



# Victoria Riding for the Disabled Association

PO Box 412, Brentwood Bay, BC V8M 1R3  
BN# 890341977RR001

## Horse Handler and Side Walker Job Description

Revised September 12, 2003

### Horse Handlers

#### **The primary responsibility of the horse handler is the control and care of the horse.**

##### **ON ARRIVAL**

- arrive ½ hour early to tack up; horses must be in the ring 15 minutes prior to the start of class
- check in with volunteer coordinator, sign in attendance register, put your name tag on
- check horse assignment board (help bring out tack if necessary)

##### **GROOMING**

- bring in assigned horse from paddock/field if necessary.
- ensure that aisle and outside doors are pulled shut while grooming and tacking if in a shared paddock.
- during grooming and tacking, horse should be tied to the strap attached to the wall
- if you must leave the stall, make sure the stall door is closed and latched
- clean the horse's hooves thoroughly with the hoof pick
- make note of any damage or unusual conditions (ie. Strong smell could indicate Thrush)
- groom horse: to minimize the impact of many people handling the horses each day, we will groom only the area where the saddle will sit and where the girth will be touching; rubber curry comb for body, dandy brush for body; please do not brush the face, mane and tail ; (plastic curry comb is only used for cleaning the other brushes)
- check legs for any injuries (heat, swelling, cuts, etc) and inform the instructor or horse manager before the classes begin
- tack up (the stirrup length may be obtained now or when the horse is in the ring)

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**TACKING UP** The horses are handled frequently throughout the day, sometimes by many different handlers. It is imperative that all tacking up is completed very gently and considerately. The instructor will check all tack and tighten girths before the classes begin

### **Saddle:**

- The saddle should have the rider's leather handle attached in front of the pommel and 'quick release' stirrups (release facing forward).
- The elastic end of the girth should be on the horse's left (near) side. For initial tightening, the girth should only be tightened to "snug"—the instructor will finish tightening the girth once the horse has had a chance to walk around in the ring.
- **PULL GIRTH STRAPS GENTLY AND SLOWLY.** The horses are tacked up frequently during the day and will get both sore and grouchy if treated roughly.
- **DO NOT** wrench on the stirrup straps when adjusting the stirrups – support the saddle with your other hand when you are pulling down the stirrups, this will avoid unnecessary strain on the horse's back.
- **NEVER** leave horses untied when they have their saddles on.

**Bridle:** Bridling and unbridling will be done by the Instructor and Assistant Instructor in the ring. The reins should be knotted over the strap on the pommel of the saddle. Make sure that the horse's face is handled very gently, especially around the eyes, mouth and ears.

### **LEAVING THE STALL AND ENTERING THE ARENA**

- always ensure that the aisle is safe and clear of people before bringing horses out: announce 'horse coming through' to alert everyone.
- bring horse into ring to warm up not less than 10 minutes before the beginning of the class; horse should be walked and/or trotted around the ring to warm up.
- the lead rope should be held 6 to 8 inches from the horse's head, body position; your elbow to the horse's nostril, unless otherwise specified by the Instructor.
- maintain a distance of 1 to 2 horse lengths between other horses at all times
- adjust stirrup lengths if not already done; the instructor will check all tack and tighten girth as necessary
- line up and listen for mounting order of horse and rider

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### IN THE RING AND DURING THE LESSON

**Mounting:** *It is crucial that the horse handler is extremely focused on the horse during both mounting and dismounting. This is a potentially dangerous time as the riders are sometimes very tense and/or nervous.*

The horse handler should give the horse enough room to come through the ramp in a straight line. The horse must be standing straight and square in preparation for the rider to mount. The horse handler must ensure that the horse walks out of the ramp in a slow and straight line.

### Leading:

- *the horse handler's primary responsibility is for the horse and not the rider, the horse handler must not turn around and talk to the rider and/or sidewalkers*
- all transitions and turns, etc. must be executed slowly and carefully
- the sidewalkers must be given enough room to walk comfortably beside the rider
- the horse handler must give the rider adequate time to receive, process and perform all instructions
- allow riders to make "safe" mistakes (for example if they are working on stopping and they don't say "whoa" or pull the reins, if it is safe to do so carry on walking until rider makes attempt to stop).
- during stretches and exercises at the halt, stand to the side, facing the horse in the "parked position".
- Listen to the lead sidewalker who will relay information (such as "walk on" when with non verbal riders)

**Trail Rides:** Pay extra close attention to the horse's reactions – head up, ears forward, nose flared, etc. Again, be considerate to the side walker's space on the far side of the horse.

**Dismounting:** *During dismounting, stand to the side of the horse in "parked position", as in exercises. Ensure that the horse stands quietly while rider is on the ground moving around the horse. Riders and Sidewalkers are only to pet the horse on the shoulder.*

- wait for instruction at the end of the class; if the horse is being used in the next class, stay in the ring and make any necessary stirrup and/or tack adjustments
- if the horse is not being used in the next class, have the Instructor or Assistant Instructor remove the bridle, wait until all riders have left the ring and the aisle is safe and return the horse to it's stall

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### **AFTER THE CLASS**

- take the horse into the stall, attach the halter to the tie in the stall and leave the horse for the groom to untack.
- at the end of a morning or afternoon shift, please assist with untacking and grooming the horse.
- at the end of the day, all tack is returned to the tack room; ensure that the bit is washed
- if the horse's own saddle has been substituted with another saddle, please put the substitute saddle back in the correct position in the tack room but return the saddle pads and girth to the horse's own saddle to prevent mix ups in tack
- pick hooves, groom horse and turn loose; during the winter, blankets may also need to be put on

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### Sidewalkers

#### **The primary responsibility of the side walker is to ensure the safety of the rider at all times.**

The side walker can help the instructor in many ways (ie. keeping the rider's attention on the lesson and help to communicate or explain directions).

The side walker is an extension of the instructor.

#### **ON YOUR ARRIVAL**

- arrive 15 – 20 minutes early
- sign in on attendance registry book and put on your name tag
- ask coordinator for assignment of rider
- ***determine whether you are the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> side walker. The first side walker will be the person who will be doing the communicating with the rider. Please defer to that person to ensure that the rider is not hearing too much talking from too many sources (occasionally, the instructor may designate a sidewalker to relay information to the rider – this will be for specific rider requirements)***
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#### **WHEN YOUR RIDER ARRIVES**

- introduce yourself to the rider and ensure that jackets are done up properly, that the rider is wearing proper boots or shoes and clothing, no loose accessories and has no gum, candy, food or drink
- help rider put on belt and correct helmet (ensure that helmet is done up properly)
- stay with rider until it is time to mount, then escort rider to ramp (one sidewalker will stay with the rider on the ramp)

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### **MOUNTING**

- When waiting to be called for mounting, spend some time getting the rider focused on their lesson – for example review the horse words for “go” and “stop”, ask the rider to identify their horse etc.
- If there are two sidewalkers decide which person will be going to the far side of the mounting ramp – THAT person will go through the gate first and hold the gate open for the rider
- Please ensure you are focused on the instructor once you get to the mounting gate so that you can hear immediately when your rider is called
- *Please refrain from speaking, either to the rider or each other, during the mounting procedure – the rider must be focused only on the horse and instructor at this time.*
- ALL riders leave the ramp with a thigh hold
- instructor will inform side walkers of the hold required for each rider once they have cleared the mounting area (ankle, thigh/knee or lower back/thigh hold) and give any necessary information regarding the rider’s disability

### **DURING THE LESSON**

- once the rider has mounted the horse, the side walker must stay with the rider at all times and maintain physical contact
- maintain a position beside the rider’s knee and be aware of the rider’s position and moods at all times
- do not hold onto the rider’s belt (this could pull the rider off balance or put extra pressure on the rider) or lean on the horse (this is uncomfortable for the horse)
- avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or the other volunteers, not only is this distracting for the rider, but it can also distract everyone from their jobs
- keep directions short and to the point
- *allow the rider sufficient time to receive, process and complete the instructor’s direction. Help the rider perform the applicable task (but do not do it for them). If the rider cannot perform the task, you may encourage them verbally or hand-over-hand. Take small steps in assisting – try a little at a time.*
- *When practicing STEERING – start by using verbal cues, if this does not work take the next step and tap the relevant hand that needs to steer, if that still does not produce a response then go to full hand-over-hand. NEVER PULL THE REINS YOURSELF. The hands should always go back to the middle after steering.*

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- if you need to change sides, advise the instructor (or Assistant Instructor) and wait until you are replaced before you leave the rider's side; move into the new position from BEHIND the person already there. *always walk in front of the horse*
- during trail rides, the sidewalker should be supporting the rider at all times

### **DISMOUNT AND AFTER THE LESSON**

- during dismounting, one or more sidewalkers may be required to assist the instructor as necessary depending on the type of dismount required (eg. Crest or wheelchair dismount). The instructor will explain the applicable procedures at that time. When wheelchairs or canes, etc. are being used during mounting and dismounting, it is important not to move them quickly or too closely to the horses
- after dismounting, the sidewalker on the LEFT side must stay with the rider and assist in running up the stirrups on both sides; the sidewalker must ensure that the rider does not run around or behind the horse
- side walkers escort riders safely from the ring – ensure that they do not remove their helmet or belt until they are outside of the ring; once outside, help the riders remove their helmets and belts
- any feedback you can provide is always helpful – things that went well (or not), differences in the rider from one week to another etc.

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