

# Rainier Therapeutic Riding



## Volunteer Manual



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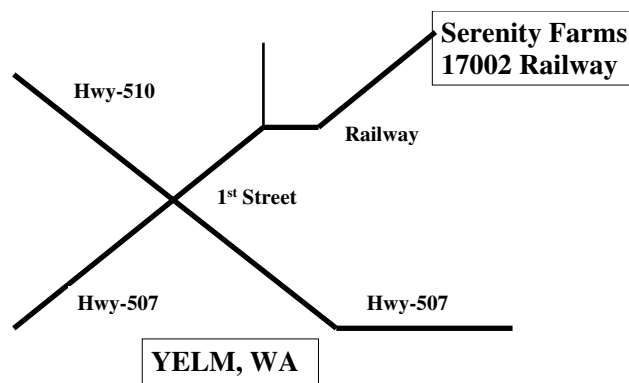
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## **Welcome**

Thank you for your interest and participation.

As you know, RTR offers therapeutic riding for military personnel, veterans and their families. Horses have the ability to read, understand, and relay emotional and physical stresses that people are experiencing. They have helped individuals build a stronger sense of security, confidence and strengthen coping mechanisms. For people with physical limitations or needs, horses have been shown to re-teach and strengthen balance, coordination, and motor functions.

This handbook is designed to serve as a reference for your orientation to the program. It includes volunteer duties and tips for working with horses and riders. Inside this manual you will find information on some of the main disabilities we work with, RTR's expectations from you and information that will help you provide meaningful sessions with your rider. This manual has been designed with large margins and areas for personal notes.

Our goal is to provide a volunteer team for each rider, so that both riders and volunteers can benefit from continuity and establish a lasting relationship of trust with one another. As a volunteer you will be able to share knowledge, guidance and patience with the rider. A professional, safety-conscious environment for the riders, volunteers and horses is also of major importance.

### **VOLUNTEERS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN ACHIEVING THIS GOAL!**

As volunteers, you will be part of a professional team; we also have a lot of fun! Therapeutic riding, done in a professional and safety-conscious manner, brings feelings of boundless joy and accomplishment for all involved.

**From all of the staff and riders, thank you for your interest and  
commitment!**



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## Rising from the Ashes

Welcome, it is with heartfelt gratitude that I personally welcome you as a volunteer to Rainier Therapeutic Riding. I know that being a part of this program will be a blessing to you, as much as it has been to me, also bless many veterans in return.

I am Debbi Fisher, the widow of Lt.Col Randy Fisher. Randy served our country for 28 years and we were married for 30 years before he was killed in a head on car collision while on Active Duty. My life was changed that day on Oct 1, 2006. My three children and grandchildren all lived far away and GOD seemed to close the doors for me to leave Yelm WA.

Randy had a horse by the name of Rootbeer. We have had since Rootbeer was 6 months old. I did not need to own seven horses, being by myself, so I decided to sell some of them. Rootbeer I sold three times, but he kept on coming home, as he was not happy in his new homes, so I would buy him back. So this told me that GOD had another plan for Rootbeer and myself.

In 2008, Bob Woelk and I decided that we wanted to provide service to the community as a way of bringing joy into our lives. We heard about horse therapy for soldiers, and so traveled down to the National Convention in Fort Worth Texas. We listened to a panel of soldiers tell us how horses had given them their lives back with a sense of purpose, self-esteem and confidence. Horses showed them that they still had a lot to offer, even though the military had told them they were broken and of no use to the military anymore. Horses had actually kept these men and women from committing suicide. We talked to these men after the conference and they told us to go back to the Northwest and start a program for the veterans up here. It has been an amazing journey to see how GOD has opened up the doors for Rainier Therapeutic Riding. We had our pilot program back in September of 2010 with 8 active duty wounded soldiers from JBLM, from the Warrior Transition Battalion. Since that inception we now serve more than 100 veterans on a weekly basis.

Looking at our logo, you will see the mythical phoenix bird rising in front of Mt. Rainier. I have a beautiful view of Mt. Rainier from my home, and when I gave GOD my sorrow and pain, HE truly took those ashes of my life and given me purpose again, by being a blessing to these amazing veterans who have boldly given so much for all of us to live in the United States. Rootbeer and I love our new jobs and the purpose we now have for our lives. We thank you from the bottom of my heart for being a part of this, as we could not do this without your dedication and sincere concern and care of these veterans and the horses that do this amazing therapy work. Welcome to the RTR Family!

Jeremiah 29:11 – For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”





## General Information

### **What to Wear:**

For safety as well as comfort, volunteers should wear close-fitting clothing. Loose, floppy clothing can get caught and tangled with equipment. Dress in layers that you can shed, especially during the cooler months. Bring a jacket, even if you don't think you'll need it. It's cooler at the barn than you might think! During the summer, dress appropriately. Sunglasses and sunblock are a plus. Tank tops / exercise tops are fine, but strapless tops or spaghetti straps are not appropriate. **Long** pants such as jeans, riding breeches or other comfortable pants are required.

### **NO SHORTS!**

You will be doing a lot of walking and jogging on uneven terrain, so comfortable shoes are a must! **ALWAYS WEAR CLOSED-TOED SHOES!**

### **Inclement Weather:**

RTR is fortunate to have an indoor arena; classes are rarely canceled due to weather conditions. However, if driving conditions become unsafe be sure to call the designated instructor.

### **Substitutes:**

If you are not going to make it to class, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator by phone or email at least 24 HOURS ahead of time so we have time to locate another volunteer to take your place. If you know you will be away certain weeks, please let us know when the session begins so we can make other arrangements.

### **Minimum age requirements and liability release:**

No one under the age of 14 unless approved by the Program Manager is allowed to work directly with our horses and riders due to insurance restrictions. Because working with horses can be potentially dangerous, we ask that all prospective volunteers sign the liability release form for Rainier Therapeutic Riding. These can be obtained in the office from any staff member.

### **Sign in Procedures and Recording Hours:**

Your volunteer time is important to us for funding purposes and recognizing outstanding volunteers. Please be sure to record your hours each time you come to the barn. Any time used for RTR purposes outside the barn should be recorded by sending an email to the Volunteer Coordinator.



### **Your Commitment:**

Many volunteer positions are needed to facilitate a therapy program; each position requires a different level of commitment from you. All volunteers must participate in a 4 hour hands-on training program before working alone with a rider.

## **Job Descriptions**

### **Horse Team Captain:**

One or two volunteers are assigned to each horse as their Team Captain/s.

Each Horse Team Captain is responsible for the well-being of the horse assigned to them. Their duties include:

- Evaluating horse health on a regular basis
- Knowing their horse's average temperature, pulse and respiration rates
- Checking the horse for soundness, performing pinch test, lameness check, checking teeth and gums, holding a horse for a veterinarian, proper restraining when needed for a veterinarian.
- Evaluating body condition, correct feeding for your assigned horse knowing horse body weight, watching for any changes, and if food changes are needed
- Bathing, and clipping your horse
- Keeping their horse tuned up on all groundwork exercises including:
  1. Round penning
  2. Flexing
  3. Desensitizing with rope, stick & string, other items
  4. Leading – Walk Halt, Trotting, Backing using all 4 methods
  5. Sending
- Tracking progress in Horse Health Record Book
- Tracking progress in Horse Exercise Log Book
- Being trained in and assist with:
  1. Off side mounting
  2. Trailer loading and unloading
  3. Feeding and watering the horses

### **Leaders:**

Top priority is placed on keeping our riders and you SAFE! Being a leader requires an 8 week commitment for each session. Up to two absences per session are allowed for travel and illness. Consistency is very important to our riders. We ask leaders for the first class of the day to arrive an hour early for the first class of the day to ensure everything is well prepared for class and to attend the morning briefing. Subsequent class leaders are asked to arrive 30 minutes prior to class starting. Leaders are to provide guidance for their rider, if needed, after the instructors have demonstrated the skill they are to be practicing. Please keep side conversations to a minimum so the rider can concentrate on the task at hand. You may be assigned to any horse in



the herd. If you are assigned to a horse you have not worked with before or are unfamiliar with, contact that horse's Team Captain to learn about their personality, likes and dislikes. The leader and rider may need to incorporate variations or accommodations to normal procedures; this can be discussed with the Instructor.

### **Side Walkers:**

Required for weeks five and six in the intro session and potentially more for later sessions depending on rider stability. There is one side walker on either side of the horse and it is their job to give whatever level of support the rider needs. This will be identified by the instructor. Typical holds include heel hold, thigh hold and hip hold. The side walker on the inside of the arena is responsible for relaying any instructions that may not have been heard. Use caution when walking on the same side as the Leader and avoid kicking the backs of their feet. The footing is uneven so be cautious of large holes. Please see the "Guidelines for Side Walkers" on page 28 for more information.

### **Photographers:**

Responsible for photographing classes. Photography should not be invasive; don't interrupt a lesson to get a good photo. Be aware of your foreground and background as there are several riders who do NOT want their picture taken. Their name tags have "NO PHOTO" printed in red. It is of utmost importance we not compromise their trust of the program by taking their picture. For some of these individuals having their picture on the internet is a safety issue. All memory cards with RTR photos must stay on the premises! You may use your own camera but always use an RTR memory card.

### **Greeters:**

Greet incoming people. Inquire if they are a volunteer, rider or visitor and point them in the proper direction. If they are a visitor, introduce them to a staff member. Responsible for ensuring each participant entering knows important information and is directed to the correct areas. You are the first person people see when entering; be inviting in your demeanor.

### **Paperwork Assistant:**

Ensure riders fill out intake scales on their notes form and sign Wounded Warrior Project sign in sheet. Be sure they have their name tags on. Get notes forms to Note Taker. Have riders fill out scales on their way out of class. All notes forms go to the in-box of the instructor for that class. Keep forms face down as much as possible to protect rider's privacy.

### **Gate keeper:**

Open and close gates for people and horses. Keep all unauthorized people out of the arena.





### **Floaters:**

Two to three floating volunteers are needed for introduction classes. These volunteers will fill in for an absent Leader and assist Leaders as needed. Being a floater may also include the following duties:

- Refreshments: Make sure coffee is made and hot water pot is full and heated. Keep food covered to prevent flies from getting in it. Refill coffee station as needed.
- Laundry: Hamper is located at the far end of the helmet cubbies. Laundry facility is on the boarder's side of the barn between the two sets of wash racks. Be sure not to leave laundry in the machines.
- General cleaning: Sweeping, dusting, taking out garbage, tidying up restrooms, maintaining grooming buckets and tack cleaning.

### **Note takers:**

Observe the riders **unobtrusively** during class to determine if they are meeting the stated objectives. Ask Leaders if their rider was able to complete tasks. This can be done during break time or after class if necessary. Notes should be objective and phrased positively as the riders will see these. Deliver completed notes to the rider table so they may complete their exit scales. If you put the forms down during class make sure they are face down to protect rider privacy.

### **Personal Relationships:**

Often Leaders find themselves in a close relationship with their riders. It is common for riders to share personal information with their Leader. For some riders this may be the only safe place for them to share. It is important to remember that we are not therapists. We encourage you to listen. However, avoid sharing your opinion or giving advice. Remember that our riders may or may not be struggling with emotional challenges and it is wise to keep firm personal boundaries. Sharing phone numbers, becoming friends outside of the program etc. are allowed, however, we strongly urge you to maintain a professional relationship and limit the risk of a participant misunderstanding the relationship. Volunteers dating riders is strictly forbidden.

### **Dismissals:**

On occasion it may be necessary to dismiss a rider or volunteer from our program. Riders may be dismissed at the discretion of the Instructor, Occupational Therapist, Commanding Officer or Doctor. If you are concerned about the behavior of your rider or their safety, please discuss these concerns with your Instructor, Program Manager or Volunteer Coordinator immediately. Volunteers that are unable or unwilling to follow our rules or curriculum may be dismissed at the discretion of the Instructor. We will attempt to give feedback, both positive and constructive, as



needed to improve. It is imperative volunteers can be relied upon by both instructors and their riders for a consistent experience. We appreciate your willing acceptance of feedback.

**Personal Conduct:**

When participating in RTR events or wearing RTR logo gear, you are representing the organization. Please be sure your conduct, actions and words reflect positively on RTR. Also use caution when posting about the program on social media. Never refer to any of the riders by name unless they have given you specific permission to do so.

**Conflict of Interest Policy:**

It is the policy of Rainier Therapeutic Riding that officers, directors and key employees should be subject to a conflict of interest policy. A conflict of interest generally arises when an individual can benefit financially from a decision that person makes in his / her capacity as an officer, director or key employee. This is a self-reporting policy and it is assumed that those subject to this policy will take the necessary steps to avoid a conflict of interest or the appearance of same.

**Constructive Feedback & Whistleblower Policy:**

Rainier Therapeutic Riding encourages constructive feedback from all levels of our organization. Feedback can be provided to the instructors, staff, or board members directly, or through our compliance officer. Written feedback can be provided through our mailbox using the provided forms. Our compliance officer will review the feedback and take appropriate action, redacting names where appropriate. You will be informed of the status of your feedback by the compliance officer.

Rainier Therapeutic Riding encourages staff and volunteers to come forward with credible information on illegal practices or violations of adopted policies of the organization. RTR will protect the individual from retaliation and identify those staff or board members or outside parties whom such information can be reported.



## **Rainier Therapeutic Riding Statement of Ethical Purpose:**

Rainier Therapeutic Riding is a secular organization. In keeping with that policy we want to honor the faith of our founders, Debbi Fisher and Bob Woelk, who created this platform for transformational healing. To that end we will continually seek to manage this organization in ways that follow values that support grace, hope, faith, love, justice, joy, service and peace.

In honoring those we serve and to observe a long-standing military tradition, prayers may be offered at times. All are encouraged to join in as they see fit. Rainier Therapeutic Riding's anti-discrimination policy is emphasized in all of our programs and services. Rainier Therapeutic Riding is consciously and proactively inclusive of all areas of diversity including, but not limited to race, ethnicity, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, socioeconomic status, marital status, language or disability.



## Working with our Riders

### **Consistency:**

Each volunteer comes with their own background of horse experience. As many of you know, there are many right and wrong ways to perform each task. We ask that while working with RTR horses and riders that you teach **ONLY** the methods explained in the manual, training program and by the instructors. There has been significant thought put into the methods used and how they balance against the disabilities our riders face. Using multiple methods can be confusing to horses and riders.

### **Alternate Activities:**

Sometimes riders may not be up to participating in group lessons. If the instructor gives direction that your rider will only be grooming today, or even hand grazing in front of the barn you will need to assist your rider as directed.

## Challenges Our Riders May Face

### **PTSD**

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) results from exposure to an overwhelmingly stressful event or series of events, such as war, rape, or abuse. *It is a normal response by normal people to an abnormal situation.* The traumatic events that lead to PTSD are typically so extraordinary or severe that they would distress almost anyone. These events are usually sudden. They are perceived as dangerous to self or others and they overwhelm our ability to respond adequately. PTSD is a normal response to an abnormal event because the condition is completely understandable and predictable. The symptoms make perfect sense because what happened has overwhelmed normal coping responses.

People with PTSD will re-experience the event through recurrent, intrusive recollections, recurrent distressing dreams of the event, acting or feeling as if the trauma were reoccurring (flashbacks, dissociative episodes) and intense psychological and physiological responses to internal or external cues.

### **Impaired Social and Occupational Functioning**

The diagnosis of PTSD means that symptoms are significantly interfering with relationships or work. Communication is disrupted by numbing, pulling inward, avoiding people and social situations, or by hostility and anger. Work suffers due to absenteeism, fatigue, or impaired concentration



### **Event Re-experienced**

In one sense, PTSD can be viewed as a fear of the unpleasant memories of the traumatic event that repeatedly intrude into one's awareness. Intrusive recollections can occur in the form of thoughts, images, or perceptions. These intrusions are unwelcome, uninvited, and painful, and the person experiencing them wishes that they could put a stop to them. They often elicit feelings of fear and vulnerability, rage at the cause, sadness, disgust, or guilt. Sometimes these intrusions break through when one is trying to relax and one's guard is down. Sometimes a trigger that reminds one of the trauma will start the intrusions. For example, a survivor of a Russian prisoner-of-war camp often daydreams, absorbed in unpleasant memories and out of touch with his surroundings. A number of cues can trigger this re-experience, including thin soup, walking in the woods, Russian music, a harsh rebuke by a supervisor, or any unpleasant confrontation. Sometimes there is no apparent connection to the thoughts or feelings that are replayed. Nightmares are a common form of re-experiencing the trauma. The nightmares might be fairly accurate replays of the traumatic event, or they might symbolically depict the trauma with themes of threats, rescuing self or others, being trapped or chased by monsters, or dying. Flashbacks are a particularly upsetting form of re-experiencing the traumatic event. In flashbacks, people feel they are going back in time and reliving the trauma. Typically, flashbacks are visual re-experiences. However, they can also involve sensations, behavior, or emotions. For example, a war veteran hits the ground when a car backfires, and sees a battle recurring, begins to hear sounds of battle, and feels hot, sweaty, and terrified. Later, he does not remember the incident. Flashbacks can last from seconds to hours, and even days. They are usually believed to be real and then forgotten, but sometimes the sufferer will realize that the flashback was not reality. Insomnia, fatigue, stress, or drugs often trigger flashbacks. Experiencing the intrusive memories is very distressful, both psychologically and physically. Although one might not realize that a cue triggers the distress that accompanies intrusive thoughts, some searching can usually find it. The trigger might be either a cue in the environment, such as the backfiring car that reminded the veteran of gunfire, or an internal trigger, such as a nauseous feeling that is similar to one experienced after a rape.

### **Arousal**

Like other anxiety disorders, PTSD is characterized by extreme general physical arousal and/or arousal following exposure to internal or external triggers. The nervous system has become *sensitized* by an overwhelming trauma. Thus, two things can happen. General arousal becomes elevated, while the nervous system overreacts to even smaller stressors. Signs of arousal include the following:



**Troubled sleep** includes difficulty falling or staying asleep, twitching, moving, and/or awakening unrested. Awakenings may be due to nightmares. Fear of nightmares might then lead to fear of going to sleep, especially if one was violated in bed.

**Irritability or outbursts of anger** might be displayed as smashing things, heated arguing, flying off the handle, screaming, intense criticizing, or impatience. Unresolved anger is fatiguing. It might be mixed with shame, frustration, betrayal, or other uncomfortable emotions that lead to moodiness and explosions of pent-up anger. One might then feel embarrassed or guilty.

**Difficulty concentrating or remembering** can occur when one is still battling for control of intrusive memories.

**Hypervigilance.** People who have endured a trauma will be on guard against intrusive memories. They are also likely to be unusually cautious to ensure that further injury does not occur. Hypervigilance might be demonstrated as:

- Feeling vulnerable, fearful of lots of things, unable to feel calm in safe places
- Fear of repetition
- Anticipating disaster, such as needing to sit in the corner of a room with one's back to the wall while looking for exits or places to hide (one fireman carried around a fire extinguisher for a year after being burned by a petroleum ball)
- Rapid scanning, looking over one's shoulder
- Being overprotective or over controlling of loved ones

**Exaggerated startle response** means you are easily frightened. A sensitized nervous system will overreact to frightening or even unusual stressors. Thus, you might jump, flinch, or tense when someone appears suddenly or from behind, when a sudden noise occurs, when someone wakes you up when sleeping, or when someone touches you. Eye blinking may become more rapid. One woman who was struck in a head-on car accident will now jerk the steering wheel when she sees another car approaching. In addition to the above symptoms, indications of a sensitized nervous system might include the following:

- Elevation of certain stress hormones in the blood
- Elevated heart rate (either resting or in response to stress)
- Elevated blood pressure
- Hyperventilation
- Tight chest or stomach
- Light-headedness
- Sweating



These might occur generally or in response to a trigger. (Glenn R. Schiraldi, 2009)

Horses have a tremendous ability to read and mirror our physiological and emotional responses. Horses are in a natural state of “elevated startle response” (reactive side) and have been trained to keep that response under control (thinking side). Helping our soldiers see how trusting and relaxed horses can become with training can help them face their individual challenges. Using our equine partners to help the riders become more aware of their emotions and responses they can work to use their “thinking brain” instead of their “reactive brain”.

## **TBI**

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI, also called intracranial injury) occurs when an external force traumatically injures the brain. TBI can be classified based on severity, mechanism (closed or penetrating head injury), or other features (e.g., occurring in a specific location or over a widespread area). Head injury usually refers to TBI, but is a broader category because it can involve damage to structures other than the brain, such as the scalp and skull.

TBI is a major cause of death and disability worldwide, especially in children and young adults. Causes include falls, vehicle accidents, and violence. Prevention measures include use of technology to protect those who are in accidents, such as seat belts and sports or motorcycle helmets, as well as efforts to reduce the number of accidents, such as safety education programs and enforcement of traffic laws.

Brain trauma can be caused by a direct impact or by acceleration alone. In addition to the damage caused at the moment of injury, brain trauma causes secondary injury, a variety of events that take place in the minutes and days following the injury. These processes, which include alterations in cerebral blood flow and the pressure within the skull, contribute substantially to the damage from the initial injury.

TBI can cause a host of physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects, and outcome can range from complete recovery to permanent disability or death. The 20th century has seen critical developments in diagnosis and treatment which have decreased death rates and improved outcome. These include imaging techniques such as computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging. Depending on the injury, treatment required may be minimal or may include interventions such as medications and emergency surgery. Physical therapy, speech therapy, recreation therapy, and occupational therapy may be employed for rehabilitation. (Unknown, 2010)





## **Depression**

Major depressive disorder (also known as recurrent depressive disorder, clinical depression, major depression, unipolar depression, or unipolar disorder) is a mental disorder characterized by an all-encompassing low mood accompanied by low self-esteem, and by loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities. The term "major depressive disorder" was selected by the American Psychiatric Association to designate this symptom cluster as a mood disorder in the 1980 version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III), and has become widely used since. The general term "depression" is often used to denote the disorder; but as it can also be used in reference to other types of psychological depression. It is disfavored over more precise terminology for the disorder in clinical and research use. Major depression is a disabling condition which adversely affects a person's family, work or school life, sleeping and eating habits, and general health. In the United States, around 3.4% of people with major depression commit suicide, and up to 60% of people who committed suicide had depression or another mood disorder.

The diagnosis of major depressive disorder is based on the patient's self-reported experiences, behavior reported by relatives or friends, and a mental status exam. There is no laboratory test for major depression, although physicians generally request tests for physical conditions that may cause similar symptoms. The most common time of onset is between the ages of 20 and 30 years, with a later peak between 30 and 40 years. (Unknown, Major depressive disorder, 2010)

## **Anxiety**

Anxiety is a psychological and physiological state characterized by cognitive, somatic, emotional, and behavioral components. These components combine to create an unpleasant feeling that is typically associated with uneasiness, apprehension, fear, or worry. Anxiety is a generalized mood condition that can often occur without an identifiable triggering stimulus. As such, it is distinguished from fear, which occurs in the presence of an observed threat.

Additionally, fear is related to the specific behaviors of escape and avoidance, whereas anxiety is the result of threats that are perceived to be uncontrollable or unavoidable.

Physical effects of anxiety may include heart palpitations, muscle weakness and tension, fatigue, nausea, chest pain, shortness of breath, stomach aches, or headaches. The body prepares to deal with a threat: blood pressure and heart rate are increased, sweating is increased, blood flow to the major muscle groups is increased, and immune and digestive system functions are inhibited (the fight or flight response). External signs of anxiety may include pale skin, sweating, trembling, and pupillary dilation. Someone who has anxiety might also experience it as a sense of dread or panic. Although panic attacks are not experienced by every person who has anxiety, they are a common symptom. Panic attacks usually come without warning, and although the fear is





generally irrational, the perception of danger is very real. A person experiencing a panic attack will often feel as if he or she is about to die or pass out.

Anxiety does not only consist of physical effects; there are many emotional ones as well. They include "feelings of apprehension or dread, trouble concentrating, feeling tense or jumpy, anticipating the worst, irritability, restlessness, watching (and waiting) for signs (and occurrences) or danger, and, feeling like your mind's gone blank"[6] as well as "nightmares/bad dreams, obsessions about sensations, deja vu, a trapped in your mind feeling, and feeling like everything is scary."

As you can see, our participants come to us with many challenges. As they learn new skills and challenge themselves they may become fearful, reactive, embarrassed, emotional or even angry. It is important that we allow them to go through this process and support them to the best of our abilities. Our program is partnered with an occupational therapist and all participants are under medical care to address the feelings and experiences that may come up during sessions.





## Staff, Rider and Horse Safety

Keeping ourselves, our Soldier / Riders and our horses safe is the first priority of the program. Only after our riders trust that they are in a safe situation can they start to work on the emotional barriers caused by the PTSD. We have implemented some safety procedures to ensure everyone's safety.

### Emergency Phone

The RTR phone is located just inside the door of the office. Emergency contact information and directions to the farm are on the laminated card below the phone.

### Emergency Evacuation

In case of emergencies requiring evacuation, instruct your rider to exit the building and meet at the northwest corner of the paddock directly in front of the main entrance to the barn. Look for the orange cone. Leaders are responsible for the horse they are working with. In the event your rider is unable to get themselves out of the building safely on their own, one of the instructors will have been designated as their escort ahead of time.

### Accident Prevention

To ensure that any accident that does occur is prevented in the future, an accident investigation report will need to be filed with the Lead Instructor for any incident resulting in injury or near miss.

### First Aid

Horse and human first aid kits are located in the first tack room. Please be sure to let an Instructor know if you have removed or used any supplies so they can be replaced. All Instructors are trained in basic first aid.

### Volunteer Support

Working with injured soldiers may bring your emotions to surface. This is a normal response for volunteers in therapy programs. You are very likely not alone in your feelings. It is important to communicate with your instructors about how you are feeling.



## Program Horses

Safe, reliable horses are the backbone of our program. To be accepted as an RTR program horse they must undergo several evaluations and at any time can be removed from the program if deemed to be unfit.

We have horses of many breeds within the program, varying in size, shape and disposition. Some horses will be more sensitive and reactive and some less reactive. It is the Instructor and Leader's job to ensure we are making correct matches for both horse and rider. If you are concerned about the match, please let the Instructor know immediately.

### Information Cards

Each horse has a profile card in their grooming bucket. Please be sure to read over your assigned horse's card each shift to get to know your horse and ensure nothing has changed. If you notice information or behavior that would be helpful to your peers, please make notes on the horse's card.





## Program Equipment

At RTR we use natural horsemanship methods and equipment.

Rope Halters – We use thin, knotted rope halters. They give more control than traditional nylon or leather halters and allow for smaller aids to be picked up by the horse.

Lead Ropes – We use 14' lead ropes with leather poppers, these allow plenty of room to move around the horse as well as additional length to use during groundwork.

Stick and String – In some groups we use a stick and string with ground work and lunging – this is an extension of your arm similar to a short lunge whip.

Bridles – To preserve our horses' mouths from unbalanced riders, we have chosen to use bit less English style bridles in most classes. Bridles are labeled with each horse's name next to the crown piece.

Saddles – In the first session we use a saddle specific to therapeutic riding comprised of a surcingle with handles and a foam and leather pad. This keeps the rider secure and allows for maximum movement. In later sessions English or Western saddles may be used.

Tie Rings – Horses are tied in the arena using Blocker Tie Rings. It is very important that each horse is tied with the Blocker Tie Ring. If the horse pulls back and is unable to be released a horse or person could be injured or a rider may panic or become fearful.

**Please have an instructor or volunteer show you our method of tying horses.**



## General Horse Information

To see things from the horse's perspective, you need to know — literally — how the horse takes in the world. Humans evolved to be hunters and gatherers, chasing down prey and finding appropriate plants to eat. Horses, on the other hand, are built to avoid hunters and eat nearly everything that grows around them. Given these fundamental distinctions, the horse's senses are bound to have nuances that are somewhat different from those of a human.

### **Sight**

Sight is the most important equine sense. For a prey animal like the horse, in the wild, good eyesight means the difference between life and death. Literally seeing trouble coming is the best way the horse has to make it to safety before a predator gets too close. Because horses have long, narrow heads with eyes on either side, they have the ability to take in more of the view than humans do. When their heads are facing forward, horses have a nearly 180-degree field of vision. They can see in front of and almost all the way around their bodies, though they do have some blind spots. One of a horse's blind spots is directly behind, so you should never approach a horse from the back unless the horse already knows you're there. The other blind spot is directly in front of their eyes. If you put your fist on the bridge of your nose, this simulates a horse's forward vision. Scientists know far less about horses' color vision than about other areas of equine sight, but they are certain that horses can see some colors. Red and blue seem to be particularly distinct to the equine eye, but beyond this, we don't know. Researchers need to do more tests to find out whether horses can see the full spectrum of the rainbow.

### **Hearing**

A species that survives by getting a head start on marauding predators needs a pretty good sense of hearing. The fact that horses have survived all the way to modern times is testimony to their incredible hearing, which is considerably better than a human's.

If you look at the shape of the horse's ear, you can see that it's built sort of like a funnel. With this design, the ear can capture sound in its outer part and channel it down into the ear canal. The broad outer part of the horse's ear very adequately takes in the slightest sound in the horse's environment.

Using very mobile ears, horses constantly monitor the world around them. Just imagine trying to pay complete attention to different sounds coming in to either ear at the same time. It is impossible for a human, yet the horse does this on a steady basis. A horse can take in the sounds of a car driving by, children playing, a bird chirping and a human approaching, all at once, from different places in the environment. The horse then processes that information and makes split second decisions about whether to react — all while picking out the best blades of pasture grass or meandering down a rocky trail. The process really is mind-blowing.



Loud, unfamiliar noises can send a relaxed horse into a tizzy. On the other hand, a placid, reassuring sound can ease a horse's worries. It's amazing to see how a frightened horse can be comforted by a soft, gentle voice from a calm and confident human. Keep this fact in mind when handling your horse in a particularly noisy or frightening environment.

## **Body Signals**

When reading horses it's important to look at each indicator and put them together to form a whole expression. For example, a horse with his ears forward may mean a number of different things. You must look at the animal's stance and other body signals to determine exactly how he is feeling. Here are some common body signals that horses and ponies use to communicate.

## **Eyes**

The first thing good horsemen look for in a horse is the look in their eyes. A wide range of emotions can be determined from the eyes. A horse may have a kind, worried, curious, wild, gentle or intelligent "look" to their eyes. Here are a few indicators to help you read the eyes:

- \*Whites visible (except in Appaloosas) - Anxious, angry.
- \*Half closed - Tired, relaxed, sleeping.
- \*Wrinkled - Worried.
- \*Blinking - Processing information, thinking.
- \*Soft eye - Gentle, relaxed, learning mode.
- \*Hard eye - Tense, resistant.

## **Ears**

Watching the ears can help determine where the horse is focusing and how it is feeling.

Generally a horse is focused on what the ears might be pointing at.

- \*Turned back - Focused on something behind, tired.
- \*Pointing forward - Attentive, curious.
- \*Rigid pointing - Fear, uncertainty.
- \*Droopy - Tired, sleepy, bored.
- \*Pinned back - Threatening, aggressive, angry or warning.
- \*Pointing in different directions - Focused on two things at once.
- \*Rotating - Lots going on, curious, nervous, indecisive.
- \*Airplane ears (drooped out to side) - Depressed, drugged, unwell, sleeping.
- \*Neutral - Normal.



**Relaxed, happy horse. Ears forward, lips and nostrils relaxed. Eyes soft.**



### **Muzzle, Lips and Nostrils**

- \*Tight/hard lips - Anxious, tense.
- \*Wrinkled muzzle - Nervous, worried.
- \*Licking/Chewing - Stress release, digesting ideas, acknowledgment.
- \*Drooping lip - Relaxed, bored.
- \*Swishing/Mobile Muzzle - Curious, extroverted.
- \*Flared nostrils - Nervous, excited, alert, working.
- \*Relaxed nostrils, soft muzzle - Neutral, relaxed.
- \*Flapping lower lip - Unfocused, sensitive, or nervous.
- \*Open mouth, mouthing - Often seen in foals. "I'm a baby. Don't hurt me".

### **Head and Neck Set**

- \*Low - Accepting, relaxed.
- \*High - Fear, anxiety, defiance.
- \*Level - Neutral, Focused.

### **Tail**

- \*Swishing - Annoyed, irritated, flies.
- \*Flagged - Excited, happy, playful, alarmed (often in Arabians and foals).
- \*High/Raised - Attentive, excited, happy.
- \*Low - Submissive.
- \*Neutral/level - Focused, normal.
- \*Clamped down - Fearful.

### **Legs**

- \*Pawing - Frustrated.
- \*Standing square - Attentive.
- \*Hind hoof resting - Relaxed.
- \*Hind leg lifted - Warning, defensive.
- \*Stamping- Flies, mild irritation.
- \*Striking - Angry, threatening, fighting.
- \*Dancing around - Nervous, excited, frightened.



**Soft, relaxed and trusting eye.**



**Anxious or Irritated horse. Ears back in warning, eyes focused lips tight and grinding teeth. Nostrils wrinkle.**





## Grooming

Grooming can be one of the most beneficial aspects of our program. Riders benefit from the bonding with the horses as well as learning basic horse communication skills. As a volunteer you will be responsible for both ensuring the important aspects of the grooming routine are completed, and that the timelines given are kept. Each horseperson has individual methods and styles of grooming – for the sake of consistency we ask that you follow the procedure below. Always keep one hand on the horse while grooming and be aware of the horse’s behavior, teach the soldier not to “tunnel vision” on the area they are grooming. You and your soldier should NEVER walk between the wall and the tied horse. Teach your soldier how to move the horse over from pressure and avoid being between the horse’s body and the walls. Ideally the soldier will be grooming on their own while you supervise and give insight to the horse’s behaviors and reactions and tips on their work.

**Curry Comb** – Often a round or oval rubber brush used to in a circular motion on the body of the horse. This helps generate oils in the skin and loosen dirt and hair.

**Dandy Brush** – A firm brush with bristles made of plastic or natural fibers used to brush body and legs of horse.

**Mane and Tail Comb** – A brush or comb resembling your own hair brush. Brush mane gently and try not to pull out mane hairs. For the tail, have the rider stand to the side of the horse looking at the head of the horse and brush the bottom 6 inches, again trying not to remove hairs.

**Hoof Pick** – A plastic handle with a metal pick on one end, sometimes also has a brush attached. Pick both feet on one side then safely cross behind the horse and pick both feet on the other side.

**Fly Spray** – If needed, apply fly spray to the rag provided then wipe onto horse avoiding the horse’s face.







## Groundwork

Many veteran equine therapy programs report that groundwork and sensitizing / desensitizing work provides the best therapy for soldiers with PTSD and TBI. For consistency, we have chosen to use natural horsemanship methods.

Some terms you may hear in class are:

**Hula-Hoop Space** – this is a 4’ circle around you that a horse should not enter unless invited.

**Two Eyes are better than two heels** – if the horse is looking at you with both eyes they are paying attention and ready to learn. You are also the farthest away from his two heels as possible! The basic technique is to apply a pressure of some kind to the horse as a "cue" for an action and then release the pressure as soon as the horse responds, either by doing what was asked for, or by doing something that could be understood as a step towards the requested action, a "try". **Timing is everything, as the horse learns not from the pressure itself, but rather from the release of that pressure.**

This work allows the soldiers to see the horses use both the “reactive” and “thinking” sides of their brain. It allow the soldiers to see how their body language and instinctual physiological responses are clearly read by the horse and gives the riders an opportunity to see themselves and their reactions in the mirror of the horse’s actions.

It is important to keep our riders safe while doing groundwork – while also allowing them to make mistakes and learn from them. Often as a volunteer you will need to demonstrate an activity before the soldier will feel comfortable trying – be sure to offer and encourage your soldier to try out each activity.

**It is important to note that horses may react differently on the left and right sides of their bodies – just as our soldiers may have different startle responses from different angles.**

The 5 signs of relaxation – with groundwork we are working to train the horse to relax with various stimulations.

Watch for these signs of relaxation and reward your horse AND rider for achieving them.

Licking or chewing

Blowing or snorting

Dropping the head and neck

Resting a hind foot

Standing still for 15 seconds

Blinking



**Leading** – Riders will lead the horses from the left side with the horse’s nose at their shoulder. The horse should not be ahead or lagging behind.

**Desensitizing with the rope** - Using the lead rope and rope halter and starting on the left side at a 45-degree angle facing the horse’s haunches. The left hand should be held up ready to move the horse’s face out of your space while the right hand holds the body of the lead rope. Swing the lead rope up and over the horse’s withers several times. Watch for any of the 5 signs of relaxation and reward with a rub of the rope. Continue by moving from the withers to the hindquarters, neck, front legs and hind legs. When the left side is complete repeat on the right side. If the horse does not show a sign of relaxation, but they do stand still for 5 tosses of the rope, reward them and move on to the next section.

**Flexing the neck** - Stand next to the horse’s girth area with the slack of the lead rope coiled in your right hand. Position your right hand on the horse just behind where the saddle would sit. Using the left hand, pull the horse’s head around and place your hand firmly on the withers. When the horse releases the pressure on their nose by tucking in the nose and touching their side or creating slack in the rope, immediately reward by dropping the rope from your right hand and rubbing the horse. Repeat on both sides several times.

**Backing** – There are many ways to back a horse; we have chosen to teach backing from direct pressure. Stand next to the horse’s neck and turn to face the hindquarters. Hold the lead rope about 12 inches from the snap with the slack in your right hand. Apply light direct pressure to the halter and the horse should back. Note that you don’t actually need to touch the horse to get it to back; pressure on the rope is very often enough. Firmer pressure can be used as needed. It is worth noting that most horses in the program also know to back from shaking the lead rope at them. This is not something we teach, but may be worth sharing with your soldier so they are not surprised if the horse reacts.



## Mounting

Before entering the mounting area tack must be checked by an Instructor.

During mounting, Leaders hold horses in the designated holding area, while side walkers move to the designated tack check location. Leaders, make sure your rider's helmet fits correctly, then wait to be called by the Instructor. The Instructor conducts mounting. Volunteers assist as directed. There are three types of mounts:

**Ramp Mount** - used for riders using wheelchairs or otherwise not able to climb stairs. Also used for back-riders.

**Block Mount** - used for small riders or taller horses to get the rider to the stirrup level.

**Ground Mount** - used when the rider is tall enough and capable of reaching the stirrup from the ground. The Leader holds the horse quietly while the Instructor assists as needed.

1. Approach the ramp or block in the direction requested by the Instructor, turning to face the horse upon entering.
2. Position horse close to the side from which mounting will take place and have the horse stand square.
3. Do not put pressure on the lead rope; this may cause the horse to back up. If the horse should back up, do not pull; simply release pressure on the lead and go with him - he will stop.
4. Allow the horse to relax, holding him quietly and not restricting his head.
5. Once the rider is mounted and the cue is given by the instructor and rider to "walk on", guide the horse out slowly and quietly while still facing him. Once the horse is clear of the ramp block, stop and wait for the instructor for the final adjustments. Side walkers join the rider so that support can be given while the Instructor adjusts the stirrups.
6. Lead the horse slowly and quietly from the mounting area once the rider has said "walk on".



## Guidelines for Side Walkers

The Side Walker(s) are in charge of the rider's safety, and help the rider with balance and reinforce instructions in the lesson. **If there are two Side Walkers, the inside side walker (the one closer to the center of the arena) will clarify the instructions.** Too many people talking at the same time can confuse the rider, or shift the riders' attention away from the Instructor.

Different methods are used with individual riders, depending on the rider's needs:

1. Thigh Hold - Place your arm that is closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle or pad. Watch where you place your hands, do not get too personal and keep your fingers together.
2. Hip Hold - Place your arm that is closest to the rider across the rider's hip and grasp the front handle of the saddle. Watch where you place your hands, do not get too personal.
3. Heel Hold - Hold the heel of the rider to help stabilize rider's leg.

Do not offer any more support than the rider needs. Heel holds are most common in RTR classes. If a rider has a Leader and one Side Walker, the Side Walker should walk on the right side of the rider unless directed differently by the Instructor. Always be aware of the rider, horse, Leader, Instructor, and activities around you. Be sure not to lean on the horse or rider since this pressure may unbalance the rider or irritate the horse. Listen to the Instructor's directions so you may reinforce when necessary, BUT allow the rider plenty of time to process the information before you begin to assist. Talking to the rider while having a lesson is not recommended since it interferes in the communication between the rider and the Instructor. Many riders have trouble focusing on instruction so all talking should be kept to a minimum. Refrain from talking to other Side Walkers or Leaders during the lesson unless there is a safety issue. Riders who need moderate support, especially support to the back, will need more attention. Side Walkers should be specifically instructed in how to support their rider during mounting and riding. Be sure that you are at ease with the method of support, both mentally and physically, before moving into the riding area.



## Guidelines for Leaders

**The Leader is responsible for the horse!** In case of an emergency the Leader takes control of the horse while Side Walker takes the rider off the horse and to safety.

Leaders must be entirely focused on the horse and their safety / communication needs. Leaders should NEVER talk with the rider or team unless addressing a safety concern. Talking confuses the horse. The inside Side Walker is assigned to assist the rider with any balance, position or other needs.

Hold the lead rope 12-24 inches from the snap/halter to allow for the natural motion of the horse's head. Hold the extra rope in your left hand, doubling the extra rope back and forth in the palm of your hand. *Never wrap the rope around your hand.* Never put the extra rope on or around your shoulder. This might injure you if the horse pulls suddenly.

When leading a mounted rider you will hold the lead rope with your thumbs tucked into your belt loops, waistband or pockets. This helps the horse to have less sensory stimulation and listen more easily to the rider's aids.

Always lead a horse standing beside his head, holding the lead rope. Do not look the horse in the eyes, that's a cue for stopping. Make sure the lead rope is between the reins and not over one of them.

Keep a distance of an "elephant" between you and the horse in front of you.

Make the turns softly. Allow space for the Side Walkers when next to a fence or obstacle.

To halt say "whoa" or "ho". If the horse does not stop, tug slightly backwards on the rope, then release. If horse does not respond immediately, repeat several times till stopped.

When stopped, the Leader walks in front of the horse and turns facing it at a 45-degree angle.

Allow the horse to move his head and stretch. However, the Leader must make sure the horse is calm and quiet but does not move (talk to horse softly, pet it).

Students are urged to control their horses to the maximum of their abilities. A horse leader must never take the place of the student, but should be there to assist as directed to keep the horse in control. Check with the Instructor before the lesson what the ability is of your rider. Do not do the exercise for your rider. Wait for the rider to initiate the movement and then you can help out. When the rider is controlling the horse, allow a little more lead rope (8-10 feet or as directed by Instructor) so you do not influence the horse unless this becomes necessary for safety reasons. It may confuse the horse if it gets mixed orders from his Leader and rider.

When changing pace, have the horse follow your pace rather than you following the horse's.

Move from a walk into a fast walk and then to a trot and from trot to a fast walk, then walk. This will make the transitions smoother and will not throw rider off balance.

Be sure to hold the horse's head straight, especially at the trot. This is particularly true when you are on the inside, between the horse and the center of the ring.



Pulling the horse's head will distort its gait and make it move crooked; the rider will become unevenly seated and lose the rhythm of the gait. Even steps of the horse are crucial to maintaining the rider's balance. Short tug works better than a steady pull on a horse. Leader should always look forward to avoid collisions and other problems.



### **NEVER hit or discipline a horse when rider is mounted.**

If a horse steps on your foot, lean into it so the horse becomes unbalanced and will move. Try not to yell because this may scare the horse or rider. The horse cannot feel it is on your foot. Always keep the horse away from any hazard or dangerous obstacle such as mud holes, broken fences, trash, plastic bags, wire, etc.

If the horse should shy or suddenly pull, release rope that is in your right hand (hand closest to the horse's head) but maintain contact with your left hand on the other end of the lead rope to control the horse. If the rider is mounted on the horse in a situation like this, NEVER totally let go of the lead rope under any circumstance.

When a horse is frightened by an object, let it stop, face the object, look at it and sniff it (do not let the horse spin and try to flee). Give the horse time to overcome his fear. Reassure the horse and help calm the horse down by talking to it in a slow, soft voice.



### **RTR Serenity Farm Barn Rules:**

- Safety is our number one priority. Alert an Instructor or staff member immediately with any safety concerns.
- Never repeat anything a rider tells you in confidence unless there is a safety concern.
- Gates must be kept closed at all times.
- RTR Office Hours are from 11am-5pm.
- Only working service dogs are allowed to visit the farm. All non-resident dogs must be on-leash or in a stall at all times.
- Smoking and E-cigs permitted only at front planter area. Dispose of cigarette butts in containers provided.
- Do not bring unattended children to class.
- No Alcohol or Drugs.
- Turn off all lights after use.
- The far aisle and stalls past the break room are off-limits to riders and volunteers.
- No running or yelling in the barn.
- No bicycles or scooters allowed in the barn.
- Cell phones are not to be used or checked while in the arena.
- There is no place to secure personal items in the barn.
- Photography: As many of our riders are sensitive to pictures, outside photographers are NOT allowed in the arena during classes unless they receive instructor permission. All photographs are to be taken using RTR cameras OR all photos must be downloaded to the RTR computer and deleted from personal cameras before leaving the farm.
- Personal photos of family / friends and horses are allowed outside of class time.

### **HORSE HANDLING RULES**

- Class begins at the appointed time. Do not retrieve your horse prior to instructor approval.
- Stalls are the horse's private area. You may approach RTR stalls to visit a horse, but do not enter the stall unless haltering and removing the horse from the stall. No grooming, petting or medicating horses inside the stalls.
- Do not handle any horses without express staff permission.
- Do not approach non RTR Horses in stalls or pastures.
- Never leave a rider unattended with a horse.
- Do not feed or treat any horse without instructor or staff permission. All treats must be given after lessons are over and from the red treat buckets or the stall feeders. NO HANDFEEDING.
- Long pants are required when handling horses. Boots or sturdy shoes are encouraged when possible.
- Helmets are required for all mounted activities. Participants under 18 years must wear helmets while grooming / handling horses in addition to riding.
- No riding in the aisle ways or barn. Always mount / dismount in the arena or outside.
- Only tie horses using designated tie-rings or cross-ties. No tying to stall doors.
- Do not leave horses unattended while tied.
- Clean all grooming and tie areas when done using – manure, dirt and hair can be disposed of in designated muck buckets.
- No horses in the lobby area.



**Rainier Therapeutic Riding  
Volunteer Handbook Signature Page**

I \_\_\_\_\_, have received, read and understand the information included in the volunteer manual. I have had the opportunity to ask questions as needed, and I agree to follow all policies and procedures within.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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