

Training Manual Part I  
For Hippotherapy & Therapeutic Riding  
Assistants

## WELCOME TO TAKING THE LEAD, INC

To our future assistant,

Thank you for your interest in Assisting with Taking the Lead, Inc hippotherapy and therapeutic riding lessons.

Lesson Assistants are a vital part of our program. We could not offer these beneficial services to our riders with you!

Realizing the motivational power of animal assisted activities, Chelsea founded Taking the Lead, Inc. It is the aim of Taking the Lead, Inc to utilize trained therapy animals to instill confidence, success, and independence within every one of our participants. Taking the Lead, Inc offers hippotherapy, recreational therapeutic riding, dog training, and service dog training services. Chelsea is an occupational therapist and dog trainer who specialized training in Autism studies and operated a therapeutic riding program at River Valley Ranch from 2011-2015.

Hippotherapy and recreational therapeutic riding use equine oriented activities to contribute positively to the cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being of people with disabilities. The main difference between the two is that individuals engaging in Hippotherapy are meeting therapy goals. Hippotherapy is performed by a licensed therapist who utilizes equine movement to facilitate an individual's therapy goals. These goals may include postural control and trunk strength to transfer with more ease or to learn to communicate more effectively. In contrast, Individuals participating in recreational therapeutic riding aim to learn to ride a horse as independently as possible. The therapeutic riding instructors at Taking the Lead, Inc are PATH certified. By assisting in lessons, YOU can help our riders gain such benefits!

Please read through the Assistance manual and feel free to ask any questions. Prior to Assisting at Taking the Lead, Inc all Assistants must attend an orientation session and fill out forms including a health form, Taking the Lead contract, a waiver, and an understanding of roles and policies and procedures found at our website. If you have any questions, contact us by email located at the end of this manual.

Your contributions of time, talent, and treasure are hugely appreciated, and without you the Taking the Lead program could not function.

**THANK YOU!!!**

Sincerely,

The board members and clients of Taking the Lead, Inc

## **Requirements for Assistants:**

Leaders (volunteers assigned to control the horse) and sidewalkers (volunteers who walk alongside the riders) must be at least 15 years of age and must be capable of walking and jogging alongside a horse for short durations of time. Horse Leaders should have extensive experience with horses and must demonstrate competency in handling horses. Sidewalkers do not need to have previous horse experience, but should be comfortable working around and walking next to them. Unless otherwise arranged,

Sidewalkers may be asked to maintain a therapeutic hold, which consists of holding an arm up at about shoulder level. Anyone with shoulder pain can ask to work with a rider not requiring this type of hold.

Expect to be at the farm 20 min before and after the scheduled volunteer window to help with horse preparation, arena set-up and after-class clean-up. Volunteers should commit to attending the entire 4 week session.

Please notify Chelsea Whitaker when you are unable to attend a class for which you had committed. Text or call 443-690-1176 as soon as possible.

## **Attire:**

Foot wear is very important for safety. Horses can step on a volunteer's foot causing a great deal of pain if the person is wearing soft shoes. Sturdy boots with a heel is highly recommended. Sandals, flip-flops as well as soft-toed shoes such as ballet shoes or Crocs are prohibited. Be aware that hats and sunglasses may be grabbed by some riders, so use caution. Leave dangling jewelry at home and avoid perfume as it may attract stinging insects and can be irritating to riders with hypersensitivities and allergies.

In cooler months, we recommend that you dress in layers. It is often windier and cooler at the farms than it is in town. Bring hats and gloves if needed and consider leaving an extra sweatshirt in your car!

## **Assistants can expect:**

- A comprehensive orientation and training session and opportunities for continued education as requested
- A safe and supportive environment
- A clear understanding of program expectations
- Assignment to a student or horse with whom you feel comfortable
- Select information about your assigned student or horse to assist in a safe and effective manner
- Recognition and appreciation for your time
- Prompt communication in response to your concerns

### **Taking The Lead can expect that Assistants will:**

- Arrive on time, properly attired with a cheerful attitude and sign in and out
- Check email from Mama Chita for possible class cancellations in the event of temperature extremes or severe weather at the discretion of Taking the Lead, Inc.
- Attend exclusively to the needs of their assigned rider or horse.
- Act in accordance with Taking the Lead policy and procedures as outlined in the orientation and volunteer manual.
- Know the location of both fire extinguishers in the barn and to direct all individuals to the lighted “Timberbrook” sign in the event of a fire or fire drill, or congregate in the barn with the ramp in the event of any other weather emergency or thunderstorm

### **Our Riders**

Taking the Lead, Inc provides therapeutic horseback riding to children and adults with a wide range of special needs. Riders may have physical disabilities of varying degrees. Some may need a wheelchair for mobility, while others have mild muscle weakness or incoordination. Other riders have cognitive impairments and may have difficulty following directions and/or limited speech Some riders may appear “normal,” but they may have less obvious needs including sensory processing issues or learning disabilities

Sometimes, riders will demonstrate challenging behaviors. The instructor can help you learn some strategies will be helpful in managing these behaviors. The movement of the horse is often calming, so for some riders, you may be asked to keep your horse moving as much as possible. Providing choices can often help avoid resistive behaviors. Ignoring non-critical misbehavior is often best. Please seek help from your instructor when you have any concerns regarding behavior issues.

If you have questions about why a rider demonstrates certain physical, cognitive or behavior challenges, please ask our instructors for information at a time that the rider and his or her family members are not present. We like to focus on the strengths our riders demonstrate while they are riding.

At the end of the volunteer notebook, we include descriptions of some of the impairment our riders may have.

### **Confidentiality**

Specific diagnoses and information about our riders are confidential; medical records and progress reports are available with the supervision of Taking the Lead, Inc staff. Frequently, volunteers may acquire more details about riders, either through caregivers or the riders themselves. Due to HIPPA Laws **important to remember that such information should be treated confidentially** and not discuss casually or in public places. Similarly, photography of horses, riders (or volunteers) is not permitted without written authorization.

## Before the Class Begins

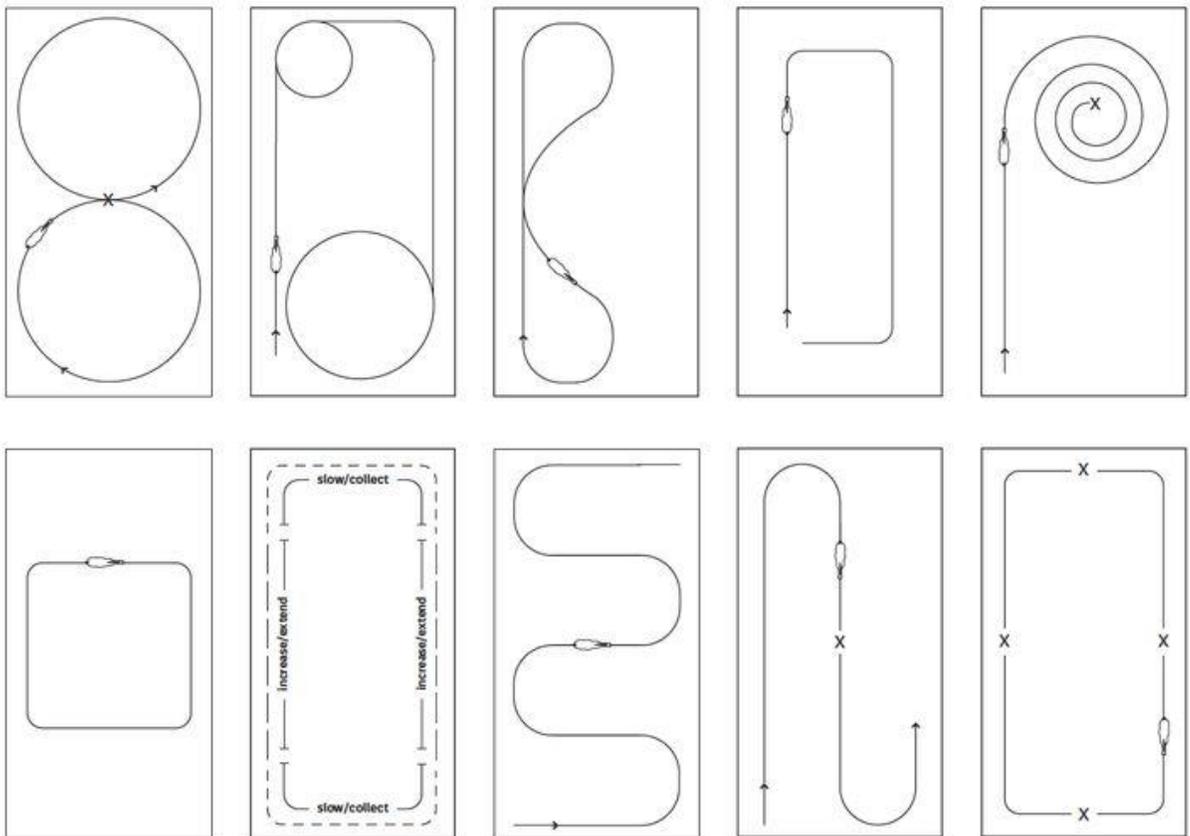
Before leaving the house, remember to bring your water bottle, or extra clothing in case of inclement weather. You may want to keep your phone and purse locked securely in the car.

Upon arrival, proceed to the Sign in table, turn of your cell phone, and sign your name on the attendance sheet. Remember to pick up a nametag, check the volunteer board for any messages and then check in with the class instructor.

Don't forget to sign out before you leave!

Typical Patterns utilized by instructors in the arena are listed below:

**“The Figure 8” “10 m. &20m circle” “The Teardrop” “The Rectangle” “The Cyclone”**



**“The Square” “Ext vs. Collection” “The Zipper” “The Middle Change” “Center Halts”**

Please read the *Training Manual Part II* for detailed instruction for leading and sidewalking. Then sign below acknowledging that you have read and understand *Training Manual Part I & Part II* and the roles of being a sidewalker or leader. Other forms that need to be completed by assistants include a Taking the Lead Contract, health form, and waiver located on our website or, [Takingthelead.org](http://Takingthelead.org).

# **I Have Read and Understood Training Manuals Part I and II as Summarized Below:**

## **Job Description for Horse Leaders**

Horse Leaders are an integral part of the volunteer team. They are responsible for preparing the horse prior to the start of class, maintaining control of the horse during the mounting and riding activities and putting the horse and tack away. Experienced as a horse handler, the leader provides a safe riding experience for Taking the Lead riders and pleasant experience for the therapy horse. Horse Leaders are responsible for the safety of the team.

## **Responsibilities of Horse Leaders**

- Sign in upon arrival and sign out
- The Horse Leader's primary responsibility is to the horse and the safety of the team. They are **NOT** to interact with the rider or the side walkers except to clarify their instructions.
- Groom and tack horses, following Taking the Lead's procedures of safe tying and gentle handling, especially during tacking.
- Assist the instructor with doing a second tack check including saddle/surcingle tightness, saddle and pad alignment, safety stirrup with bands on outside of boot, halter/bridle and bit fit, and overall horse wellness
- Show ability to control a horse's speed at walk and trot in a calm fashion, speeding up or slowing down as instructed, respecting the horse at all times and avoiding undue pulling on lead line. Verbalize "Door" before opening a gate and verbalize "Inside" when passing a horse to the inside of the ring.
- Taking the Lead, Inc horses have language they were trained on enforced with ground work: To back up: face the horse verbalize "spsss spss spss" sound when no rider is on horse. When a rider is on the horse, one cluck means speed up, two clucks mean trot, kiss means canter, easy means slow down, Ho means halt, walk on means walk forward.
- **If a horse is giving you difficulty during a lesson, Do Not Correct the horse. Notify the instructor. Correcting the horse may put the rider in danger**
- Show ability to maintain the horse at a halt for the length of time needed for mounting, dismounting and periods of stopping during class.
- Follow directions provided by the instructor regarding walking on halting, turning etc. while allowing the rider to participate to full potential. Leader must wait for rider to initiate action whenever possible.
- Demonstrate the ability to maintain safe spacing between horses as well as between the horse and side barriers such as arena wall or fence to allow for safety of the sidewalker throughout class.
- Understand and have the ability to address common horse misbehavior.
- Demonstrate maturity in ability to follow specific directions in an emergency situation.
- **In an emergency situation**, The leader is to remove the horse from the situation and take the horse to a stall and remove the bridle and lead
- Maintain confidentiality of riders' diagnoses and challenges.

**NEVER WRAP THE EXCESS LEAD LINE AROUND YOUR HAND, DRAPE AROUND YOUR NECK OR TIE AROUND YOUR WAIST.**

The primary responsibility of the leader is to control the horse. The sidewalker will monitor and insure the rider's safety. The leader should avoid giving verbal directions to the rider, since they will be confusing when the sidewalker is also giving directions

## Job Description for Sidewalkers

Sidewalkers are an integral part of the volunteer team, being responsible for helping set up the arena, welcoming riders prior to class, maintaining safety of riders during mounting and riding activities and helping riders follow directions provided by riding instructor. Sidewalkers may help with the grooming of horses prior to class. Previous experience with horses is not necessary, but it is helpful to have prior experience working with children or with children or adults with special needs. Sidewalkers are supervised by riding instructors and/or the executive director.

### Job Responsibilities of Sidewalker

- Sign in upon arrival and sign out, help the rider sign in
- Under supervision of the instructor, help with arena set-up and with grooming and tacking as needed and if knowledgeable in these activities.
- Assist the instructor by noticing helmet fit and the maintenance of feet in the stirrups
- Follow instructor's direction with regards to the amount of physical and verbal assistance provided to the riders during mounting/dismounting and riding activities and provide this with consistency.
- If requested by the instructor, show the ability to effectively prompt rider with physical or verbal cues only when prompted.
- Maintain attention to rider throughout class to monitor situation for unsafe actions or loss of balance
- Maintain cheerful but professional attitude with riders, showing patience: once rider is mounted, refrain from conversation unrelated to lesson.
- Maintain position as sidewalker alongside rider during periods at halt, walking and trotting, having the necessary endurance to walk for approximately 30 minutes with short periods of trotting. Show ability to maintain therapeutic hold for up to 30 minutes or ask to switch sides and proceed in a safe manner.
- Present a cheerful attitude towards horses and riders in our program.
- Ask the instructor if you may provide specific encouragement when the rider is halted at the beginning of the lesson. Sometimes excess directions and verbal input is minimized based on the needs of the individual rider
- **In an emergency**, the off side sidewalker takes the offside foot out of the stirrup to prepare for a dismount and calls 911 if necessary ASAP. The inside sidewalker or instructor acting as inside sidewalker will assist the rider in an emergency dismount, gently lowering them to the floor. The sidewalker helps assist directing people to the proper location in an emergency: The lighted Timberbrook sign in the event of a fire and the barn with the ramp in case of a thunderstorm or weather related emergency
- Upon mounting, The sidewalker verbalize the roles of the team members in times of an emergency

I have read and understand emergency procedure in the event of a fire, thunder storm, or rider emergency. I have read and understood the *Training Manual Part I & Part II* for Taking the Lead, Inc. I understand the roles and responsibilities of being a leader/sidewalker and the physical capabilities necessary

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

**Contact us:**

For cancellations or lesson information, contact

Chelsea Whitaker, Lead Instructor

Email: [Chelsea@takingthelead.org](mailto:Chelsea@takingthelead.org)

Phone: 443-690-1176

Website: [takingthelead.org](http://takingthelead.org)

For interest in volunteer opportunities, contact

Conchita Whitaker (MamaChita)

Volunteer Coordinator

410-218-4131

Address:

Timberbrook Farm

21000 Slab Bridge Rd

Freeland, MD 21053