



AVALON T.E.C.

Therapeutic Equestrian Center serving Southeastern Wisconsin

AVALON THERAPEUTIC EQUESTRIAN CENTER

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

“The outside of a horse is the best thing for the inside of a man.”

-Xonophan

Welcome to Avalon! We appreciate and need your help. The Avalon program would not be possible without you. Wonderful people like you make the Avalon program a reality for our riders!

As a volunteer, you will be part of a professional team. Therapeutic riding done in a safe and professional manner, can bring feelings of boundless joy and accomplishment for all involved.

This handbook has been designed as a reference, that we hope you will find useful in your orientation. It is Avalon's goal to provide you with information needed to be part of an effective team, to bring our riders the best experience.

Your commitment is vital in our quest for excellence and making the magic continue here at Avalon.

MISSION STATEMENT

Avalon T.E.C. provides therapeutic horseback riding and horsemanship education, which enhances the overall quality of life for persons who are physically, emotionally and developmentally challenged.

NARHA Member Center

North American Riding for the Handicapped Association

N9368 Green Valley Road • Watertown, WI 53094 • 920-206-1148

E-mail: avalontec@avalontec.org Website: www.avalon.org



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ABOUT AVALON

Greetings from Avalon Therapeutic Equestrian Center!

Avalon is a unique program that uses horses to provide therapy for children and adults challenged by many different types of disabilities. Avalon is located on a beautiful 40 acre farm in S.E. Wisconsin, 30 miles west of Milwaukee. Coming to Avalon is the highlight of our riders week and we work hard to give them the very best. We are often stunned by the accomplishments of the riders. Avalon is staffed with health care professionals and certified riding instructors, as well as many wonderful and talented volunteers. We are a 501(c)3 member center of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). Every year it is a challenge raising funds and session fees cover only about 50% of our program costs. We do not turn riders away for inability to pay. In 2004, Avalon had \$12,000.00 in charitable riding sessions. There are periodic fund-raisers during the year, including the annual Irish barn Dance and Polo outing. Avalon serves about 70 riders per week, from all over S.E. Wisconsin and is open year round with a heated indoor riding arena, trails and outdoor riding ring. Avalon depends on the support of many people to make the program possible.

Thank you so much for joining us in helping make “dreams come true at Avalon!” We need and appreciate your support.

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VOLUNTEER PROCEDURES

Upon arrival, please be sure to sign in at the table outside the office door. List the start and end time of your hours that week as it is important for us to track volunteer hours for fundraising purposes. This is also a helpful resource for volunteers who need to keep a formal record of their hours. Please note the column for you to indicate whether you are available the following week. This is *extremely* important, as we use this information as a guide to determine if we have enough volunteer coverage from week to week.

The lesson roster for each day is posted in the barn and in the tack room. In addition to showing the number of riders per session, the roster lists the equipment necessary to prepare the horse for its rider. Volunteers are *not* expected to have horse experience. Participation in grooming and tacking is at each volunteer's discretion. Avalon staff is always available to assist volunteers interested in learning more about horse care.

It is helpful to arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the lesson to assist in grooming and tacking horses. If you are unable to volunteer at your designated time, please call the Avalon office as soon as possible (a 24 hour notice is appreciated). Avalon and its riders depend on volunteer support. Many of the riders look forward to seeing their volunteers each week. Keep this in mind when you commit to a session. In case of inclement weather, please call ahead to ensure lessons are on schedule.

What to Wear. Dress comfortably for the weather. We are inside during the winter months; however, our indoor arena is insulated and heated (layers are advised). During the Spring and Summer, we make use of the outdoor arena and trail (sunglasses and insect repellent are recommended). Wear shoes which provide support for walking in sand, and offer enough protection for working around horses (boots or tennis shoes rather than sandals). Please approach dressing with a professional attitude while keeping in mind the clientele we serve. When in doubt, feel free to ask a staff member.

BASIC EQUIPMENT AND ITS ABBREVIATIONS

All tack with the exception of halters and lead ropes is kept in the tack room. Halters and lead ropes are kept in the barn. Halters are labeled on the noseband indicating which horse it belongs to. Each saddle is numbered on the cantle (back rim). For example: W2 stands for Western saddle #2. Bridles and other tack are also labeled. The lesson roster will indicate the correct tack for each horse/rider combination using the below abbreviations.

- W-Western saddle (followed by a number)
- J-Jumping saddle (followed by a number)
- D-Dressage saddle (followed by a number)
- C-Child's saddle (followed by a number)
- AP-All Purpose saddle (followed by a number)
- LL-Lead Line saddle
- Wool-western wool pad
- Pad-square dressage or all purpose pad used with J, D, or AP saddles
- Cashel-used in combination with another pad for extra protection
- Fuzzy-fuzzy western pad of various colors
- V-vaulting surcingle (followed by a number)
- Ped-pediatric surcingle
- RR-rainbow reins
- LR-ladder reins
- WR-western reins

GROOMING THE HORSE

Grooming keeps the horse's coat clean and healthy. It eliminates dirt, dried sweat, and loose hair that can irritate the horse's skin when ridden. Grooming also stimulates nerve endings and helps relax and warm up the muscles. Each horse has its own grooming kit on the shelving unit in the barn.

Do not interchange grooming tools as this can spread disease. To ensure safety for all, never sit on a horse to groom or tie a horse when grooming. If necessary, attach a lead rope to the horse's halter and hold in hand while grooming. Please ask for help if you are unsure. Basic grooming tools include a metal curry, rubber curry, hard body brush, soft body brush, and hoof pick. The metal curry is used first in the direction of hair growth to remove dirt on the coat surface. This curry is not to be used on the face or legs. The rubber curry is used in a circular motion to loosen dirt and dead hair at the base of the coat. Again, do not use the rubber curry on the face or legs. The hard and soft body brushes are used in long sweeping motions in the direction of hair growth to remove loosened dirt and hair. The soft brush may be used on the face and legs. The hoof pick is used to remove debris or stones imbedded between the sole or shoe and frog. Do not attempt to use the hoof pick until a staff member or experienced volunteer has demonstrated the proper way pick a horse's hoof.

LEADERS AND SIDEWALKERS

As an Avalon volunteer, most of your time will be spent as a Horse Leader (HL) or Sidewalker (SVV)

Leader Guidelines. Volunteers are asked to be a Horse Leader if they have extensive previous horse experience *or* have extensive experience as an Avalon volunteer. A Horse Leader's primary responsibility is the horse. The lead rope should be properly attached *between* the reins to either the halter or the hackamore. Hold the lead rope with your right hand 6-12 inches from the snap to allow for ample movement of the horse's head. The extra rope is held in the left hand. *Never* wrap the rope around your hand. When necessary, it is the leader's responsibility to gauge and control the Speed of the horse's gait. Should the horse be required to stop for more than a few seconds, the HL should stand directly in front of the horse, facing the horse. This is also necessary during mounting and dismounting as it is imperative the horse does not move during these processes. Before mounting, the instructor will tighten the girth. Many horses toss their heads and some will attempt to bite during this process, so be aware.

Horses are led on the left side. Do not "drag" the horse behind you, or allow them to walk too far in front of you. Make the horse follow your pace rather than you follow his. Keep the horse's head straight, especially when trotting. Turning the horse's head toward you will cause his body to move crookedly and potentially cause the rider to become unevenly seated. Keep at least two horse lengths between your horse and the horse in front of you. If necessary, notify the rider and sidewalkers that you plan to circle to maintain proper spacing. Make wide turns and watch for cones or other obstacles that may impede sidewalkers. Smooth transitions are integral to avoid throwing the rider off balance. Steady steps help maintain the rider's balance. When leading a pokey horse, short tugs are more effective than a steady pull.

Riders are encouraged to control their horse to the maximum of their ability. Give the rider three to five seconds before assisting him or her. A leader must never take the place of the rider, but should be there to assist in his or her progress and encourage independence. While the rider controls the horse, leaders should be careful to not impede the horse's movements. When halting, the rider should say "Ho." If the horse does not stop, tug slightly backward then release. If the horse does not respond immediately, repeat with several tugs. Do not ever hit the horse. Reprimands will be done by staff as necessary, or staff will advise horse leaders how to handle specific situations.

Leaders need to be aware of their sidewalkers. Allow ample space for them when next to fences or other obstacles. Horse leaders must also be aware of rider height when passing under tree branches on the trail. Should an unusual circumstance occur while leading the horse, never let go of the horse. Try to read the horse's body language. Be firm, calm and confident in an unusual and/or potentially dangerous situation. As a horse leader, you must never leave your horse to assist other volunteers or riders. Remember, the horse is your responsibility.

Horse leaders are not responsible to assist riders in mounting and dismounting. The instructor will request that the leader lead the horse to the mounting or dismounting area where you will halt and stand in front of the horse. Following the class, find out if your horse is used in the next lesson. If possible, take a time out to give the horse a drink of water (especially on hot days). If the horse has no other riders, ask if he should be put in a stall or out in the pasture.

Sidewalker Guidelines. New volunteers or volunteers with limited horse experience will be asked to walk beside the horse to assist the rider. A sidewalker should always focus on the rider. Walk abreast of the rider's leg; close enough to provide necessary assistance to the rider, but not in the way of the horse or the rider's progress. The goal is for the rider to achieve optimal independence in the safest way possible.

Sidewalkers help the rider with balance and ensure completion of assigned tasks by the instructor. Some riders need minimal assistance or occasional support while others need continuous support (called a thigh hold). The instructor will advise volunteers of the method of support for each rider. Be sure you understand the method and are at ease with instructions before assisting a rider.

Listen to the instructor's directions so that you can be ready to reinforce them if necessary. Should the rider need no support, walk along side and be certain your attention remains on the rider. If you are the only sidewalker, walk on the left side of the horse (the same side the leader walks on). In the case of an emergency, it is easier to stabilize a rider if you are on the same side as the leader.

The sidewalker should get the instructor's attention and ask the leader to bring the horse to a stop if:

- The rider is off balance and cannot regain balance while the horse is moving
- The saddle pad has slipped or the girth needs to be tightened
- The stirrups need adjusting
- The rider's helmet needs adjusting
- The rider is fatigued, in pain, or needs to stop for any reason
- You need to change sides or are having difficulty carrying on comfortably

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

Please inform staff if you are a doctor, a nurse, with the police or fire department, or otherwise have advanced medical training. In the event of an emergency:

- Horse leader faces the horse, strokes his neck and speaks soothingly. Remember: A leader's responsibility is the horse. Never let go of the horse.
- Carefully move the horse away from the fallen rider, regardless of whether or not it was your rider who has fallen.
- Sidewalkers should follow the instructor's requests. Make every attempt not to spook or startle horses.
- Speak calmly to riders in any emergency and stay composed

RELATING TO THE DISABLED PERSON

Working with disabled persons may be a new experience for some volunteers. If so, allow yourself time to become comfortable with the riders. The opportunity to get to know our riders and their families is very rewarding. The key is to relax and be you. Speak directly to the individual instead of to someone with him or her. Many riders enjoy talking about their horse or how long they've been riding. Offer assistance when asked or when the situation requires it. Respect privacy. Talk about the disability if the subject comes up naturally, but don't pry.

A disability is only one characteristic of a person and does not define his or her entire being. Communicate from your heart without showing exaggerated sympathy or affection. Remember to treat riders in an age-appropriate manner as they will treat you the same. Choose your words with dignity, making reference to the person first, not the disability. Preferred terms focus attention on the uniqueness and worth of the individual, rather than placing emphasis on the disabling condition. A brief sample of words to avoid is listed below:

- Afflicted with blindness-Use "person who is blind"
- Crippled-Use "physically disabled" or "physically challenged"
- Stricken with-Use "person who has..."
- Confined to a wheelchair-Use "person who uses a wheelchair"
- Birth defect-Use "congenital disability"
- Mongol or Mongoloid-Use "Down's Syndrome"
- Slow/Retarded-Use "learning disability"
- Normal/Healthy-Use "Non-disabled"

More information regarding physical and cognitive disabilities is available upon request. Please ask a staff member for details.

VOLUNTEER RIDING

Riding lessons may be available at a reduced cost for volunteers. If you are interested, please contact the instructor. For insurance reasons, no dogs or other personal pets are allowed on the Avalon grounds. Guests are not allowed contact with horses or clients, without staff present. Children must be attended at all times, and for that reason, volunteers should not bring their children during volunteer time.

THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING AT AVALON !!!