



EQUINE-ASSISTED SERVICES CENTER  
*Where the impossible becomes possible*

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## SIDE WALKER MANUAL



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### **What does a side walker do?**

- Walks beside the horse and rider to assist the student in responding to the instructor's directions, while ensuring the safety of the student.

### **Qualifications**

- For safety reasons, a minimum height requirement of 5'2" (or comparable reach) is considered.
- No horse experience required but must be comfortable around horses.
- Must be physically capable of walking for 30-45 minutes at a time, and jogging short distances (20-30 feet).

### **ALL SIDE WALKERS MUST ATTEND A MANDATORY TRAINING SESSION**

## **Side Walker Guidelines**

### **Get to know your rider**

- Special needs (At ATS, we do not disclose diagnosis for the privacy of our students. We will give volunteers specific directions on how to assist their student that may include the disclosure of seizure activity or other symptoms that require special attention).
- Goals specific to riding
- Forms of communication (verbal, sign, facial expressions)
- Likes/dislike
- Fears

### **Help them to "own" their ride**

- Although you never want to talk over the instructor, you do want to make sure the rider understands the "task" to be performed.
- Give them the time to process and perform the task (each rider will vary).
- Make sure that you and the horse leader have agreed on a form of communication so the horse leader (who should not be looking back at the rider) knows when to prompt/allow the horse to perform the task the rider is asking it to do.
  - For example: when you say, "good squeezing" the horse-handler knows that the rider has correctly prompted the horse to walk-on, at which point they will walk.

### **Offer lots of verbal praise**

- Make it specific (i.e. good job pulling the reins to your belly instead of your shoulders, you did a great job of remembering to look before you turned your horse).
- Praise not only builds the rider's confidence and sense of self-esteem, it also is a chance to verbalize (and therefore reinforce) what they learned.

## **Although every class has its own unique format there are things you can try to accomplish for your rider:**

### **Before the class**

- Arrive AT LEAST 15 minutes early. Check with the instructor to see if you need to pull the horse's tack. If so, please pull it and put it in the designated area.
- Be ready 5 minutes prior to the class to meet with the instructor and other volunteers for advice on the lesson as well as to clear our minds so we can offer 100% of ourselves to our students.
- Assist your rider in putting their helmet on properly.
- Touch base with the rider/parents/teacher just to see how the day has been going in case something has happened that may affect the ride. It could be as simple as a runny nose...you could grab some tissues. Or perhaps the rider had a really tough day in school and needs extra positives in the lesson/not the best day to push a rider to achieve.

### **While the rider is mounted but before the class officially starts**

- If your rider is one of the first on and there is unstructured time while the instructor is mounting the other riders, use this time to review what was done/or learned the week before.
- Before the class begins ask the instructor if there is something they would like the rider to work on to help prepare for that day's lesson. It could be moving hands independently to steer, or relaxing if they are tense and nervous, or practicing two point, or a quick test like:
  - "What do you do when the teacher says are you ready to trot safely?" Try to bring the rider into the lesson mentally. Try not to discuss other subjects as to get them focused on their lesson.

### **After the class**

- While you are waiting for the instructor to come and dismount the rider, take the time to ask the rider what they learned that week.
- Discuss what they think they need to work on. This will give them something to work on the next week if there is "unstructured" time while other riders are dismounted. (Please note that the instructor needs to approve the activities).
- After the rider dismounts, when appropriate walk the rider back to their parent/teacher.
  - The parents would love a comment from you on how their child did that day. It gives them something specific to talk about on the way home.

### **We need your input**

- Please take the time to fill the instructor in on anything you feel is important.

### **What you need from us to do your job**

- Although we strictly observe our rider's rights to privacy, we do need to give you information regarding your rider's needs and goals so that you are better able to assist them.
- If we do not make this available to you, please remind the instructor.

### **In the event of an emergency while the student is mounted**

- As you know, these are 1,000lb. animals that we are dealing with along with unpredictable students. We never know what outside factor could affect the horses. We do our very best to have our horses desensitized to everything, but things do happen. Besides the horses, we can sometimes have behavioral issues with the students as well (this is much more common).

- In the event of an issue with the horse or student that the instructor deems out of control, the instructor will ask for an emergency dismount, which is the removal of the student from the horse as quickly and safely as possible. Often times if this is due to a behavioral issue of the student, the instructor will try to reach them in time to handle the dismount. However, if it is due to the behavior of the horse, the instructor may instruct the side walkers to perform the emergency dismount.
- In the case of the side walkers performing the emergency dismount, the LEFT side walker will remove the student's foot from the stirrup and pull the student off to the ground. The RIGHT side walker will remove the student's foot from the stirrup and help push the student toward the LEFT side walker. COMMUNICATION is key! If there is only ONE side walker, remove the student's left foot from the stirrup and pull the student off to the ground. The other foot will pop loose as we use safety stirrups.
- During an emergency dismount, do your very best not to get yourself or the student hurt. Bring the student to the ground as quickly as possible, away from the horse. You may be able to get the student on their feet; however, sometimes it's necessary to bring them to their knees or bottom.
- This does NOT happen often, but we must be prepared for anything!

**If after attending a Side Walker Volunteer Workshop and reading this guide you still feel like you need more training (on either one area or in general) please let the Volunteer Coordinator know. If at any time you have a question or concern, please let the Volunteer Coordinator or the Instructor know.**

**For any questions and/or concerns, please contact:**

Angela Stan

Executive Director

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**Again, thank you for volunteering with Autumn Trails Stable! We appreciate you, and we could not do this without you!**