, style of learning, personality, and temperament. One must always look beyond the disability to the person and provide them an enriched experience with a favorable environment in which to learn and grow.

RELATING TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Being around people with disabilities may be a new experience for you. You may be overwhelmed at first with things you have never seen or do not understand. This is natural for most people. Allow yourself time to get used to being with the person who is disabled. Do not give up on being a part of the program without a fair try, for your experience can be very rewarding. At first you may want to do jobs which are not in direct contact with the riders. Feel free to talk to a staff member about this. If working directly with our riders is a hardship or uncomfortable for you, consider helping **Majestic Equine Connections, Inc.** in some other way. Here are a few suggestions to assist your relationship with your rider:

- Be yourself.
- Relax. Let the rider put you at ease if you do not know what to say.
- Explore mutual interests in a friendly way. For starters, talk about the horse and whether the person has ridden before.
- Speak directly to the person with the disability. Your attention should be to them and not to someone with them.
- Children and adults will be glad to talk about themselves. They prefer to have someone ask them about their disability instead of staring at them. They would rather discuss other things like TV shows, movies, sports, foods, and other things we are all interested in.
- Use conversation and social behavior that you might use in any new situation.
- Offer assistance when asked or when the situation obviously requires it. Do not overwhelm the person with help or insist upon helping when they are managing alone. When a person is trying to increase their physical ability, effort is necessary.
- Do not hinder the rider's ability to expand their skills and independence, even when their movements may appear awkward to you.
- Respect the person's right to independence and their request for the kind of assistance they want.
- Be guided by the wishes of the person with the disability. Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally, but don't pry.
- Appreciate what the rider can do. Remember that the difficulties the person may be facing could stem from society's attitudes and barriers rather than from the disability itself. People with disabilities generally do not view themselves to be as handicapped as what society often perceives.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to accomplish or respond to something. Be patient.

- Let the person set the pace in walking and communicating.
- Realize that some individuals with disabilities are not able to communicate with words, like you and I. Instead they will have alternative means of communication, which may be as elaborate as sign language or a picture system, or as basic as various vocalizations, facial expressions and body movements. It will take even more time to get to know the person and how they communicate if they are not verbal. Again, be patient and don't give up!
- Do not be afraid to say, "I'm sorry I cannot understand you. Please say it again."
- Be sensitive to separating a rider from his wheelchair, crutches, or braces.
- Communicate with your heart and see each person from his heart.
- Acknowledge that every person has the opportunity for vast potential in his life. Share the feeling that each person's potential is found in the present moment.

CHOOSING WORDS WITH DIGNITY

When talking about a person with a disability, make reference to the person first, not the disability.

AVOID: "afflicted with blindness" or "the blind person"

USE: "person who is blind" (or vision impaired)

AVOID: "crippled"

USE: "person who has a physical disability" or "person who has a physical challenge"

AVOID: "stricken with mental retardation" or a "mentally retarded, handicapped or disabled person"

USE: "person who has a developmental disability"

AVOID: "stricken with Down's Syndrome" or "a Down's child/adult"

USE: "person who has Down Syndrome"

AVOID: "stricken with autism" or "autistic child/adult"

USE: "person who has autism"

AVOID: "confined" or "restricted to a wheelchair" (or crutches, etc.)

USE: "person who uses a wheelchair" (or crutches, etc.)

The preferred terms focus attention on the uniqueness and worth of the individual first and foremost rather than emphasizing the disabling condition. The connotation of "dis-ability" is very important to avoid. Words such as defective, deformed, invalid, lame, maimed, spastic, and crippled imply pity, infirmity, and a general lack of competence. People are neither invalid nor defective. People aren't spastic, muscles are. By choosing words carefully, positive images can be conveyed about persons with disabilities.



DESCRIPTIONS OF DISABILITIES

The following is a brief, non-medical description of some of the disabilities and conditions you may encounter at MEC. This 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 brain development disorder characterized by impaired social interaction and communication, and by restricted and repetitive behavior. These signs all begin before a child is three years old. Autism affects many parts of the brain; how this occurs is not understood. The autism spectrum disorders (ASD) also include related conditions of Asperger syndrome and PDD-NOS, which have fewer signs and symptoms.

Riding Benefits: Riding addresses several key symptoms affiliated with autism. Recent research continues to show benefits including improved communication and social skills, increased sensory skills, improved motor skills and improved response to verbal cues and external stimuli.

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 involvement 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.

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

Down Syndrome: Also called Trisomy 21, Trisomy G. It is one of the more easily and widely identified hereditary disabilities. These individuals often have a mean IQ of about 50 and experience both physical and cognitive delays.

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

Emotional Disabilities: “ED” - A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities. In general, individuals with emotional disabilities have trouble coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relationships. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, paranoia, or schizophrenia may be exhibited.

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

Hearing Impairment: 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 people who have hearing impairment may involve lip reading, finger spelling (the manual alphabet), or sign language.

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

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 intelligence skills. New learning takes time to be integrated and may need to be reviewed frequently to insure retention.

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

Mental Retardation: “MR” - A genetic defect where the individual develops below normal in terms of intelligence. It may also involve delayed physical and emotional development.

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

Riding 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 span. People with MD are easily fatigued, especially when it is cold or hot.

Riding Benefits: Riding may slow muscle tone degeneration and maintain muscle function. Riding provides appropriate opportunities for social interactions and elevates 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 usually affected.**Riding Benefits:** Riding improves balance, posture, and muscle strength in the affected limbs.

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. Defects may include gross and fine motor skills, cognitive disabilities such as long and short term memory functions, visual limitations, speech, balance, and psychological alterations.

Riding 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 blindness, 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 visual memories of people, places and things. A person is considered to be “blind” only if he has total loss of vision. If some vision is present, then the person is “visually impaired.”

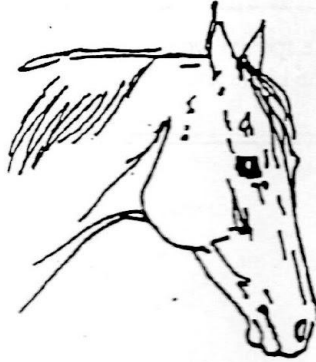
Riding Benefits: Riding helps orient the body in space and improves balance, posture, coordination and self-awareness. The voice of the instruction is a point of orientation in space for the rider; therefore, unnecessary sounds should be avoided as they are a distraction.

READING HIS EARS

The horse's ears and actions are the key to his emotions. He can tell you what he is paying attention to and how he feels by the way he uses his ears and the way he acts. Following are some tips to his emotions.



Ears forward but relaxed
interested in what's
in front of him.



Ears turned back but relaxed
listening to his rider
or what's behind him.



Ears pointed stiffly forward
alarmed or nervous about what's
ahead. Looking for danger.



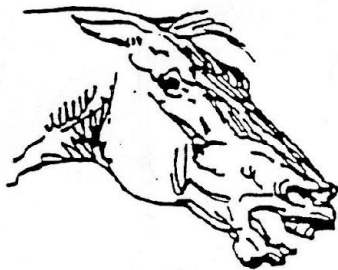
Ears pointed left and right
relaxed. paying attention
to the scenery on both sides.



Ears stiffly back
annoyed or worried about what's
behind him: might kick if annoyed.



Droopy ears
calm and resting,
horse may be dozing.

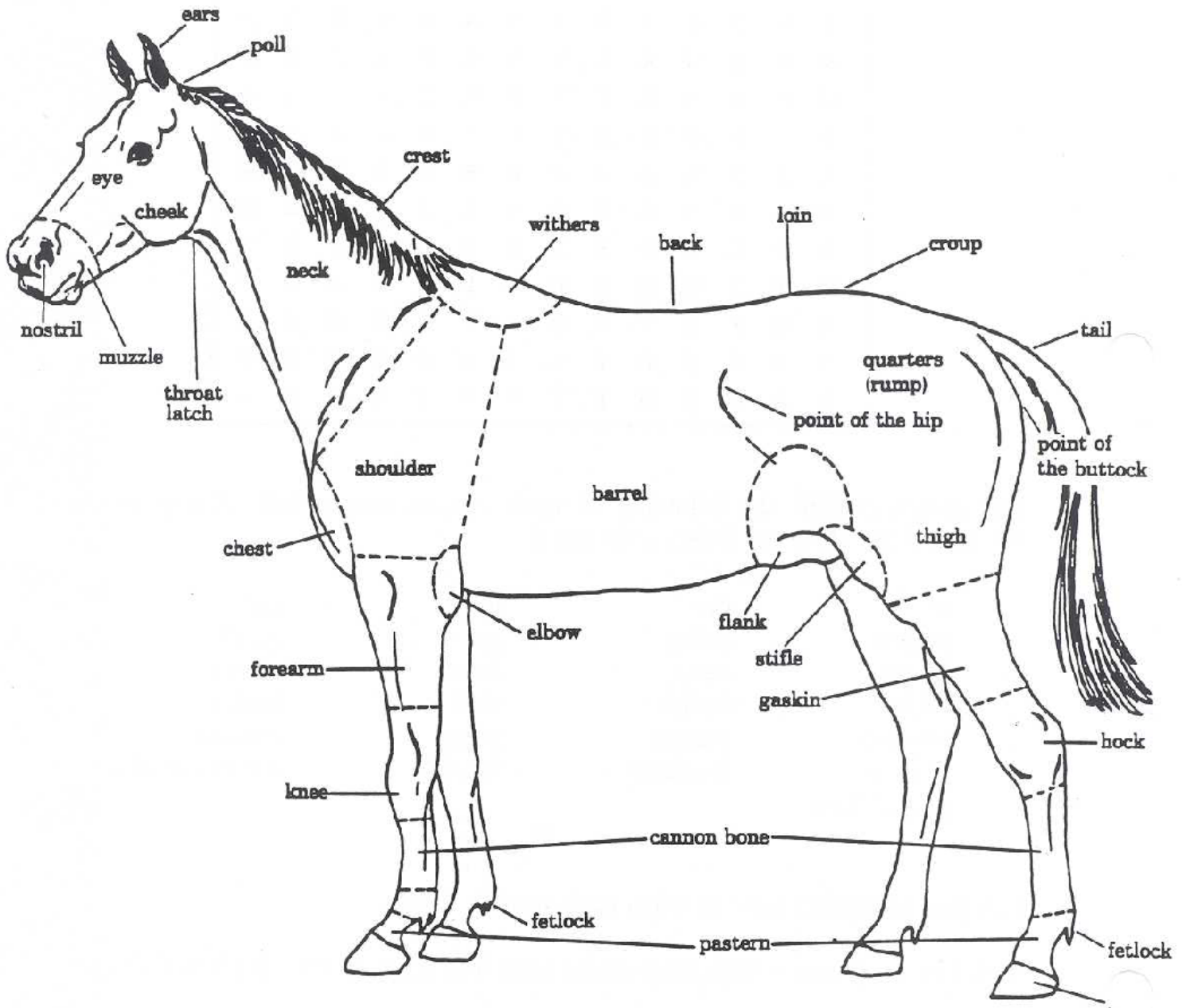


Ears flattened against neck
violently angry, in a fighting mood.
May fight, bite or kick.

OTHER SIGNS YOU SHOULD NOTICE ARE:

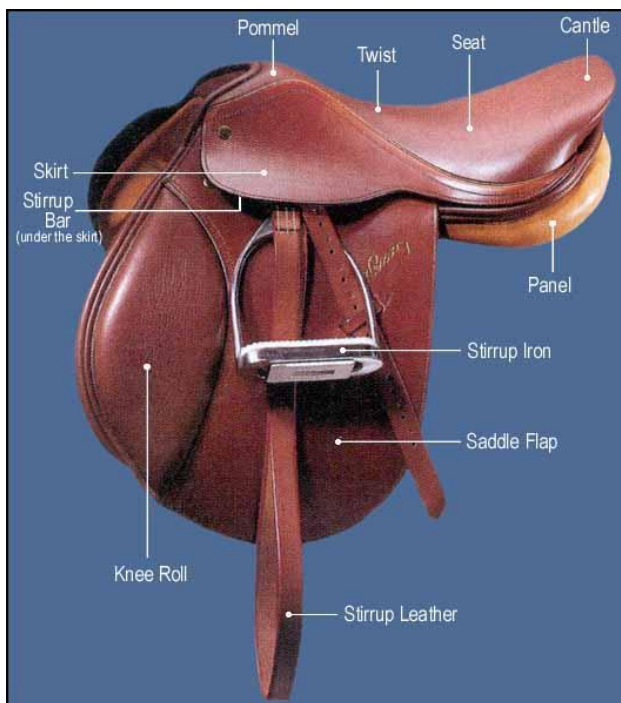
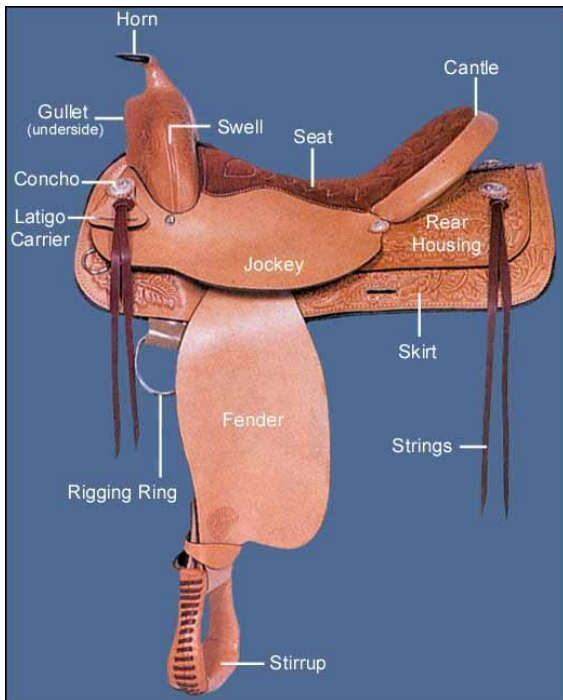
- Tucking the tail down tightly.
Danger to the rear.
Horse may bolt, buck or kick.
Watch out if ears are flattened, too!
- Switching the tail.
Annoyance and irritation:
at biting flies, stinging insects or
tickling bothersome actions of a rider or another horse.
- Droopy ears and resting one hind leg on toe.
Calm and resting, horse may be dozing.
Don't wake him up by startling him!
- Wrinkling up the face and swinging the head.
Threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse.
Watch out for biting or kicking.

PARTS OF A HORSE



PARTS OF A WESTERN SADDLE

PARTS OF AN ENGLISH SADDLE



PARTS OF A BRIDLE

(some bridles may not have nosebands)

