

**MENDING STRIDES  
RANCH**

**VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

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## **Welcome!**

Welcome Volunteers. We are delighted to have you. Volunteers are indispensable to Mending Strides Ranch. The information in this handbook is designed to assist you in understanding some of Mending Strides policies and procedures. This handbook may not include every policy or protocol relating to volunteers, so please feel free to ask staff members or seasoned volunteers if you have further questions or concerns.

Volunteers are needed on a regular basis, but there are also opportunities for one time or occasional help. There are jobs with and without the horses. Most volunteer opportunities at Mending Strides do not require special skills, but we will provide the necessary training and guidance to make your experience safe and enjoyable

## **Our Mission Statement**

The mission of Mending Strides Ranch is to empower those suffering the effects of trauma, neglect and hardships through the use of rescued horses in equine assisted therapies.

## **Attire**

We realize that you may get very dirty doing many of the outside jobs, however, we expect volunteers to choose clothing that is safe (not baggy), tasteful (no offensive sayings or logo's) and appropriate for the weather.

### What to wear

- Comfortable clothes, appropriate to the season, that you don't mind getting dirty
- Sneakers or boots.
- Sunscreen, bug repellent, sunglasses, hat or visor
- Long hair should be tied back
- Long pants with belt, not too tight or baggy
- Shorts - hem no shorter than your fingertips with arms hanging straight down at your sides

### What NOT to wear

- Jewelry (no bracelets, hoop/dangling earrings, big necklaces) stud earrings ok
- Excessively tight or baggy clothing
- Bare midriff see through or other revealing clothing. Spaghetti strap shirts or low-cut tank tops. Tops revealing bra or bra straps.
- Short Shorts
- Clothing with inappropriate slogans, decals, etc

- Opened toe shoes, sandals, clogs, or flip flops

#### Personal items are your responsibility

Please leave cell phones, purses and any other personal belongings in your locked vehicle. If you need a safe place for your keys, ask a staff person for the best location. If you must carry your cell phone, it needs to be on vibrate or silenced.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

What happens at Mending Strides, Stays at Mending Strides! Names, specific conditions or diagnosis, financial status or other personal and sensitive details specific to clients, volunteers, or staff etc. are to be held in confidence. All volunteers and staff of Mending Strides Ranch are bound by this policy to protect the rights and privacy of individuals served by Mending Strides. Individuals involved with MSR shall keep confidential all medical, social, referral, personal, and financial information regarding a person and his/her family. This includes information regarding donors and other volunteers. NO EXCEPTIONS. Individuals who breach confidentiality will be removed from the MSR program. All individuals accepting responsibilities with MSR are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

### **SPECIAL RULES FOR PHOTOS AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:**

You cannot take the pictures of any clients or therapy sessions. You must ask permission to take the picture of another volunteer. If you plan on posting the photo on a social networking site like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or any website you must have permission from anyone whose picture you have taken

Acceptable pictures would include the farm, horses, or our sign. If you are not sure, always ask.

### **CODE OF ETHICS**

As staff, Board Members or volunteers of MSR our fundamental duty is to support this agency's commitment to the highest standards of accountability in its expenditure of funds. Honesty, integrity, compassion and loyalty are the hallmarks of our profession.

We will never permit personal feelings, prejudices, animosities, or relationships to influence our official decisions. We will exercise self-restraint and be mindful of the welfare and constitutional rights of others. Information shared with us in confidence will be kept confidential unless revelation is necessary in the performance of our duty.

We will display the highest standards of professionalism in both conduct and appearance. We will diligently strive to achieve the objectives and ideals of the agency and our profession for the good of those we serve.

### **INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR**

If you observe any unsafe or inappropriate behavior on the part of another volunteer toward a horse, volunteer, client or staff member, please report it to management. Management must know what is happening for the protection of everyone.

### **DISMISSAL OF VOLUNTEERS**

A volunteer may be dismissed for the following:

- Becomes disruptive
- Threatens the safety of others or horses
- Fails to comply with MSR Code of Ethics
- Fails to comply with MSR Confidentiality Policy
- Fails to comply with MSR Dress Code

### **PROCEDURES**

#### **ATTENDANCE LOG BOOK:**

It is very important that you log in and out every time you come to volunteer. If you need verification of your volunteer hours for taxes, school, court, scholarships etc., this is where we take the information. If you do not sign in, you do not get credit.

#### **It's your first day volunteering**

Check in at the office or with the Volunteer coordinator at the location designated during your initial phone conversation. Sign the log in book.

#### **Things to remember**

We focus on safety, courtesy, respect and kindness.

- Speak softly. Therapy may be in session.
- Do not feed the horses unless directed to do so. Treats are only given with permission and must be given in a bucket.
- Do not halter a horse over a stall door or gate.

- Do not tie a horse unless directed to do so by staff. Not all are trained to be tied.
- Do not leave a haltered horse unattended.
- Do not turn horses out without permission from staff.
- Do not turn a horse out with a halter unless directed by staff.
- Leave gates the way you find them.
- Do not use your cell phone when you are working directly with a horse.
- Never panic, scream or run.
- **Never leave any tool or foreign object in a stall or paddock unattended. (wheelbarrow, mucking fork, brush bucket, halters etc.).**
- **Special grooming procedures (clipping, cutting/pulling mane or tail) are not to be done. Only staff will perform these duties.**
- Please read the white board for any information that you may need for each horse that day. (Blanketing, fly spray, sunscreen, medicine etc.) If you have any questions please ask staff or an experienced volunteer.
- Please take care of tack and put back in its proper location.
- exercising, lunging, or training of any kind is to be done by approved individuals only.
- The horses will be color coded designating the experience level a person must have to handle them. Volunteers experience level will be determined by staff. Only handle (Walk, brush, bathe etc.) horses in your color category. Green= ok for all levels. Blue= Moderate horse experience required Red= Staff or highly qualified volunteers only.

Additional rules may be posted around the farm. Please take time to read them. Treat every person and horse with respect. Help each other and have fun.

### **Emergency Procedures**

At Mending Strides Ranch an emergency is defined as any unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances resulting in a real or potential safety hazard demanding immediate attention.

Every volunteer should be familiar with the location of the following:

- Telephone located in sunroom office
- Emergency phone numbers are posted on the whiteboard in the tack room, feed room and in the office. The staff member or Volunteer Coordinator in Charge will determine if 911 should be called. Notify operator for EMT's to turn sirens and lights off once on the farm lane.
- Human first aid kit is located in the bathroom and feed room.
- Horse first aid is located in the tack room

### **Precautions**

Universal precautions are to be used to minimize contact with blood and body fluids by taking steps that may prevent non-intact skin exposures of individuals

to specific organisms such as Hepatitis B and Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV/AIDS).

When you follow universal precautions, you assume that all persons are potentially infected with blood-borne pathogens.

- Only staff or properly licensed medical personnel (doctor, nurse, EMT) should attempt to aid an injured person and come into contact with bodily fluids.
- Wear disposable latex or vinyl gloves when it is likely that hands will be in contact with bodily fluids.
- Protect clothing with an impervious material when it is likely that clothing will be soiled with bodily fluids.
- Wear masks and/or eye protection when it is likely that eye and/or mucus membranes will be splashed with bodily fluids.
- Wash hands after injured client contact, paying attention to around and under fingernails and between the fingers, even if gloves are worn. If unanticipated contact with these body substances occurs, washing is done as soon as possible.

### **Helmets**

A safety riding helmet is the single most important piece of equipment. All persons mounted on a horse **MUST** wear a helmet on the grounds of Mending Stride Ranch, Inc. There are **NO EXCEPTIONS**.

The well-fitted helmet should stay on the head when harnessed without rocking or moving. A properly fitted helmet should be snug. Overly large helmets are dangerous and uncomfortable. They may slip, obscure vision, or fall off.

### **When leading a horse**

1. Hold the lead rope about 12 inches from the snap with your hand closest to the horse. Our horses will lead from either side.
2. Fold the excess rope in a figure eight with your outside hand (the hand away from the horse). **NEVER** wrap the rope around your hand, shoulder or any body part.
3. Maintain your personal body space.
4. Look where you are going, not back at the horse. You may keep the horse in the corner of your eye.
5. Keep the horse at your side with its throat latch (where head and neck meet) about even with your shoulder.
7. Do not allow the horse to get ahead of you.
8. Do not allow the horse to fall too far behind you
9. Do not allow the horse to walk directly behind you unless he is at the very end of the lead rope.

## **Understanding Horse Behavior**

Understanding a horse's basic instincts and senses improves your ability to predict behavior and communicate effectively with them. This understanding is the first step in managing risks, preventing accidents, and increasing the quality of your mutual relationship.

### **Sense of Smell**

The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and it allows them to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations.

#### **Why is this important?**

- Smelling allows horses the opportunity to become familiar with new objects, people and other horses. Allow them time to smell new things.
- They can smell treats in clothing, so we recommend that you do not carry treats on you. Do not feed treats without permission.
- We discourage volunteers from eating or having food in with the horses to avoid getting between jealous horses.

### **Hearing**

The horse's sense of hearing is also thought to be very acute. Their ears are the most mobile of any domestic animal. They can hear higher frequencies than we can. The combination of their sense of hearing and sight helps them to become more familiar with new or frightening sounds. Often, hearing a frightening sound without seeing it causes the Fight or Flight response. Ears moving quickly back and forth may indicate that they have picked up a sound they are not familiar with. Ears laid or pinned back may indicate aggression or the horse is upset. Soft drooping ears usually indicates relaxation and ears pointed in two directions indicates the horse is concentration on two different things.

#### **Why is this important**

- It is often the first sign of what a horse is concentration on and about to do
- There is no need to shout or speak loudly around such sensitive ears
- Speak to horses in a calm, quiet manor to reassure them

### **Sight**

The horse's eyes are set on the sides of their head. This gives them greater peripheral vision. They have both binocular vision and monocular vision. This means that each eye can focus on something different or they can work together to see an object in front of them. Horses have a few blind spots: directly behind them in the area of their tail, and directly below their nose, on his back, in the area of his withers and directly in front of his forehead. They will raise and lower their head to improve their focus. Horses can see quite well in the dark, but



their eyes take longer to adjust than humans moving into darkness from the light. It is believed that they can distinguish shades of red, yellow, pink and green.

#### Why is this important?

- The horse may notice if something is new on the farm. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects. Introduce new props that the horse may be unfamiliar with.
- Plan your approach so you are not in their blind spot. Speak when approaching.
- A horse may need to touch a new object with its nose or hoof. They may paw it

#### **Taste**

Taste is closely associated with the sense of smell and helps a horse distinguish palatable foods and other objects.

#### Why is this important?

A horse may lick or nibble when becoming familiar with objects and people. Be careful as this may lead to biting.

#### **Communication**

Horses communicate primarily through body language. They are very perceptive to unconscious messages that we are sending through our body language.

#### **Barn Rules**

Mending Strides Barn rules are designed to create and maintain a clean, safe and fun environment for people and horses. Working with horses is a high-risk activity. The following rules must be adhered to at all times by participants, volunteers, staff and anyone who visits Mending strides ranch.

- All paperwork must be completed and submitted in order to enter the farm. This includes clients, volunteers, staff, board members and visitors. No Exceptions!
- Unless you are a horse, no horseplay in or around the barn. This includes running, shouting, throwing projectiles, waving objects, wrestling, fighting and chasing.
- All clients, volunteers, staff, board members, visitors etc. will wear closed toe shoes (Boots, tennis shoes) in any area inhabited by horses (fields, corrals, barn, stalls, pastures, etc.).
- No one is permitted in the barn, pastures or corrals unless accompanied by a trained volunteer or staff member.
- Absolutely no smoking or open flames are permitted in the barn or corral area.

- No one is allowed to handle the horses, feed or pet horses, unless supervised by a staff member or trained volunteer.
- No hand feeding anything to the horses. Treats may be given in a bucket under the supervision of a staff member or trained volunteer.
- If you go through a gate, close it securely behind you.
- If you get it out, put it away.
- In case of fire, get to safety first. Then call 911. Then notify a supervisor.

### **Farm Rules**

- No abusive, threatening, or violent behavior towards people or animals will be tolerated on Mending Strides premises.
- Alcohol and illegal drug use is prohibited on Mending Strides Ranch.
- Children and siblings on MSR premises must be supervised at all times by their parent/legal guardian.
- No one may enter a pasture containing horses unless accompanied by a trained volunteer or staff member.
- No pets allowed.
- No bare feet or sandals are allowed around the horses at any time, by anyone.
- No horseplay in the barn or around the corrals. This includes running, shouting throwing projectiles, waving objects wrestling, fighting and chasing.
- Keep all barn and arena gates closed at all times.
- Turn out the lights if you are the last to leave.
- In case of fire, get to safety, call 911, and tell a supervisor.

### **Verification of rules and regulations**

In order for Mending Strides Ranch to run efficiently, we rely on our trained volunteers to assist us. Thank you for volunteering your time. It is our hope that you find it a rewarding experience and understand that you are a valuable part of Mending Strides family reaching out to help our neighbors who are experiencing grief, loss and pain.

Please feel free to ask questions, because all questions are important. We encourage you to improve your education of horses and the world of equine psychotherapy by attending the various workshops we offer. If there is something you are interested in learning, please mention it to the Program director or any staff member.

We would appreciate if you could print and sign this page after you have read and understand the guidelines as printed in this Volunteer Handbook.

As soon as you have completed and reviewed these educational tools, you will be ready for some hands- on training. When you have completed all your

paperwork we will be happy to get you started. Thank you again for volunteering!

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Signature of Volunteer

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Print your Name

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Date

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Signature of Parent (if volunteer is under 18 yrs of age)

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Print your name

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Date