

# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



## VTHC

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# Vinceremos Therapeutic Horsemanship Center Volunteer Handbook

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## ***Vinceremos Therapeutic Horsemanship Center*** ***Volunteer Handbook***

### **WELCOME**

Volunteers are the heart and muscle of Vinceremos Therapeutic Riding Center (VTRC). We hope you are as glad to be here as we are to have you. This guide is meant to help answer questions about our program, its purpose, policies and basic procedures. Nothing takes the place of hands-on experience, but this publication can serve as a helpful reference.

### **VTRC MISSION**

The mission of the Vinceremos Therapeutic Riding Center is to expand and enrich the lives, bodies and spirits of children and adults with physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities through the benefits of therapeutic horseback riding and other equine assisted activities, while serving the therapeutic riding profession through training and education.

### **VTRC HISTORY**

Vinceremos Therapeutic Riding Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that was founded in 1982 by Ruth Menor. Vinceremos serves individuals with physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities through therapeutic horseback riding, hippotherapy, equine assisted activities and therapies. The horse's gentle nature and rhythmic movement, joined with our staff's extensive expertise, has helped thousands of clients conquer challenges associated with their disabilities. VTRC coordinates its services through physician/therapist referrals, group homes, school programs, and individual enrollment. This therapeutic modality propels clients to reach goals such as strengthening postural control and core strength and balance, improving motor function, and gaining a greater sense of self-esteem and accomplishment.

In addition the center also offers a Volunteer program, which allows those over the age of 12 the opportunity to learn skills including stable management, barn maintenance, and equine care (grooming, bathing, tacking, and handling) while also gaining experience working with individuals with physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities. The heart of our organization is our Volunteers – with just eight full-time employees, we rely on our Volunteers to prepare horses for lessons, ensure the safety of our students during lessons, help care for our horses, and assist at our special events, fundraisers, our annual VTRC Holiday Horse Show, golf and fishing tournaments, our Annual Benefit Auction, and the Special Olympics. For more information on Vinceremos, please call our office at (561) 792-9900 or email [info@vinceremos.org](mailto:info@vinceremos.org).

### **VISION**

Vinceremos Therapeutic Riding Center continually strives to provide life-changing experiences that empower the mind, strengthen the body and lift the spirit.



## *Vinceremos Therapeutic Horsemanship Center* *Volunteer Handbook*

### **VTRC VOLUNTEER PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT**

Vinceremos Therapeutic Riding Center is a community-based organization whose Volunteers comprise its heart and hands. VTRC Volunteers are committed, passionate, willing, caring and professional. They enhance the quality of the therapies/activities we provide and are role models for healthy social behavior. At VTRC we value people, and our Volunteers are afforded the same respect and care that VTRC provides its clients. From their service experience through VTRC our Volunteers are provided an avenue to help others, receiving in return many more blessings than given.

### **VOLUNTEER QUESTIONS**

#### ***What does my role as a Volunteer entail?***

Volunteers working with horses and students must be in good health and be physically active, mentally alert and focused for at least a two-hour period. He/she must also be able to tolerate heat, cold, dust and wind.

The two types of Volunteers utilized in classes are SIDEWALKERS and HORSE LEADERS. (See job descriptions on later pages.)

You will also be asked to help with barn work, getting horses ready for class, and other duties around the farm. We are all expected to pitch in with ANY work that needs to be done!

If you sign up to Volunteer in a class, PLAN TO COMMIT TO THE ENTIRE 11-WEEK SESSION. The riders and instructors depend on you being there. You may also get a call from our Volunteer Coordinator asking you if you can fill in for another Volunteer who needs to miss their class. Please let us know if there are other days you might be able to fill in.

We also need help in the office, with fundraising projects and organizing special events. You may be asked to join us at a special event to lend a hand!

One of the greatest gifts you have to offer is to be a positive **role model**. It does not matter if you are an expert horse person, trained therapist or novice Volunteer. If you are open and willing to learn new things, and if you conduct yourself with respect for people and horses, you will make a significant contribution to VTRC. Not to mention, you will take away skills that are priceless!

### ***What should I bring to class?***

If you are new, you will need to complete and sign a Volunteer Registration and Release Form including a photo release. If you are a minor, you will need your parents or guardians to sign the release. Volunteers must be at least 12 years of age to Volunteer with VTRC. Feel free to bring a snack, lunch or drinks. **Drinking water is provided in the lounge - please bring a reusable water bottle.** Snacks and sodas are available from the vending machines. You may also want to bring sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat.

### ***What should I wear?***

Here are a few tips for you to prepare for your Volunteer duties at VTRC. Although we work in a barn, we promote a professional atmosphere such as you might find in a clinic or classroom. Keep this in mind in the way you dress, speak and act. Please remember that VTRC is a business, so dress presentably.

- Dress in comfortable clothing that can get dirty.
- Wear sturdy athletic shoes or boots, as you will be doing a lot of walking. Flip flops, sandals, or other non-sturdy footwear are not permitted. Rain boots are a good idea during rainy season.
- Long pants or shorts of a reasonable length are permitted but please no revealing, tattered or otherwise inappropriate clothing.
- Tops with spaghetti straps are not permitted.
- Do not wear hanging jewelry, as it may dangle, get caught, or tempt little hands.
- Hair should be tied back, out of the way.
- No perfumes and/or colognes, or lotions, as they can attract stinging insects and sometimes irritate the horses.

### ***When should I arrive for class?***

Plan to arrive 10 minutes early on the first day of the new session or your first day here at the Center. The Volunteer Coordinator will tell you what your time commitment is when you sign up. For a one-hour class, you should plan to spend two hours at VTRC per week (1/2 hour before class, plus the time it takes to put the horse away and consult with the instructor).

***What should I do my first day?***

1. When you arrive **REGISTER YOUR ATTENDANCE** on the Volunteer clipboard in the Barn. If you leave your personal belongings in the lounge, please remember that VTRC is not responsible for loss of those items. When possible, please lock your belongings in your car.
2. Put on a **NAME TAG** – It is important to wear your name tag so others can identify you.
3. **CHECK BULLETIN BOARDS FOR ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS, FLYERS, OR SIGN-UP SHEETS.** Please remember to check for updates by reading VTRC e-mails and checking Facebook/VinceremosTRC.
4. **CHECK IN WITH THE BARN STAFF.** Check the schedule for the day posted in the main barn and Indoor Arena.

**LEADERS** – Help groom, tack and warm-up your assigned horse.

**SIDEWALKERS** – Greet your rider, and if necessary, assist them with their helmet. Then wait with the rider until time to mount. While waiting for your rider, you may help with the horses or you may be needed to help set up the arena for the lesson.

**BARN VOLUNTEERS** - Communicate with barn staff about tasks for the shift.

**Before you leave:**

1. **LEADERS** – Make sure all grooming kits and tack are put away. If the horse is not used again, you may leave him in the stall or turn out to pasture at the request of the barn staff.
2. **SIDEWALKERS** – Once your last rider has gone, you may help put away equipment and pick manure from the arena.
3. **BARN VOLUNTEERS** – Inform the barn staff before you leave and sign out.
4. **ALWAYS CHECK WITH INSTRUCTOR OR BARN STAFF BEFORE YOU LEAVE.** If the rider to whom you are assigned is absent, you may still be needed to help with other riders or in the barn.
5. **RECORD VOLUNTEER HOURS** on Volunteer clipboard in the Barn. Collect any personal belongings and return your name tag.

***Thank you for your Volunteer service and commitment to VTRC!***

***What if I am unable to make it to class?***

Please text or call the Volunteer phone at (561) 906-9961 or call the office (561) 792-9900 as soon as possible. We prefer you inform us at least 24 hours in advance so that we can find a substitute. If something comes up at the last minute, please call so we know you remain committed and we can count on you for future classes. If you are able to substitute, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator.

**Commitment and consistency are vital to the therapy process.** We require you to commit to an entire session unless you have made advance plans with our Volunteer Coordinator. Missing one week out of a session is acceptable. If you know you will be unable to attend most of your classes, please talk with the Volunteer Coordinator about other options. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of your consistent attendance as a Volunteer at VTRC. We cannot conduct a class without Volunteers. As a VTRC Volunteer, you will reap the rewards of truly making a difference in people's lives.

***What if the weather is bad? How will I know if my class is canceled?***

Whatever the weather is at your home, it may be different at VTRC, so call when the weather is questionable. In the event that VTRC must close due to inclement weather, student cancellations, or other circumstances, we will make every attempt to notify Volunteers at least two hours in advance to their scheduled Volunteer time. VTRC reserves the right to cancel lessons based on the availability of instructors, Volunteers, and/or horses. Further, any factor or situation considered by VTRC staff to be a threat to the safety of students, Volunteers, staff, or horses is reason for cancellation. We do our best to contact all students and Volunteers when we cancel classes. But we have many calls to make, and sometimes we fail to inform everyone before they leave home. We apologize, in advance, if this ever happens to you.

**\* Please note that in the event of lightning, lessons will not be cancelled but will be adjusted to equine learning curriculum in the barn.**

***Weather Cancellation Policy***

Lessons will be cancelled if any of the following conditions occur:

- Palm Beach County Schools are cancelled.
- The following conditions exist one hour prior to lesson time:
  - Tornado warnings, severe storms, or hurricanes.

\* In the event of extended closures, lessons will be cancelled until the staff determines the suitability of the horses to return to work.

**Please note:** Barn Volunteers are still needed in the event of weather-related cancellations to care for our very special horses, *except in the case of unsafe driving conditions*. Our Volunteers come from near and far, so if driving is hazardous in your area, please do not feel obligated to attend your regularly scheduled Volunteer shift.

When in doubt about whether or not to attend your Volunteer shift you may call the office at (561) 792-9900 or the Volunteer phone.

### **How does therapeutic riding benefit riders?**

*Equine Assisted Activities* benefit individuals with disabilities to achieve the control and mobility they may not otherwise experience. A horse's gait, similar to the human walk, helps strengthen spine and pelvic muscles, improves posture and coordination, and increases joint mobility and psychological well-being. The three-dimensional movement of the horse stimulates parts of the brain that control vocal and motor skills, rewarding many riders with improved speech as well as mobility. These stimuli as well as the sights and sounds that the students experience cannot be duplicated in the traditional clinic setting.

### **Therapeutic Riding**

*Therapeutic Riding:* At the core of the VTRC mission is the therapeutic riding lesson program. PATH International certified therapeutic riding instructors conduct lessons to teach adapted riding skills. The rider receives physical, cognitive, and emotional benefits in addition to learning how to ride with the goal of maximum independence.

Physical benefits of therapeutic riding include improved muscle tone, balance, posture, coordination, and motor development.

Therapeutic riding offers sport, recreational, and educational benefits while promoting emotional and psychological well-being, confidence, and communication skills.

### **Hippotherapy**

*Hippotherapy:* Hippotherapy refers to the use of a horse as a treatment tool by a licensed Occupational, Physical, or Speech and Language Therapist to address impairments and functional limitations in patients with neuromusculoskeletal dysfunction.

Research has shown improvements in dynamic postural control, balance, mobility, and function. Hippotherapy is also used to improve sensory processing and achieve psychological, cognitive, behavioral, and communication outcomes.

Unlike therapeutic riding, specific riding skills are not taught during a hippotherapy session. Rather, a foundation is established to improve neurological and physical function and sensory processing. This foundation can be generalized to benefit a wide range of daily activities.

Hippotherapy sessions are provided one-on-one therapist to rider. The horse's movement is used to influence the rider.

Typical improvements from this therapy include:

- Balance, posture, coordination and core strength.
- Normalization of muscle tone.
- Speech and language skills.

### **Equine Assisted Learning**

This program provides unmounted horsemanship lessons for individuals interested in learning skills related to horse health and care, horse handling, barn maintenance, and equine body language. This program allows participants to form a unique bond with the horse by learning how to communicate and work with the horse on the ground.

**All programs reach beyond the tangible benefits.** Students benefit emotionally in areas such as self-confidence, sense of accomplishment, and motivation. Trust, communication, teamwork, responsibility, respect and caring are learned directly through horsemanship. Through mastery of consistent techniques, students discover how to effectively control 1,000-pound animals, even though they lack control in many other areas of their lives. Other activities include participation in Special Olympics and riding demonstrations at our Center for various events. We also offer special educational opportunities for instructors and therapists around the country – amplifying our impact for those with disabilities throughout the United States. We offer continuing education trainings for our Volunteers as well.

### **Working with a Special Needs Population**

Working with people who have special needs may be a new experience for some Volunteers. Please take time to know your participant and direct questions to the instructors. Often, a major barrier for people with special needs is not the disability itself, but the lack of awareness and knowledge by others. Above all, please treat individuals with respect, being considerate and sensitive to their needs.

**Wheelchair Etiquette:** Many people are unsure how to act when meeting someone in a wheelchair. Please try to keep the following in mind. Always ask the wheelchair user if they would like assistance before you help; be respectful – people's wheelchairs are an extension of their body space. Don't hang or lean on them unless you have permission; and speak directly – be careful not to exclude the wheelchair user from conversations. If the conversation lasts more than a few minutes, sit or kneel to get yourself on the same level as the wheelchair.

**General Guidelines for Working with Individuals with Hearing/Language Impairment:** Try to maintain good eye contact, looking at the individual when speaking to him/her. Speak clearly, avoid talking slowly or over-emphasizing words, and avoid long verbal instructions / conversation. Become familiar with hand gestures / body positions that the participant may be using to represent words and concepts. Direct questions to your instructor. Provide assistance with communication when needed (i.e., visual cues, gestures, etc.). Alert the instructor if the participant is having difficulty with hearing aid (i.e., ringing).

**Escorting an Individual with a Visual Impairment:** If an individual with a visual impairment looks like they need assistance, please ask first if help is needed. Remember that they may only need verbal direction/cues. If physical assistance is needed, allow the individual to hold onto your arm above the elbow and walk one-half step ahead. The individual may also have a specific way that they prefer to have assistance. Repeat/verbalize information that may be written or posted. If you're uncertain of what to do, ask your instructor how you can be of further assistance.

**Non-Verbal or Limited Verbal Expression:** Many of our participants are non-verbal or limited in their verbal expression. To enhance communication with these individuals, instructors and Volunteers may reinforce requests and direction with basic American Sign Language (ASL).

### ***General Rules***

- Volunteers should always follow the direction of the supervising barn staff member.
- Excessive noise or commotion in or around the stable or riding arena is not permitted.
- All children must be kept under the supervision of an adult at all times.
- Appropriate footwear should be worn around the horses and farm. Sandals/open toed shoes are not permitted.
- The barn and grounds should be kept neat and orderly at all times. Unused equipment must be kept in its proper place. Aisles should be kept clear of wheelbarrows, pitchforks, etc.
- Manure should be removed from aisle way, arena or around the stable immediately.
- Visitors are welcome with prior approval of the Volunteer Coordinator outside of your Volunteer shift hours. All visitors must sign a release of liability.
- Visitors/riders/parents should not enter the barn unless they have the express permission of a staff member – they should be supervised at ALL times.
- Cell phones and car alarms must be turned off as they disrupt lessons and startle horses.

- The consumption of alcohol prior to or while at VTRC is prohibited, except for events approved by VTRC. The use of illegal substances prior to or while at VTRC is prohibited.
- Please refrain from offering food or other gifts to participants without permission as they may have a medical condition such as food allergies, diabetes, etc.
- Do not perform a Volunteer role you have not been trained for.
- No cell phone use while handling horses in any capacity or performing other Volunteer duties. Cell phones may be used during break times.

### ***Horse Rules***

- No changes to horse's equipment, appearance, feeding or exercise program without the direct approval of the equine manager.
- NO TREATS ARE PERMITTED TO BE GIVEN TO ANY HORSE AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PERMISSION. Treats may be given to a staff member to determine suitability to add to a horse's meal.
- If you see any injury or abnormality on any horse, please notify a staff member immediately.
- Do not enter stalls or fields that contain horses unless you have been asked to do so by a staff member.

### ***Facility Rules***

- NO SMOKING or vaping anywhere on site.
- No dogs anywhere on the property, especially not left unattended in cars.
- Keep all automobiles in designated parking areas.
- Keep all gates closed and latched unless otherwise specified.
- Hay shed, pastures, stalls and farm equipment are out of bounds unless accompanied or invited by a staff member. Volunteers should follow the direction of the supervising barn staff member.
- If you notice a broken fence, gate or anything out of the ordinary on the grounds, notify the staff immediately.
- The tack room, medicine cabinet and offices must be locked when closing the barn at night.
- Volunteers are not permitted to drive the tractor.

### ***Golf Cart Rules***

- No one under the age of 16 or without a driver's license is permitted to drive the golf cart.
- When driving anywhere on the property, speed limit must not exceed 5 mph.
- Always use caution when driving in and out of paddocks. Make sure there are no horses near the gate before opening and make sure the gate is opened wide enough for the golf cart to have enough clearance to pass.
- Keep a safe distance from horses at all times. Never drive up behind a horse.
- Always look behind you when backing up. Do not rely on the backing signal to warn others.
- When approaching a horse and rider anywhere on the farm, stop and wait for them to pass you. If they give you the OK to pass, drive slowly and quietly.
- When parking the golf cart turn the key to the "off" position. This will help preserve the battery life.

### **Conduct, Behavior and Dismissal**

As Volunteers, you are representatives of our organization. All Volunteers are expected to set a good example for the students. Inappropriate language, disruptive behavior or behavior which threatens the safety of others is not acceptable, nor will it be tolerated. After a first attempt to correct the behavior, offenders will be asked to leave the premises by a staff member and withdrawal from the program will be immediate.

### **Confidentiality**

We have a policy of confidentiality. Names, specific conditions or other personal details are to be held in strict confidence. By all means, share the stories, successes and the warmth – but please leave out the personal details. This includes detailed information of riders, other Volunteers, donors, staff and instructors. All Riders, Volunteers and instructors must sign a PHOTO RELEASE so that photographs can be used for publications and on our website.

### **Limits of Confidentiality**

There may be situations where you feel it is necessary to reveal confidential information in order to keep someone safe. For example, a rider may tell you they are having a severe medical issue that day but still wants to ride. It is your responsibility to share that information with the staff – you are not bound by confidentiality when it comes to safety. Your primary role is to keep the participants safe, and if anyone at the Center, whether it's them self or a fellow Volunteer or Rider, tells you something that is a threat to their own person or someone else, it is your responsibility to tell a staff member in a confidential manner.

### **Emergencies**

All instructors are CPR and First Aid certified. Please follow the instructor's directions in the event of an emergency. Phones and emergency procedures are located in the VTRC office. The Equine First Aid kit is located in the medical room and there are Human First Aid Kits are in the VTRC office, the arena and the barn.

### **Occurrences**

Volunteers are required to report any occurrences to staff and instructors whether it results in an injury or not. Examples include fires, natural disasters, crises arising out of misconduct or other situations posing serious threat to the safety of others.

This also includes serious injury from "near misses" and other emergencies that may not result in immediately apparent injuries but are potentially harmful to personnel or participants. Examples may include an equine stepping on a human foot, difficulties encountered during transfers (mounting a rider), equine bite, etc.

### **Volunteer Orientation**

Every new Volunteer must attend an orientation. For orientation dates, call the VTRC office at 561-792-9900 or visit facebook/VinceremosTRC. Continuing education for Volunteers is offered whenever possible.

### **Volunteer Comments and Feedback**

Please share your ideas, questions and concerns to help us be the best therapeutic program possible. We really do take your input seriously. There is a suggestion box on the Volunteer desk, if you wish to remain anonymous.

**INSTRUCTORS AND STAFF DEPEND ON ALL VOLUNTEERS FOR ONGOING OBSERVATIONS. ALL DECISIONS AND STRATEGIES WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE INSTRUCTOR AND BARN STAFF. THE INSTRUCTOR IS THE FINAL AUTHORITY.**

### **General Grooming and Tacking Rules**

- Do not go into a horse's stall without being told to groom the horse or asking a staff member first.
- Always put the halter and lead line on the horse while in the stall and walk the horse to the crossties in the barn aisle, or tie with a quick release knot in the stall.
- Grooming buckets are located on the wall in the barn aisle. Each horse has their own bucket with all of their grooming tools in it.
- If you notice anything unusual about the horse while grooming, please alert the barn staff or instructor on site.

- Always remain cautious when working around the horses. Pay attention to what you are doing and how the horse is responding.
- Be calm around the horses when grooming them. They will respond more favorably to a calm environment than a rushed chaotic environment.
- Ask questions. This is your time to learn and practice. Your help during lessons by grooming and tacking is really appreciated.
- Remember – Safety is most important for everyone involved!
- Report any injuries (no matter how small) to the barn staff or instructor on site.

*Thanks for taking the time to learn and practice your skills!*

### **Grooming Tools**

**Grooming – The process of cleaning and caring for a horse’s skin, coat and hooves including currying, brushing and cleaning their hooves.**

- **Grooming Bucket** – each horse has their own bucket of grooming tools.
  1. **Curry Comb** – a round or oval rubber utensil used in a circular motion to remove caked-on mud and improve circulation.
  2. **Hard Brush** – a large oval shaped brush with a hand support strip which is used to remove dirt, dust and dandruff from the horse’s coat; the length of the bristles determines the stiffness of the brush.
  3. **Soft Brush** – a brush with short, stiff bristles used after the hard brush.
  4. **Mane and Tail Comb or Brush** – used to comb tangles out of the mane and tail.
  5. **Hoof Pick** – metal pick used to remove debris from the bottom of the hoof.

### **Grooming Procedures**

When grooming a horse, start at the top of his neck and work your way to his rear, then switch sides and repeat.

1. Start with the **curry comb**. The rubber curry should be used in a circular motion to loosen dirt that has settled under the horse’s hair. Be very careful and gentle around the bony areas of your horse’s body (such as his back). Don’t use the curry on your horse’s legs unless you can be extremely gentle with it. Never use the curry or any stiff brush on your horse’s face.

2. Next, use the **hard brush**. The motion for this brush is like the same motion you would use when sweeping a floor. You “flick” the brush away and up from the coat so that the dirt comes off the horse’s coat. Unless your horse is already extremely clean, you should see a slight cloud of dust with each stroke. If you don’t use this “flicking” motion, the dirt will just get pushed back under the hair, potentially causing irritation to the horse.
3. Then you use the **soft brush**. The soft “body” brush is meant to smooth down the hair and to get rid of any traces of leftover dirt after you have thoroughly used the stiff brush. With the body brush, you do not use the flicking motion. Instead, you smooth it flat over the horse’s coat to flatten the hair. This brush often gives the horse a shiny, clean appearance.
4. Next, use the **mane and tail comb or brush** to gently comb the horse’s mane and tail. You can also use the stiff brush for the tail. Start from the bottom of the tail and gently work your way up, removing tangles and debris.
5. Now, on to the **hooves!** This can be done by running your hand down your horse’s leg, then gently squeezing his fetlock (ankle). When you use the **hoof pick**, always scrape away from you, just as you would if you were using a carrot peeler. It is important to thoroughly clean out the hollow areas of both sides of the frog, and around the sole of the foot. The frog is the most sensitive part of the horse’s hoof. When done, gently lower the hoof to the ground, do not drop it. Watch the positioning of your feet so that you are not in the same area where he will be dropping his hoof.

### **Tacking Procedure**

Once your horse is properly secured and clean you may begin tacking. Our tack is color coded to help simplify the tacking process. Look at the lesson schedule to see what exactly is needed for your assigned horse. Everything is abbreviated on the list to make it easy.

The six main items you will need are:

Saddle pads. English - we use a square pad and a shaped pad/back protector. Western - just needs a western pad.

Saddle. Saddles are numbered.

Girth/Cinch

Headpiece, either a Halter/H, Sidepull/SP (S,M,L) or Bridle.

Reins – R.R. for Rainbow reins.

Rope Halter

**ASK FOR HELP FOR ANY OF THESE PROCEDURES**

**English**

1. First position Square Pad in front of the withers with straps facing forward towards the horse's head.
2. Next put Shaped pad on top.
3. Make sure stirrups are run up so they don't hit the horse, grasp the saddle and gently place it on top of the pads in the middle.
4. Pull the saddle pads up into gullet of the saddle so they're not tight on the horse's back. Make sure everything is even on both sides and gently slide everything back a few inches to smooth the hair back under the saddle.
5. Now that everything is smooth and even, attach the girth. Start with the elastic end and place it on the left side (remember eLastic on the Left) through the girth loops on the saddle pad, then buckle using the first and third billet strap. Go to the offside, place girth across belly behind armpits, go through loops and gently attach buckles, tighten one hole at a time just enough to take the slack out of the girth. With the proper size girth this should be approximately in the middle of the billet strap. It only needs to be tight enough for the saddle not to slip. Make sure there are plenty of holes on the left side to tighten the girth evenly. Final tightening will be made by the instructor.

**Western**

1. Place pad slightly forward and slide back to smooth hair.
2. Place stirrup on horn, gently lift saddle onto horse's back, pull front of pad up into gullet.
3. Attach cinch/girth on right side.
4. From the right side, attach loop latigo twice through cinch ring and tie using 7-4-11 method. Please ask a staff member to teach you if you are unsure.

## **Headpiece**

1. Undo crossties, remove halter and put around horse's neck. Make sure horse is secured.
2. Stand on left side of the horse, hold the top of the sidepull in your right hand and the nose piece with your left. Guide nose piece over the nose, lift the top up, and slide over your horse's ears. Center the brow band and make sure it is not pinching the ears. Adjust the mane and forelock so everything sits smoothly.
3. Buckle throat latch; make sure you can fit your fingers sideways between cheek and leather.
4. Put reins around horse's neck and clip them to the rings on the sidepull.
5. Clip lead rope to the bit lead.
6. Remove halter and hang it up neatly.

## **JOB DESCRIPTIONS / QUALIFICATIONS**

**SIDEWALKERS** – Responsible for the rider during the lesson session. If two Sidewalkers are required, one will assist as a “buddy”, responsible for the rider upon arrival for lessons and sees to it that the rider is safely back with parents/guardians after the lesson. Sidewalkers are positioned at each side of the rider in order to assist with balance issues.

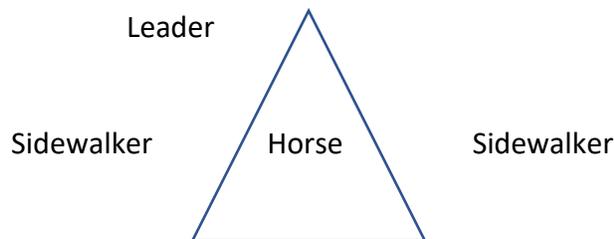
Ability to walk with arms in a supporting position for a minimum of thirty minutes. The supporting holds can be different for each rider. Holds will be discussed in the mock training. Some holds can be tiring on the Volunteer and Volunteers are encouraged to change sides to assist with the Volunteer's comfort. Proper change guidelines are required to maintain safety guidelines for your rider.

1. Ability to walk / jog alongside horse and rider as spotter for up to an hour. Spotting at the trot requires some jogging but is limited to short distances. Volunteers can request a stand-in during the trot if needed.
2. Ability to relate to children and adults in an encouraging and humorous manner.
3. Ability to reassure frightened / nervous riders.
4. Responsible for the safety of the rider while mounted.
5. Ability to assist instructor with proper mounting and/or dismounting of a rider if needed.

**HORSE LEADERS** – Responsible for the control of the horse or pony from the time the animal leaves the stall, throughout the lesson session, and upon return of the animal to the stall or pasture area.

1. Ability to control a large animal.
2. Calm and gentle nature with animals.
3. Knowledge of the proper leading position.
4. Ability to walk for a minimum of fifty minutes and jog for short distances.

### **The Lesson Volunteer Team**



### **SIDEWALKER VOLUNTEER POSITION INFORMATION**

**Sidewalker location and positioning:** Sidewalkers are positioned at the rider's knee. Being too far forward or back will make it difficult to assist with instructions or provide security to the rider if needed. It is also a safe place to be positioned as far as your safety around the horse.

**Balance:** The job of the sidewalker is to maintain the balance of the rider when they cannot sustain it themselves. Some students have a definite balance problem, on the horse as well as off. Depending on the ability of the student, there will be either one or two sidewalkers assigned to each rider. The instructors will inform you as to the requirement of each participant during the mounting time.

**Changing positions or sides:** Since the student with less muscle tone requires the Volunteer to exert enormous physical energies, you may need to change sides throughout the lesson. To do so, notify the instructor and horse leader that you need to "switch" sides. Come to the center of the ring and change with the other sidewalker **one at a time**. The student must never be totally left alone during a change over since falling could occur.

**Correct rider position:** Do not grab at the student if he/she starts to slip, gently guide them back into the correct position. Sidewalkers are very important, as they need to be constantly aware of the student and what they are doing. The safety of the riders depends on you!

**Communication:** Since the sidewalker is always close to the rider, you will find they will want to talk to you a great deal. Do not ignore direct questions but do try to get your rider to focus their attention on the instructor. If your student is not paying attention or does not hear the instructor, you can help reinforce the directions of the instructor by repeating instructors or prompting the action requested by the instructor. One of the greatest distractions during lessons can be the excessive talking in the ring by Volunteers. Please limit your conversations with the students during lesson time to what is absolutely necessary. Conversations between the Volunteers and riders are encouraged and can take place during warm ups and cool downs.

**Assisting the rider with instructions:** When an instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process 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. Sometimes Volunteers forget that the riders are to do the exercises, the same applies to games; don’t get so competitive that you start to take over for the rider because you want them to win. The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow to be as independent as they possibly can become. You are there to support and help challenge the rider to the best of their ability.

**Attention:** The sidewalker will need to observe the rider at all times. Never become so relaxed that you are not totally aware of the rider, the horse and leader, the instructor or other activities around you. Be aware of your position near the horse. Do not lean on the horse as this can agitate the horse, throw off the horse’s balance and also interfere with the communication between the horse and rider.

**Anticipate:** Sidewalkers will learn from experience how to anticipate difficulties from the horse or rider which might create accidents. Be as prepared as possible for the unexpected. Use your judgment as necessary. The horse does not always act in a predictable manner or “according to procedure”. Always be alert to your surroundings.

## **THE HORSE LEADER POSITION**

The job of the leader is to control the horse or pony from the time the animal leaves the stall, throughout the lesson session, and upon return of the animal to the stall or pasture area.

The proper position for the leader is to walk just back of the horse’s or pony’s head. **DO NOT GET IN FRONT or TOO FAR BEHIND.** The lead should never be used to pull the mount forward. Care must be taken to ensure the horse’s head is not merely pushed up in the air since that may

throw the rider off-balance. Also do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground as this may pull the rider forward. Keep your hands away from the horse's mouth. A good rule of thumb is to hold the lead in your right hand approximately six to eight inches away from the ring or buckle (keep a smile in your line). Hold the extra length of lead in your left hand but NEVER wrap it around your hand. In order to be able to hear the instructor and to work your horse equally from both sides, please change sides when changing directions.

Remember just as the sizes of horses vary, so do their steps. With some animals you will be able to walk faster than others. Adjust your step to that of the horse so that you are not pulling him forward or holding him back. Keep to left so you do not impede the horse's stride.

No matter how slow the pony or horse you are leading is, the leader should not try and take the place of the rider either by pulling the mount forward or turning or stopping the horse. It is the rider's responsibility to do as much as they can. The instructor will point out to you when the rider needs assistance and as you work with riders you will start to get a feel of when to step in.

In order for the rider to have complete freedom to use the reins correctly, care should be taken to ensure that the lead line does not run over the rider's reins. The lead line must be hanging between the rider's reins and not over the top of them.

#### **AT THE MOUNTING BLOCK OR RAMPS**

If you are going to lead a rider that has to be mounted from the ramp, pay close attention to the instructor because they will tell you where to position the horse in the mounting area. You will want to place the horse as close as possible to the side of the ramp on which the rider will be mounting. Most mounting and dismounting is done on the left side of the horse. It is your responsibility to keep the horse as quiet as possible while the rider mounts (patting the horse's neck is very reassuring and calming).

Lead the horse so you have a straight shot to the mounting block. Move into ramp slowly, moving the horse's head toward the ramp so the body follows. Request that the sidewalkers do not try to push the horse to get it closer to the ramp. It's better to lead him out and around again if he's not lined up close enough. Try to get him to stand squarely, you may need to ask the instructor if she will wait for you to square him. Stand in front of slightly to the side of the horse while mounting to block forward movement. Once your rider is settled you should face forward and assume your position at the head of the horse. Walk the horse straight out of the ramp slowly, so that the instructor and sidewalkers can remain close. Be sure to listen to the instructor, follow their instructions.

Additional training is required to mount and dismount students.

## **LEADER IN THE RING**

Once the rider is mounted, the instructor will tell you where to stand with the horse. Be sure you are a safe distance from the horse in front of you (an elephant's length between is a good gauge). As the class begins all instruction will be given to the student by name. All Volunteers on the team should be familiar with the rider, and give them all the opportunity to learn your name also. Please wear your name tag at all times.

It is tempting to turn around to talk with or assist your rider, but your responsibility as the leader is to pay attention to the horse and where you are going. Listen to the rider and sidewalkers for instructions or whether or not assistance is needed for a certain maneuver.

## **AT THE HALT**

While it seems unnatural, we ask you to pivot yourself from the side of the horse to slightly in front of the horse at the halt. This will keep the horse from moving forward. This is especially important while the riders are doing their exercises. The halt is also used as a "breather" for the horses; you should not hold their heads too tight. Allow the horse freedom to move its head around. If the horse is getting too restless, rub the neck; this is a good way to calm them down. Occasionally the horse will need to walk around but the instructor will alert you to those situations.

## **AT THE WALK**

Many leaders forget that the riders may also have sidewalkers. Be aware not to get too close to the side of the ring, jumps or other obstacles or you will not have room for everyone to fit through safely. **GIVE YOURSELF ROOM FROM THE HORSE IN FRONT OF YOU.** Though none of our animals are known to be a kicker, all horses can kick if they feel pressured by a horse following too closely behind them. If your rider cannot maintain a safe distance, it is your job to do so. If you have to make a turn suddenly for safety reasons, verbalize your intentions to the team – the sidewalkers and rider - as a sudden turn can throw off a rider's balance and sidewalkers need to be well aware of the imminent risk.

Do not assist in making turns unless directed by the instructor. Use common sense; if you see that your rider is getting into trouble and is unable to follow directions given by the instructor it is your job to help. The sidewalker(s) should be prompting to keep students "tuned into" their instructor's directions.

## **AT THE TROT**

Often during a lesson the students will be asked to trot. Since trotting is faster than walking, the leader has to be more alert to the horse, rider and surroundings. The instructor will come over, if necessary, to give specific instructions to the student and you. Before starting the trot, be sure the rider and sidewalkers are ready.

If a horse is reluctant to trot, start to walk a little faster and say “trot”. Most of our horses are good on voice commands, however some horses will need a little additional prodding. **DO NOT PULL ON THE LEAD.**

Do not run in front of your horse, and immediately “walk” or “stop” (“whoa”) when the instructor gives the command. This must be done on a straight line so as not to unseat the rider. Make the transitions smooth, no sudden stops or starts. Make sure the team is ready.

## **DURING THE GAMES**

Games are an important part of every lesson. They may be as simple as “Simon Says” or “Red Light, Green Light”, or a more complicated game such as “Musical Stalls”. The leader is an important part of all games. The instructor will give the riders and Volunteers the rules of the games to be played. The sidewalker will need to watch the rider to see if they understand the directions. However, if there is no sidewalker, you will need to talk to the rider and pep them up and get them ready for the games. Your enthusiasm is contagious, but remember it is the rider playing not you. Allow the student to do as much as possible by them self. During the games everyone can get excited and lose focus on safety. Make sure the horses remain at a safe distance apart from each other.

## **FALLS DO HAPPEN**

Though falls are very rare, they can and do happen. If your rider falls, your only concern is the horse you are leading. The instructor will take care of the student. If another rider falls and the horse gets loose, then **STOP IMMEDIATELY** in front of your horse and hold the horse as you would while mounting. **NEVER LET GO OF YOUR HORSE** if possible. Do not panic if there is a fall. The fall off a horse is really not any worse than any other type of fall. Your job is to stop and hold the horse. If the rider falls close to the horse and the horse stops, walk the horse a safe distance away from the rider to allow the rider to be attended to.

## **LOOSE HORSE**

If a horse gets loose **DO NOT CHASE THE HORSE**. If they feel they are being chased they may run faster. They are prey animals and they use flight as a defense. All other horses need to be stopped where they are. When horses are scared they will seek comfort and may go to another horse. Wait for further instructions from the instructor.

## **DISMOUNTING**

Unless otherwise specified, the instructor will dismount the student. You will receive specific instructions as to whether to bring your student to the ramp area or to remain in the center of the ring. Once again, keep your mount quiet by standing in slightly to the front and turn in to the horse's head while your rider dismounts.

### **Leading reminders:**

- Keep attention on the horse.
- Follow the instructor's instructions; listen to sidewalkers/leaders if assistance is needed.
- Improper leading can change the movement of the horse, affecting their physical health and what the rider is feeling.
- Horses have two blind spots – directly in front of and directly behind the body.
- Horses are protective of their personal space; do not lead too close behind or beside another horse.
- Horses are able to sense what you are feeling, so it is important to stay calm.
- You are not always doing the steering during lessons; you are a "fixture" at the horse's head for safety.

### **Leading "Do's":**

- Use voice commands.
- Walk beside the horse (about an arm's length away) in between head and shoulder.
- Look up and where you are going at all times.
- Allow the horse to have free head and neck movement.
- Maintain distance between other horses in the lesson.
- Tune in to the horse's body language so you will know when something is going wrong.

### **Leading Don'ts:**

- Walk in front of and pull the horse to move faster.
- Turn suddenly or sharply, it will knock horse and rider off balance.
- Assume that the rider is unable to control the horse, many of them can.
- Look down at the ground, stare at the horse, or let eyes wander in a "day dream".
- Wrap the lead around your hand or let it hang low to the ground.

Bottom line – **always remain cautious around the horses.** While your skills and confidence may increase while working with them, a healthy respect for their size and ability to act out of their typical behavior will help you greatly. If you follow the safety procedures and remain alert to your surroundings and environment you will be able to reduce the risks of working around the horses.

Please ask questions. If you are not comfortable completing a task, DON'T DO IT. Instead, ask someone to help you until you are comfortable. Your safety, the rider's safety and the horse's safety are of the utmost importance to us.

### **Emergency Information**

#### ***If there is an emergency while a lesson is in session:***

1. All horses will be halted.
2. All leaders will position themselves in front of the horses. The leaders are responsible ONLY for the horses, not the riders.
3. All sidewalkers will stabilize their riders (arm over leg support). The sidewalkers are responsible ONLY for the riders, not the horses.
4. The instructor will supervise the dismounting, either verbally or personally.
5. In the event that a rider must be removed from the horse quickly, as in a seizure or a spooked horse, the sidewalker on the left is responsible for dismounting the rider. Both sidewalkers should immediately remove the rider's feet from the stirrups.
6. If circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated, the riders will be escorted out first by their Volunteers (if used) and the horses will be removed by their leaders to an appropriate place, after the riders are out of danger. We will gather at our evacuation meeting site at the northwest gate of the property.
7. The instructor will determine if medical personnel are required and will request assistance in contacting specific personnel.

#### ***Spooked Horse***

Should a horse become frightened, sidewalkers are to apply the arm over thigh support hold to their rider. The horse leader should attempt to halt and calm the horse. The horse leader must always try to stay with the horse. The sidewalkers should attempt to stay with their rider and maintain the supportive hold. Listen for directions from the instructor and follow directions.

#### ***Loose Horse***

If a horse should become loose in the barn or while in the ring – **DO NOT** chase after the horse. If they feel you are a threat they will run more. Keep calm. The horse will eventually stop. One person will be designated to approach the horse to "catch" them. The instructor will give the instructions and who is to be designated to get the horse. If you are in a lesson with another team, as a sidewalker, calm your rider.

If horse becomes loose in the barn – do not chase – but do alarm by announcing "**Loose Horse**" to alert others in the barn. Just get to a safe area out of the horse's path until the horse stops.

If the loose horse is outside of fences or enclosed area, close the front gates until the horse has been secured.

***Universal Precautions***

Universal precautions are 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 Immuno-Deficiency Virus (HIV/AIDS). When you follow universal precautions, you assume that all persons are potentially infected with blood-borne pathogens.

- Wear disposable latex or vinyl gloves when it is likely that hands will be in contact with bodily fluids. Always change gloves between clients.
- 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 eyes and/or mucus membranes will be splashed with bodily fluids.
- Wash hands often, before and after client care, paying particular 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.
- Resuscitation masks should be used for CPR.

## **Volunteer Training**

Congratulations and thank you! You have completed the Volunteer Orientation! You are now able to help in the barn and start to learn about the Vinceremos horses. The next step is Volunteer Training, this will prepare you to help in the lessons. You may have years of horse experience or you may have met a horse today for the first time. Vinceremos horses have a special job and in the arena you will have a special role as a key part of a safe and successful lesson team.

### ***Training Schedule***

**Taking the Lead** - Vinceremos has particular methods for leading and communicating with our horses. Because we all have different backgrounds and ways of communicating, we have devised a language that is familiar for our horses and that we all use. These methods and skills will be outlined and demonstrated along with an explanation of why we do things this way. Each attendee will have the opportunity to practice leading and sidewalking and become comfortable using the Vinceremos language. (This class must be completed to help in the mounted classes.)

**Mounting and Dismounting** - This session will explain the steps for safely assisting the Vinceremos Instructors with various types of mounts and dismounts chosen specifically for their student. You will learn how to bring a horse into the different types of mounting blocks. (This class must be completed to help with mounting and dismounting.)

**Hoyer Lift** - This lift is used to help wheelchair bound individuals mount and dismount. (This class must be completed to help at the Hoyer Lift.)

**Disabilities** - This training will introduce you to the different types of disabilities you may encounter while volunteering. This will help you to become more comfortable working with individuals who have disabilities, you will learn how their abilities are more important than their disabilities. You will have the opportunity to ask questions.

These classes will give you firm understanding and introduction to the basic Vinceremos methods. Please feel free to ask questions, request further help and ask for assistance. You are an important part of the team. We will add other trainings upon request and as needed.

**Please check the Volunteer bulletin board and Facebook for dates and announcements.**

**Please Sign Up for Volunteer Training Sessions with the Volunteer Coordinator by texting or calling (561) 906-9961. Thank you for your time!**



*Vinceremos Therapeutic Horsemanship Center*  
**Volunteer Handbook**

Please sign, date and return this page to the Volunteer Coordinator.

**Volunteer Agreement:** I have read and understand the Volunteer Manual. I agree to the rules and terms, and I understand that failure to follow these rules and terms may result in loss of Volunteer privileges.

**Print:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(If under 18 yrs old, parent or legal guardian must sign)

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for Volunteering with us! We couldn't do it without you!**

*Vinceremos Therapeutic Horsemanship Center*  
*Volunteer Handbook*

