



O.A.T.S. hrh

Offering Alternative Therapy with Smiles, Incorporated

~ therapeutic horseback riding ~



Information about Volunteering at O.A.T.S

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with O.A.T.S. !

Offering Alternative Therapy with Smiles (O.A.T.S.) is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization that provides therapeutic riding for people with disabilities. This program could not exist without the dedication of our volunteers. We welcome your participation, and hope you will find this to be a rewarding experience.

All volunteers will be given an 'on-site' orientation. Additionally, you will find some important information about 'leading horses' and 'side walking with our riders' included with this packet. Please read these sheets before your first volunteer session.

If you need to keep a record of your volunteer time at O.A.T.S. for Community Service, we are happy to help with that. Included in this packet is a "Community Service Log" that may be used, or if you have your own, that is fine too. Please note the following guidelines which outline our "Community Service" policy:

- All volunteers are responsible for their own record keeping. If you need to use our 'log', you must print & bring it each time you come. We do not keep copies of them.
- Have one of the adults sign it when you arrive and again when you leave. This allows for accurate tracking of your volunteer hours.
- If you need a letter from our organization, certifying your participation, we are happy to provide that. However, to do so, you must present us a copy of your Community Service Log, and your request must be submitted within 2 months of your last participation.

O.A.T.S. does operate 'year round', with a few breaks around the holidays. We ask you to dress appropriately for the weather. Yes, it is chilly in the winter and long underwear and multiple layers are always suggested, but the smiles of our riders will warm your heart, so the chill is well worth it. Please refer to the calendar on our website (www.oatshrh.org) for information on class days/times.

If you are ready to join our team, download the OATS Volunteer Application form from our website. Be sure to fill out all parts – signatures/initials/dates, etc. and bring the information with you on your first day.

We are excited to have you join our team! Please let us know if you have any questions about our volunteer program or about O.A.T.S. in general.

We look forward to seeing you soon!

The Team at O.A.T.S.
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O.A.T.S. hrh is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is tax exempt as allowed by law. O.A.T.S. admits students of any race, color and national or ethnic origin.

Leading or Working with Horses

Basic Rules for Safety

1. Always speak to a horse before approaching or touching him. Most horses are likely to jump and may kick, when startled.
2. Never approach a horse directly from the rear. Even in standing stalls, it is possible to approach from an oblique angle at the rear.
3. Approach your horse from the side, talking to him in a low voice. Keep your hand on your horse when walking around him.
4. If the horse hangs back on the end of the rope, lead him a few steps forward before touching him with your hand.
5. Walk beside the horse when leading him – not ahead or behind his head.
6. Use a long lead shank and **both** hands when leading. If the horse rears up, release the hand closest to the halter so you can stay on the ground.
7. You weigh a lot less than any horse. You cannot out-pull him. If a horse pulls back, step with him rather than pull against him. A quick jerk on the lead rope will generally get him going.
8. **Never** wrap a lead shank or reins around your hand, wrist or body. Fold any excess rope over the palm of your hand and then close your fist around it
9. Pet a horse by placing your hand on his shoulder or neck. **DON'T** dab at the end of his nose.
10. Always walk around your horse – never under the rope or stepping over it.
11. After leading into a box stall, turn the horse so that he faces the door. Before releasing the lead rope, close the stall door leaving, just enough space for you to get out, but not the horse.
12. Lead your horse from the left side – one hand about 6” from the halter and looping the other end of the lead road over the palm of your hand, not wrapped around it.
13. When bridling a horse, keep your head in the clear. He may throw his head or strike to avoid the bridle. Avoid bridling a nervous animal in close quarters.
14. When saddling a horse, stand with your feet well back. You should have to lean forward to lift and place the saddle on his back.
15. Adjust saddle, carefully, and cinch tightly enough so it will not turn when mounting. Horses often “swell up” when first saddled. Check the girth, again, before mounting a rider. Failure to tighten can result in serious accidents.
16. Always unhook the lead rope before taking the halter off your horse. This may prevent him from pulling back and becoming a “halter puller”. **Never** remove the halter before the horse is completely in the stall or pen.
17. Keep reins and leads ropes off the ground.
18. When checking or cleaning a horse’s hooves, do it from the side, facing the rear. Never squat or kneel down. Stay up on both feet.
19. When leading a horse during classes, remember that when the horse is at a “Whoa”, the leader must come around in front of the horse and stand ‘nose to nose’ with the horse. **Both hands must remain on the lead rope, all times.** Do not take this as an opportunity to ‘pet the horses’ face’ or snuggle up to him/her.

Effective Side-walking

Side-walkers are the ones who normally get the most “hands-on” duties in therapeutic riding. They are directly responsible for the rider. As such, they have the capability to either enhance or detract from the lesson.

All of our riders are disabled, but it is important to focus on their abilities, rather than their disability. Each rider is unique, and it is very helpful to know how much your rider is capable of and how best to assist him or her. It is the instructor’s responsibility to provide each side-walker with that information. Sometimes we get really busy or assume you already know the rider in your care. **Don’t ever hesitate to ask the instructor any questions about your role.** There are “no stupid” questions in therapeutic horse back riding.

Always remember that you must have both hands ‘ready’ to react, at all times. No hands in the pockets and no cell phone usage during classes,

In the arena, the side-walker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and to the riders who already have perceptual problems, it can be overwhelming. If two side-walkers are working with one student, one should be the “designated talker” to avoid this situation.

When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process or think about it. If the instructor says, “Turn to the right toward me,” and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, “right”, to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and learn when they need help and when they’re just not paying attention.

It’s important to maintain a position by the rider’s knee. Being too far forward or too far back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security if the horse should trip or “shy”.

There are two ways to hold onto a rider, without interfering. The most commonly used is the “arm-over-the-thigh” hold. The side-walker grips the front of the saddle (flap or pommel, depending on the horse’s size) with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider’s thigh. Be careful that the elbow doesn’t accidentally dig into the rider’s leg or the horse’s back.

Sometimes, pressure on the thigh can increase and/or cause muscle spasticity with the cerebral palsy population. In this case, the “therapeutic hold” may be used. Here, the leg is held at the joints, usually the knee and/or the ankle. Check with the instructor/therapist for the best way to assist. In the (unlikely) event of an emergency, the arm-over-the-thigh hold is the most secure.

Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider’s waist. It is tempting when walking beside a pony with a young or small rider, but it can offer too much and/or uneven support. At times, it can even pull the rider off balance and make riding more difficult. Encourage your students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.

