

**GUIDELINES FOR  
COMPLETING THE  
RDA VOLUNTEERS  
BASIC TRAINING  
RECORD CARD  
(THE GREEN CARD)**



**RIDING FOR THE DISABLED ASSOCIATION  
INCORPORATING CARRIAGE DRIVING**

**REGISTERED CHARITY 244108**

Produced with thanks by the Court Meadow Group.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**Thank you for becoming a volunteer with .....**

### **RDA Group**

The contents of this booklet give an insight into the duties listed on the green card. It is your choice whether you train for some or all of them.

As the RDA Welcome Pack says:

#### **Remember**

- Sympathy without sentimentality
- Alertness without anxiety
- Unlimited patience
- Interest in the rider as a person
- Allow independence
- YOU are an important member of the team

#### **The Ideal Helper**

- Is always on time; by .....am/pm if possible
- Notifies in advance if unable to attend a session
- Is armed with 100% concentration
- Is prepared to do ANY job they are capable of doing
- Is always alert
- When needed, gives help with kindness, humour and dignity
- Is aware of the rider's ability, temperament and mood
- Concentrates on the coach's words, reinforcing the message

**Whatever your role, your help is needed and appreciated.**

**If you have a problem, other group members are always happy to help**

*(Please note: "Horse" and "Pony" are interchangeable in this document).*

## **APPROPRIATE DRESS AND FOOTWEAR**

1. Comfortable strong shoes/boots. (Strong enough to provide protection should the pony step on you).
2. Comfortable trousers or tracksuit.
3. Shirt or sweater.
4. Short coat or jacket (if cold), which must be fastened.
5. Gloves. (Optional, but necessary if leading).
6. Headscarf, cap or hat. (Optional, and must fit so as not to blow off).

### **Inappropriate articles include:**

1. High heeled shoes, sandals or flimsy shoes.
2. Baggy trousers.
3. Skirts.
4. Loose jackets.
5. Long coats not designed for the equine environment.
6. Long scarves.
7. Hats that might come off easily
8. ***Jewellery, including face and body jewellery.*** (It might get caught up or tugged by a rider).
9. No mobile phones turned on (unless they are required by the coach).
10. No perfume. (It can make some ponies nervous).
11. No handbags, walking sticks or umbrellas.

## **APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR WHEN WORKING WITH HORSES**

1. Approach the pony towards the shoulder, where he can see you walking in a natural way.
2. Talk to him as you approach.
3. Pat his shoulder or neck.
4. Allow him to smell you and review the situation.
5. If he is loose, put on a head collar to gain control.
6. Always restrain him with a head collar and lead rope before grooming or tacking up etc.
7. Handle him with confidence, talk to him quietly.
8. Always be firm but gentle. Stay in control.
9. Be aware of his body language. Ears flat back can mean he is not happy.
10. Learn the six equine senses. (See later section in this document).

### **Inappropriate behaviour when working with horses:**

1. Never run towards a pony.
2. Never approach directly in front or behind. (The pony may not see you).
3. Don't wear perfume. (Ponies have an acute sense of smell).
4. Never come inappropriately dressed.
5. Never shout or get rough with the pony.
6. Never try tacking up, grooming or picking out a hoof with a loose pony.

### **Never forget:**

**Ponies have long memories.**

## **TACKING-UP AND UN-TACKING**

Before tacking up it is safer and easier to tie the pony up using a quick release knot attached to a single piece of string. Before putting the bridle on, it is safer to undo the knot and let the rope lie in the loop of string.

### **PUTTING ON A SADDLE**

1. Place the neck strap on the pony (if required).
2. Make sure the numnah is pushed well up into the gullet of the saddle as a tight one can cause sores.
3. Place the saddle well forward on the withers and slide it back into position.
4. Take the girth and put it through the appropriate part of the neck strap. Do the girth up gently and not too tightly at first.
5. Buckle the neck strap to the 'D' rings on the saddle.
6. Ensure the stirrups are "run up" or crossed over the withers.
7. Add toes stoppers or similar if required.

### **PUTTING ON A BRIDLE**

1. Check that the bridle is correctly assembled before putting it on the pony.
2. Place the bridle on the pony, easing the bit gently into his mouth. The bridle can be worn on top of a well-fitting head collar.
3. Buckle the throat lash (with the reins secured within it until the rider is ready to mount unless instructed otherwise). It should be possible to place a hand between the leather and the side of the jaw bone.
4. Buckle the noseband - you should be able to fit two fingers below the cheek bone and two fingers between the leather and the jaw. Bridle nosebands are not advised if the pony wears a head collar for leading.
5. When you are ready to lead the pony out of the stable attach the lead rope to the headcollar, or the coupling to the bit rings (below the reins) and the lead rein to the central ring of the coupling. Note that some couplings have an integral lead rein.

### **UN-TACKING**

1. Undo the neck strap from the saddle, and the girth on the left side. After freeing the girth from the neck strap lay the girth over the saddle and then gently lift the saddle from the pony's back.
2. Unbuckle the noseband and throat lash then gently ease the bridle off the pony, taking care that the bit doesn't bang his teeth.
3. Ensure that all the tack is put away correctly.

**Tacking up and un-tacking can be demonstrated but takes time and practice to perfect.**

## **SIDE HELPING AND HELPING THE RIDER**

The duties of the side helper include:

### **ASSISTING THE RIDER PRIOR TO THE SESSION**

- Greet and chat to the rider.
- Check the girth.
- Adjust the stirrup lengths.
- When asked, direct and assist the rider to the mounting block

### **HELPING THE RIDER DURING THE SESSION**

- If there is one sidewalker, plus leader, walk on the opposite side to the leader unless instructed otherwise. If there are two sidewalkers, one either side.
- You are there to give confidence and prevent accidents.
- The sidewalker on the inside communicates with the rider helping him/her to understand and respond to the coach.
- Give as little physical support as possible. If support is needed, hold the heel lightly or as directed by your coach. Ask your rider if it is OK to do this.
- Allow the rider as much independence as possible.
- Be patient, allow the riders to work to achieve.
- If help is needed, it should be done with kindness and dignity. Communicate and encourage.
- If you need to halt, ask the leader to come off the outside track.
- Prior to the lesson chat to the rider, during the lesson let them focus on the tasks required.
- Be alert, concentrate at all times, ensure safety.
- Tell your leader if your rider is unbalanced, and not ready for a change of pace.
- The coach will give you any relevant information regarding the disability/condition/behaviour of your rider.

**At all times assist the coach to maintain RDA standards.**

# **LEADING WITH AND WITHOUT A RIDER**

## **LEADING WITH A RIDER**

**It is important to lead the pony without a rider prior to the session**

- Check the girth. Stirrups run up or crossed over the withers.
- Check the bridle, the reins secured in the throat lash or as instructed
- Hold the lead rope at least a foot below the clip, back of the hand facing forwards, the other hand taking up the looped length of rope. Never wrap it round your hand.
- Do not hold the pony's head tightly. He needs to move his head while walking and might pull or fuss if held too tightly. Using a lead rope and coupling which is attached to the bit gives as much control as the reins.
- Ask the pony to walk on and walk beside him level with his shoulder, (or head, if you have a sidewalker on your side).
- Always walk off in a straight line.
- When turning, prepare the pony and turn him away from you. This way he will be more balanced and less likely to tread on you.
- This is a good time to get to know the pony, talk to him, loosen him up, and check that he is sound.
- Practice a few transitions, walk to halt; walk-trot-walk
- Encourage an active walk as this will be more beneficial to the rider, and a relaxed, slow but active trot.
- Lead on both reins and from both sides.

## **LEADING WITHOUT A RIDER**

**If there is a sidewalker, they will communicate with the rider.**

**You manage the pony and obey instructions from the sidewalker and coach.**

- Hold the pony while your rider is mounting - stand directly in front of the pony's head holding the reins on each side.
- Listen to the coach at all times and make sure your rider and helpers are ready for any change of pace.
- Keep the pony's movements smooth, no sudden turns or stops.
- Keep a safe distance - usually a pony's length - from the tail of the pony in front.
- Be prepared to stop if your rider becomes unbalanced or has a problem.
- Make any adjustments off the track to allow the ride to continue.
- Learn the basic school figures, commands and the school letters.

**Be alert – anticipate your pony's reactions to other ponies, noise or any other activity.**

# **MOUNTING AND DISMOUNTING**

## **MOUNTING**

- All ponies, leaders and sidewalkers should be safely positioned (usually across the centre line or  $\frac{3}{4}$  line of the school) before mounting begins.
- Make sure the girth is tight.
- Adjust the stirrup length for the approximate length for your rider.
- Lead the pony straight and as close to the mounting block as possible.
- Stand in front of the pony's head holding the reins on each side.
- Make sure the pony is settled before your rider gets on the mounting block.
- A sidewalker or designated volunteer should be ready on the off side to receive your rider.
- Make sure the pony stands still while your rider mounts.
- As soon as your rider feels safe and balanced, encourage him/her to say 'walk on' then move forwards in a straight line, no sharp turns.
- If necessary move back to your original position to recheck the girth and stirrups and to check that the rider is centred, balanced and ready.

## **DISMOUNTING**

- Ideally all ponies, riders, leaders and sidewalkers will be positioned on the centre line or  $\frac{3}{4}$  line of the school before any riders dismount.
- Riders should be encouraged to pat their pony and thank their helpers.
- Encourage your rider to take his/her feet out of the stirrups on his/her own.
- Make sure your rider leans over the withers with his/her head to the off side before swinging the leg over the back of the saddle.
- If your rider is able to dismount without help, let them.
- If your rider is not able to dismount without help, the off side helper should help manoeuvre the leg. The rider is then placed in a position of balance before sliding down.
- Some riders dismount by bringing a leg over the pony's withers and then turning onto their tummy. Different methods will be explained and supervised by your group's coach.
- A sidewalker escorts your rider to the gate of the school to be met by a member of staff.

# **WORKING IN THE STABLE ENVIRONMENT AND HORSE CARE**

**Here is a list of a typical group's requirements.**

- Be confident in the stable environment with the pony.
- Approach towards the shoulder, taking deliberate steps and never rushing.
- Speak to your pony as you approach and enter the stable and while working around him.
- Stroke and pat the pony's lower neck or shoulder. Use gentle yet assertive movements.
- Put on a head collar and tie the pony up.
- Always tie your pony to a single piece of string.
- Always use a quick release knot when tying up a pony.
- NEVER kneel beside a pony - if the pony had a fright and jumped forward you might not be able to get out of the way quickly enough!
- Never do anything that would frighten or startle a pony.
- DO NOT walk behind your pony.
- Be aware of anything that might injure the pony.
- Carry out basic grooming of the pony and hoof picking.
- Tack up the pony correctly and appropriately for your rider. e.g. saddle, stirrups, bridle, neck-strap, coupling and lead rope.
- Lead your pony to the riding school and warm the pony up by walking around the school several times, on both reins, practicing transitions and having a trot too.
- Line up the pony across the centre line or  $\frac{3}{4}$  line and prepare for mounting. e.g. reins in place, stirrups at correct length and girth tightened.
- After the ride, return the pony to the stable or to where you collected him from. Untack the pony and put the tack and all equipment back in the correct place.

## **THE SIX EQUINE SENSES**

1. **SMELL:** The horses sense of smell is very strong, it allows him to recognise other horses and people, and to evaluate the situation.  
Relax if he wants to smell you, the rider or any equipment. Allow him to evaluate the situation. DO NOT carry titbits in your pocket, they are easily smelled, and the horse will be after them. The scent of fear can be given off by humans; stay calm, relaxed and unhurried.
2. **HEARING:** The horse's hearing is very acute, he wants to see what he hears. Horses are wary when they cannot see what they hear.  
Reassure the horse, walk on quietly and DO NOT tighten your hold on the lead rein. If the friction is caused by other horses walk away from them.
3. **SIGHT:** The horses eyes are set on either side of the head, therefore he has good peripheral vision but he cannot see directly behind or in front. He may move his head to get a better look. Always approach the horses shoulder.
4. **TOUCH:** Horses are sensitive to any unusual touch. Ensure the horse is not hurt or irritated by your rider pinching or pulling hair.
5. **TASTE:** Taste is linked to the sense of smell which may cause the horse to lick or nibble, so take care it is not an unwary person's hand!
6. **EVALUATION:** Horses have an ability to evaluate the disposition of all those around them. It is important for all volunteers and riders to treat them with love and respect, to be calm, confident but firm. Horses respond well to kindness, not apprehension, fear or anger.

## **NATURAL INSTINCTS**

Horses left in their natural state would live in a herd. They would stay together finding food and water. Rolling would help to remove loose hair, while mud and grease would act as a protective barrier against bad weather. Horses are gregarious, and there is always a pecking order when horses are together. They may even feel threatened if another horse gets too close; their natural reaction to this is to kick.

**REACTION TO FEAR:** The first instinct of the horse to this is flight. Sometimes he will spin round first to see the potential danger. If being ridden he may jump or move sideways (shy), rear or spin round and bolt. In the stable, as a last resort he may fight, may kick or even bite. SIGNS of fear are tension, sweating, moving away from the danger, eyes bulging, nostrils flared, tense muscles and in extreme cases snorting.

### ***Frightened horses are dangerous horses***

**REACTION TO EXCITEMENT:** This can be caused by fear, curiosity, insufficient training or exercise, strange surroundings or noises. The horses will have his head and tail up and may prance and snort and probably buck as well.

**Misbehavior:** This is usually caused by incorrect handling, with the horse being able to get his own way. Manners are all; what starts out as a naughty ploy, if left unchecked, could develop into a behavioural problem and a dangerous situation.

## **COMMUNICATION - THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION**

The following commands are used by coaches when taking a class. Ideally volunteers will become familiar with the language so they can explain/modify the commands for their rider if necessary.

**DISTANCE:** Riders should maintain a distance of about half a horse's length between themselves and the horse in front unless told otherwise by the coach.

**HALF A HORSE'S LENGTH:** This is a distance of about 4 feet. Riders can usually see the hocks of the horse in front between their horse's ears.

**HORSE'S LENGTH:** Riders can usually see the feet of the horse in front between their horse's ears.

**CORRECTING DISTANCE:** A rider can correct distance by cutting across the short end of the school, i.e. turning before reaching the corner. If getting too close to the horse in front the rider should ride deeper into the corners.

**THE TRACK:** The path taken by the rider, normally just inside the markers of the schooling area.

**Outside track:** Just inside the markers, the rider always remains on this track unless told to do otherwise.

**Inside track:** about 5 feet inside the markers.

**RIGHT REIN:** The rider is riding round the schooling area in a clockwise direction.

**LEFT REIN:** The rider is riding round the schooling area in an anti-clockwise direction.

**TRACK RIGHT:** Turn right onto the track at a given marker.

**TRACK LEFT:** Turn left onto the track at a given marker.

**PACE:** This should remain a constant speed until told to vary it by the coach. Any irregularity of pace or speed by one member of the ride will affect all those behind.

**LEADING FILE:** Person at the head of the ride that is responsible for setting and maintaining the pace.

**REAR FILE:** The rider bringing up the rear of the ride.

**SINGLE FILE:** The riders follow one another, behind and in the track of the leading file.

**IN SUCCESSION:** The exercise is carried out by each member of the ride, one at a time, usually starting with the leading file.

**WHOLE RIDE:** The exercise is carried out by each member of the ride simultaneously.

**CHANGING THE REIN:** Changing the direction of the movement, i.e. from the right rein to the left rein by turning right across the riding school at a given marker, riding in a straight line to the opposite side then turning left at that given marker.

**GO LARGE:** Ride around the outside of the school on the track.

**HALT:** Stop.

Whole ride prepare to halt.....whole ride halt.

**UP THE CENTRE LINE:** Turn up the middle of the school which runs from A to C.

**MEDIUM WALK:** The horse walks forward, purposefully and calmly, unconstrained steps, the hind feet touching the ground in front of the prints of the fore feet. The rider maintains a light but steady contact with the horse's mouth.

**WHOLE RIDE, INWARDS TURN AND HALT:** All turn their pony towards the middle of the school, halt, forming a straight line facing the centre of the school.

## **GREEN CARD TASKS COMPLETED**

| <b>TASK</b>   | <b>DATE COMPLETED</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| Appropriate dress and footwear for RDA & appropriate behaviour when working with horses |                       |
| Tacking up/un-tacking   |                       |
| Side helping  |                       |
| Leading the horse, with & without a rider   |                       |
| To be part of a mounting/dismounting team   |                       |
| Working in the stable environment & horse care  |                       |
| Other - (please specify)  |                       |