

# VOLUNTEER MANUAL



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## ***Welcome to Hope Ranch***

Volunteers drive the Hope Ranch program; we are a volunteer-based organization. We thank you for wanting to give your time and service and for assuming the obligations of the program by your own free will. You are indispensable and needed throughout the entire program here at Hope Ranch. You do not need to be equine oriented to volunteer. Some of you will bring equine skills to the program, others will bring leadership, and some will bring exceptional skills for understanding and acceptance. Most volunteers readily agree that they gain as much, or more than they give to the program! Our volunteers are the kind of individuals who reach out to others and help improve their quality of life for all involved.

### **Volunteers serve Hope Ranch in two ways:**

**Riding Team:** Assists riders in riding classes by leading the horse or walking along side a rider to help keep the rider in the saddle or to ensure the rider does not fall off. Riding classes occur 5 days a week and each class lasts one hour. A riding session runs 10-weeks, and volunteers are expected to commit for the entire session, if possible. Volunteers should arrive 15 minutes early to help tack horses, and stay after to help untack horses and put away equipment used in the riding class.

**Barn Team:** Assists with facility maintenance and cleaning. Volunteers are needed to clean the horse stalls, aisles, fences, equipment, and other parts of the facility, and may assist with horse care. Grounds maintenance, such as carpentry and other service projects, may be asked of you as well. It is expected that volunteers with nothing to do during a riding class would clean the bathrooms, sweep the aisles, etc.

***This manual has been developed to provide you with some guidelines for working with our disabled riders and safety precautions that are necessary for the equine environment. Please read it carefully. The information it contains is important, and will improve the quality of your work. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.***

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## ***Overview of Hope Ranch***

**Purpose:** Hope Ranch was founded to improve the lives of physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially disabled and disadvantaged individuals through horsemanship. Horseback riding helps people to achieve a quality of life that is improved, enhanced and enriched through contact with horses and activity in the outdoors. 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 therapeutic riding include the following:

**Physical:** The three-dimensional motion of the horse provides rider hip, back, and trunk action that simulates natural walking. Riding relaxes and strengthens muscles and improves body tone, posture, balance, joint mobility and coordination.

**Cognitive:** Horseback riding requires a variety of movements performed each time an individual rides. These constant body/mind connections may enhance memory recall.

**Emotional:** Contact with horses and horsemanship training provides a noncompetitive setting for learning. New abilities, self-discipline, and improved concentration build self-confidence and self-esteem as well as breaking down barriers to advancement with their situations.

**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 a part of a team.

**Riders:** Hope Ranch serves children and adults with a variety of mental, physical and/or emotional disabilities. Instructor's design and monitor individualized treatment plans for each student to address their physical, emotional and social needs while they learn the skills of horseback riding. Individual and class goals encourage each rider to be the best he or she can be, on or off the horse. We want to instill an environment of confidence building, body strengthening, and challenging feats.

**History:** Hope Ranch was founded in March 2006, as a non-profit organization by Ken Scroggs, executive director and ranch director, and a governing Board of Directors. It was the desire of the administrative team to meet the need in northeastern Kansas for therapeutic riding and instruction.

## ***General Guidelines***

**Attire:** Please dress appropriately and wear close-toed shoes (no sandals or loafers) to prevent foot injuries. Hard shoes with heels are preferred (i.e., cowboy boots). Unless it is extremely hot, please wear long pants and a top that you do mind to get dirty. Avoid loose clothing and jewelry, as they can be obstructive and cause injury. Hope Ranch is not responsible for lost jewelry. Do not wear anything that you would care to lose. Wear sunglasses or a hat to protect your eyes if you are working outside. Wear gloves, hats, scarves, and warm clothing to your comfort level during the colder months. The barn can be chilly in the fall and winter.

**Personal Belongings:** Cell phones are not allowed in the arena. If you are expecting a call, please leave your phone with one of the volunteers who is not in the arena or on the bleachers. Answering a call takes your attention away from your most important job – the safety of our riders. You may leave keys and cell phones in the office at your own discretion, but it may be safer to leave all personal belongings in your car and your keys in your pocket.

**Consumables:** Chewing gum, eating and drinking are not allowed in the arena. This is both for your safety and the safety of the riders.

**Signing In:** Don't forget to sign in if you need to keep track of your hours. If you are getting school credit for volunteering, we need proof that you were here. We also use it to make us eligible for certain kinds of funding.

**Commitment:** We depend on you to be here and the riders do too. If you can't come, please let us know ahead of time so that we can arrange for a substitute and inform the instructor that he/she may be shorthanded. We really appreciate your consideration and respecting our instructors' and riders' time.

**Be Helpful:** Arrive 15 minutes early to help instructors brush and tack horses as well as stay after the class to help put equipment and horses properly away.

**Horse Care:** We treat our horses GENTLY. Never kick or hit a horse. If a reprimand or schooling is necessary, let the instructor do it.

**Rider Care:** We treat our students with RESPECT. Talk to them appropriately for their age, and never yell. Use positive rather than negative reinforcement. Be patient. Count to 30 before repeating a request, especially if the student is learning disabled. He or she might need extra time to process what you asked. Be understanding of fear, but if you can't handle a problem with a student, ask the instructor for help.

**Confidentiality:** Keep what happens at the ranch confidential. We know you are excited about what you do here, and want to share it with others. Please do so in a way that does not identify the riders. They have a right to privacy.

**Use of Time:** Keep busy. If you have a long break or are volunteering when there are more volunteers than are needed for the riders, there are plenty of things you can do to help out around the barn. Clean up the tack room or office, wash out buckets, clean the toys, pull weeds, groom a horse that isn't being used, muck the stalls, pick up rocks from the arena, sweep the aisles, clean the bathroom, or just ask any of us how you can help.

Have fun! Smile, laugh, and enjoy yourself. Your enthusiasm is contagious!

## ***Safety Precautions***

**Driving at the Ranch:** If you are driving on ranch property, please drive slowly and pay attention. The ranch speed limit is 5 miles per hour. Horses spook at fast cars, and there are other animals and riders around that you may not see.

**Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking:** Drinking, drugs, and cigarette smoke do not mix with our horses. Please do not partake in any of these activities while you are at the ranch.

Also, do not show up to the ranch intoxicated or impaired. If you are taking any medications that will impair your reflexes or judgment, it is better to refrain from volunteering until you are no longer using them. If you need a cigarette break, notify the instructor, and smoke off of the property.

**Running:** Running is not allowed by anyone at anytime. This is for your safety and the safety of the horses. If a horse is loose, walk over to catch it. Running dogs, cats and children can frighten horses too. Please help us uphold our rules.

**Pets:** No pets are allowed at the ranch. The pets that are at the ranch are used to the atmosphere, and we do not know how other pets will be received.

**Problems:** If run into a problem with a volunteer, rider, or horse, or observe a situation taking place, please notify Hope Ranch or barn staff immediately.

## ***Tack Room Rules***

The tack room is the room where we store saddles, bridles, reins, and other horse-related equipment, collectively known as “tack.” Knowing your way around the tack room and keeping things organized is vital to the smooth running of the program.

**Saddles:** All saddles are numbered with a gold tag that corresponds to a number on the wall beside the saddle racks. Saddles are to be stored on the same numbered rack each time. They are placed on the saddle rack with saddle horn facing you, and the rear of saddle is next to the wall. Saddle pads are to be hung on the proper racks near the saddles. If you notice a saddle pad is wet, please notify the instructor because it must dry out before putting it away.

**Halters:** The halter and lead rope used to put away the horse are stored in the tack room or secured to fence by the pasture where the horse is kept. Extra lead ropes and halters are on a rack in the tack room, and please be sure these get put back in the tack room.

**Reins:** Reins are stored on their own rack. DO NOT leave them attached to the halter/bridles unless they are secured together. Leave them how you found them.

**Grooming Equipment:** Grooming tools are kept in grooming boxes, and are kept in the storage room in the tack room (where the helmets are). There should be at least one body brush, rubber curry, mane comb, and hoof pick in each box. The tools are shared by all the horses, even though some boxes have horses’ names on them. After you use a tool, please put it back in the same grooming box. Many volunteers put the hoof picks in their pockets and accidentally take them home. Please check your pockets before you leave.

**Orderliness:** Please keep our tack room and barn area neat and clean. Borders and private riders use this tack room too. Do not disturb or use any equipment that is not designated for Hope Ranch.

## ***Safe Tacking & Untacking***

**Be Cautious:** Think of a horse as having a 6-foot “danger zone” surrounding it. Within 6 feet, the horse can kick, buck, cowkick (kick to the side), bite, or rear – and you or a student can be seriously injured. Approach the “danger zone” with caution.

- Moving:**
1. If you must walk behind a horse, approach it from the side, touch the horse and speak to it. Keep touching it as you walk very closely around the horse.
  2. Warn a horse that you are approaching. Use your voice and a gentle touch. Approach the horse from the side, NEVER from the rear.
  3. Never walk under a horse’s neck (it might rear from fright). Never walk under a horse. You might not be that short, but some children are.
  4. Keep your feet away from the horse’s hooves and from beneath the horse. You might get stepped on.

**Standing:** When standing next to a horse, stand VERY close. If the horse kicks, he can’t kick very hard if you are close. Never stand directly in front of a horse except to hold the horse for a rider. Never stand behind a horse for any reason.

**Feeding:** Do not feed the horses unless you are instructed to do so and use a bucket or gloves. Hand feeding is an invitation to have your fingers bitten. After the food is gone, your fingers still carry the smell. A horse can’t tell the difference between a carrot and a finger that smells like a carrot. Keep your hands away from the horse’s mouth. ALL horses bite!

**Noises:** Don’t yell, run or make sudden movements near a horse. Be slow and gentle. Keep horses well away from each other at all times.

**Fighting:** Fighting horses are a danger to everyone nearby. Keep an eye on their heads and rear ends. If the ears are flattened, the horse is about to fight. If he lifts his leg, he is getting ready to kick. DO NOT ALLOW HORSES TO SNIFF EACH OTHER.

**Tying Horses:** Never tie a horse to the arena fences or stall doors. Use the tie rails or hold the horse. Always use a halter to tie a horse in the crossties. NEVER tie a horse by his bit. NEVER tie a horse by his reins. If a tied horse rears or pulls back, or otherwise acts upset, STAY AWAY. Let the instructor handle the problem. A panicked horse is very dangerous.

**Leading:** Always lead a horse by his lead rope and halter, not by the reins.

## ***Mounting***

**Safety Check:** No matter how carefully we check when we saddle the horse, or how many times we have done it before; there is always the possibility that we overlooked something. An incorrectly fitted saddle or saddle pad can irritate or hurt the horse, and an unhappy horse may hurt the rider. A loose girth will cause the saddle to slip when mounting or riding. If the bridle is not properly fitted and buckled, it may come off while riding. An extra minute is all it takes to do a safety check by walking around the horse before mounting a rider and following the steps below.

**Helmets:** All riders are required to wear helmet when in the arena and especially on a horse. Helmets are stored in the tack room. Riders should be notified to go immediately to the tack room for a helmet as soon as they arrive.

**Tied Horses:** Never have riders mount a horse while the horse is tied. If the horse pulls back, the rider and/or the horse could be injured. Never mount next to a fence, car, another horse, or any solid object that the rider could be thrown into. Never mount on pavement. All riders are only allowed to mount in the arena.

**Checking for Equipment:** Always check the girth for tightness before helping a student to mount. Check that the saddle and bridle are placed properly on the horse, the stirrups are the correct length and are down, and that nothing is broken or worn. **MAKE SURE THE RIDER'S HELMET FITS SECURELY.** Don't assume that someone else will do this. Better to check twice than not at all.

**Instructor Supervision:** All riders must be mounted by the instructor or under the instructor's supervision. Ask for assistance if the rider is unable to mount unaided. Do not attempt to help the rider alone. Assisted mounting from the mounting ramp is always done by the instructor, therapist, or parent. You may be asked to assist on the opposite side of the horse.

**Mounting from the Ground:** Use the mounting block. When mounting from the ground, one volunteer stands at the head of the horse and holds the lead rope. A second volunteer stands on the off-side of the horse and puts weight into the stirrup to counter-balance the rider. The instructor may assist the rider to mount as necessary. If the saddle starts to slip or the horse starts to walk forward during mounting, stop the mounting and remedy the situation before continuing..

**Mounting at the Ramp:** When assisting at the ramp, stand on the block, not on the ground. It is dangerous to be standing between the block and the horse, especially if the horse spooks or moves.

## ***In the Arena***

**Students in the Arena:** Students should never be in the arena other than to mount or dismount and leave the arena, or as part of a supervised activity.

**Gates:** The arena gates must be closed and latched at all times when there are horses in the arena.

**Providing Assistance:** Help your rider if he or she needs it, but also allow plenty of time for the rider to perform independently. Responses often take longer than we expect. Allow the rider to perform at his or her own pace. But, do make sure the rider understands the instructor.

**Paying Attention:** It is very important for you to pay attention to the rider and the instructor. Don't chat with riders or other volunteers while the class is in session. Be friendly, and answer questions from the rider briefly. Keep your ears on the instructor and your eyes on the rider.

**Reinforcement:** You may reinforce what the instructor is saying by showing the rider or touching the appropriate area on the reins or horse. You may talk with the rider, but sure to listen for instructions.

**Misbehaving Horses:** NEVER HIT OR KICK A HORSE. If a horse is misbehaving, call the instructor for help. If a horse is running away, (with or without a rider), STAY CALM. Do not yell and do not run. Halt *your* rider and stay with him/her. Wait for instructions from the instructor. If you are not with a student, but are spotting, walk slowly toward where the horse is running to and wait for instructions.

**Horse and Rider Issues:** If the horse or rider you are working with is nervous or upset, walk the horse to the center of the arena and ask the instructor if you should dismount the rider. Horses should be calm and riders should be alert. If this is not the case, bring it to the instructor's attention immediately.

**Emergency Situations:** If another rider has a problem or a fall, DON'T rush to assist. Stay with your rider and listen for instructions. The instructor will handle the problem and ask for assistance if needed. The rider you are assisting is YOUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY. If your rider falls, the horse leader is responsible for the horse, not the rider. A loose horse is a danger to every rider in the arena. Stop the horse, get it away from the rider and call for the instructor.

**Dismounting:** When dismounting to the ground unassisted, make sure the rider takes BOTH feet out of the stirrups before lowering himself to the ground. Assisted dismounts should always be done by the instructor, or using the mounting block.

**Being Comfortable:** If you aren't comfortable for any reason with your horse or rider, tell the instructor immediately. You are often the first person to be aware of a potential problem. Trust your instincts.

## ***Horse Leading***

The responsibility of a horse leader is to control the horse. For this reason, a horse leader should be someone with some *experience in horsemanship*. The rider has a leader because he or she is unable, at this time, to control the horse fully. Although the leader is responsible for guiding the horse, stopping and starting, the leader should allow the rider to do as much of this as possible, assisting only when necessary.

**Holding the Rope:** The leader holds the lead rope, six to eight inches from the horse's head, in the hand that is closest to the horse. The remaining rope is folded, not looped, and held in the free hand. Be careful not to allow the lead rope to drag on the ground or to be looped around the leader's hand.

**Mounting:** When a rider is mounting at the mounting ramp or block, lead the horse to the top of the ramp or on the left side of the block. Remain standing in front of the horse and keep him as still as possible during the mounting.

**Standing:** The leader usually stands on the side of the horse closest to the center of the arena, next to the horse's neck (between the head and the shoulder). During classes, horses should not stand at the fence except under the instructor's directions. If your rider needs to stop, come off the rail and move to the center of the arena so you don't block the movement of other riders.

**Walking:** Walk next to the horse's neck, between the horse's head and shoulder. DO NOT drag the horse or walk ahead of it. If necessary, slow your speed to the horse's speed. If there is a sidewalker, he or she can gently prod the horse on the barrel to encourage a faster pace. If the horse is walking too fast, a gentle tug on the lead rope will slow it down. When leading a rider in the arena, always walk on the inside (closest to the center of the arena).

**Trotting:** After the rider cues the horse to trot, gently tug the lead rope and move into a gentle trot (not a run) next to the horse. Remain alongside the horse's neck during the trot. Control the speed with a tug backwards on the rope if the horse goes too fast. Never trot a horse up to or past a walking horse.

**Stopping:** When the horse is stopped for more than a second or two, the leader should stand in front of the horse. The lead rope is held folded in one hand and the sides of the bit or halter are held gently with both hands to prevent the horse from moving forward. Never *yank* on the reins or lead rope to stop the horse. Pull slowly and steadily on the lead rope or reins. Yanking frightens the horse and can cause rearing or backing up. If a horse pulls back, do not resist. Move with him, holding the lead rope. The harder you pull a horse, the harder he will resist you.

**Circling:** Do not circle a horse near another horse. Watch that no other horses are in the way.

**Passing:** When passing another horse, always pass on the inside (the side closest to the center of the arena) and at least 6 feet away from the horse being passed.

**Direction:** All horses should be going in the same direction. If one rider reverses, all riders must reverse. A reverse is always made by turning in toward the center of the arena.

**Paying Attention:** Pay attention to the instructor at all times. It is important that you not engage in conversation when leading, as this will interfere with your knowing what is going on. The instructor will tell the riders to walk, trot, turn right or left, or halt. The leader needs to hear these commands so as not to interfere with the rider's efforts, and to supplement them if needed.

**Communication:** When leading or holding a horse with a mounted rider, always inform the rider BEFORE moving or changing directions. Avoid sharp turns or sudden stops. Allow the rider to initiate all movement if possible. Give the rider time to give commands to the horse. ALWAYS let the rider do as much as possible.

**Being Aware:** Be aware of other horses in the arena, and do not let the horse that you are leading approach another horse too closely. There should be a two horse distance between riders at all times. Horses must NEVER be allowed to put their noses together.

**Pulling on the Horse:** Do not hold the bit or halter too strongly, or the horse will resist and start to move around or pull its head back. You can calm the horse by holding the halter with one hand and stroking the horse below the forelock (on the forehead) with the other hand.

**Fallen Riders:** If a rider should fall, the leader is responsible for the horse ONLY. Keep the horse calm and move it away from the fallen rider. Stay with the horse. The instructor will take care of the fallen rider.

## ***Sidewalking***

The responsibility of the sidewalker, first and foremost, is the safety of the rider. Sidewalkers assist the riders to the degree necessary from supporting the rider directly to spotting the rider as the horse moves. Sidewalking is necessary for inexperienced riders or for individuals in wheel chairs. Riders on taller horses should, if possible, have tall sidewalkers. Riders on ponies should have short sidewalkers.

**Basics:** The sidewalker walks next to the rider's leg, helping to support the rider's balance if necessary. The Instructor will inform you if you need to use a support hold and show you how.

**Changing Sides:** Be aware that it may be necessary to change sides frequently if your arm gets tired. If this happens, ask the leader to stop, and tell the other sidewalker that you need to change sides. As the other sidewalker supports the rider, you move around to the other side. Take the support position on the new side and support the rider while the other sidewalker moves to the opposite side. When the other sidewalker has indicated he or she is ready, inform the leader that you can resume walking.

**Trotting:** At the trot, the sidewalkers must trot alongside the rider at the rider's leg. If providing support, put your arm across the rider's leg and hold firmly to the front of the saddle. Additional support may be provided by gentle downward pressure on the rider's ankle with your free hand. Riders with no upper body control should not trot.

**Falling Riders:** If a rider starts to fall, try to push the rider back into the saddle. If this is not possible, the next best thing to do is to try and break the fall. To do this, the sidewalker on the side of the horse that the rider is falling toward turns and puts his or her back against the rider and goes down to the ground with the rider. This not only slows the fall, it prevents the sidewalker from being injured in an attempt to save the rider.

**Fallen Riders:** Once a rider has fallen, the sidewalkers stay with the rider while the horse leader moves the horse out of the way. DO NOT attempt to help the rider – this is the responsibility of the instructor. Be prepared to go for help at the direction of the instructor. Know where the first aid kit is, where the phone is, and where the emergency numbers are.

**Paying Attention:** It is important for the sidewalkers to pay attention to the instructor at all times. Conversations should be non-existent when instruction is taking place. Sidewalkers reinforce, but do not teach, so restrain the urge to tell the rider what to do and how to do it unless the instructor tells you to do so.

**Independent Riders:** If there is only one sidewalker and no leader, the sidewalker takes on the additional responsibility of control of the horse in the event that the rider has trouble controlling his mount. This is only done when the rider's balance is sufficient to support him/herself on their own and the rider is beginning to ride independently.

**Other Responsibilities:** Other responsibilities of the sidewalkers include encouraging the rider to pay attention to the instructor, helping the rider to follow directions, showing the rider which side is right and left, assisting in games, demonstrating to the rider where to place the legs and how to keep heels down, encouraging the horse to keep moving (by gently prodding the horse in the side) and providing encouragement and enthusiasm for the rider's efforts.

## **Questions & Answers**

### **Who do I call if I can't attend classes?**

If you know ahead of time that you can't come, tell the instructor the week before or call our office at 785-587-8180 or email [info@hoperanchks.com](mailto:info@hoperanchks.com). If you find out you can't come on the day of the class, contact us either way listed previously.

### **Who do I call if I need more information or if I have questions?**

You can call Hope Ranch at 785-587-8180 and leave a message for designated Hope Ranch contact or your instructor.

### **Who do I call to find out if classes are cancelled due to weather or holidays?**

The riding instructor will notify you of cancellations and holidays for which the ranch will be closed. You will be notified of the schedule of classes upon signing up for time slot to volunteer.

### **How do I sign in?**

There is a sign-in book on the volunteer desk just inside the office door. You may sign in each time you come, and keep track the number of hours you are at the ranch. It is not, however, the responsibility of the riding instructor to keep track of your volunteer hours for you. Integrity and honesty are presumed if you need a Hope Ranch staff person to sign off on your hours. Clubs and organizations may provide their own sign-in sheet for their members, but again, it is not the responsibility of Hope Ranch staff to ensure your volunteers are signing in.

### **Where is the fire extinguisher?**

The fire extinguishers are located in the office and on the side of the barn closest to the barn door outside the office. There is also an extinguisher under the desk in the office.

### **Where is the phone?**

There is a phone in the office on the volunteer desk. It is for local calls only. If you need to use it to make long distance calls, you will need to call collect or use a credit card or phone card.

### **What do I do in an emergency?**

Follow the directions of the instructor of the class, other Hope Ranch staff, or the barn manager. Your primary concern is the rider and horse you are working with. Try to remain calm to the best of your ability.

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After reading this manual, we hope that you have chosen to give some of your valuable time to volunteer at Hope Ranch. We hope that in doing so, you will find that your own life has been enhanced as well. We want you to know that every person you are helping at Hope Ranch is aware of and grateful for your help. Without you, this program would not exist. You are valuable to us, and we appreciate all that you do. Thank you!