

*Progressive Equestrian Therapeutic Services, Inc.*

*P.O. Box 1244*

*Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20773-1244*

**Information for Volunteers**

A volunteer must be at least fourteen (14) years old and physically fit. You will be expected to walk approximately forty-five minutes per riding class and be able to jog for several minutes at a time. If you have had a history of back problems, please inform the director. If you have a health condition that may require emergency care, please note this is on your volunteer form and notify the director.

Volunteers are covered by insurance while participating in PETS activities, please notify the director or instructor if you are injured, regardless of how minor the injury may seem.

**Please call if you are unable to come at your scheduled time.** Please give us as much notice as possible, so that a substitute may be contacted. Students may not ride without the proper number of assigned volunteers. If you know when you will be going on vacation, please write those dates on the director's calendar as soon as possible. There are facilities for indoor lessons (classroom instruction) and on rainy evenings the students will have instruction.

A volunteer for Progressive Equestrian Therapeutic Services, Inc. should be:

- familiar with the safety rules and obey them at all times
- on time for all scheduled sessions
- respectful of the students' feelings and needs
- dressed appropriately
- informed that ***no alcoholic beverages are allowed on the premises during the PETS program***

**What Does A Volunteer Do at PETS?**

The volunteer is an asset to the instructor. How? The volunteer can direct the student's attention toward the instructor. Any volunteer information should be kept within the bounds set by the lesson. Too many directions may cause confusion.

The volunteer should be on the alert for any signs of trouble. **USE COMMON SENSE.** Do not let a rider get too close to another horse; do not let the horse get out of control; do not allow a student to walk behind any horse; no students are allowed in the ring without a volunteer in attendance.

The volunteer should be able to enjoy each individual student's personality. Feel free to have fun with the student; get involved with the lessons; be proud of the student's progress; and cheer for the student's successes.

## **An Evening at PETS:**

**The horses are brought up from the pastures, tack and equipment are distributed, and horses are groomed, tacked and taken to ring. The ring is setup for lessons. After the last riding session, the evening's work is not finished. The instructor, director and volunteers are responsible for securing all equipment, returning horses to the barn to be unpacked, groomed and fed. All barn equipment must be secured**

### ***Volunteer Tasks Available:***

#### ***Horse Care/Grooming***

**Grooming a horse: Grooming a horse and making sure his stall area is clean is an important part of the horse's general health. As a volunteer you will be providing a valuable part of horse care. Before you start the grooming process, you will need to make sure your horse is secure by placing the halter and lead rope on cross ties located outside the stalls. The purpose of grooming a horse is to check and clean all parts of the horses, face, coat, mane, tail, and hooves. Grooming a horse assures attention to the health of the horse and also builds a relationship with the horse. This creates an act of love, respect, and gratitude. The grooming procedure should be done before and after any horse activity.**

**Volunteers should be familiar with the tools that are essential for properly grooming a horse. Each horse has his personal grooming tote. Please do not swap grooming tools.**

**The grooming tote Includes:**

- **Curry comb – used for brushing the horse to loosen dirt and hair.**
- **Hard brush – used on all parts of the horse except on the horses face.**
- **Soft brush – used to every ware including the face**
- **Hoof pick – to clean the horses' hooves.**
- **Mane Comb – for the mane and tail**

### ***Volunteers Responsibility during the lessons:***

#### ***The Leader***

The leader is responsible for the control of the horse if the student is unable to assume total control. Most of the students require some assistance. Some students may need total assistance while some students will be attempting to ride without direct assistance from the leader.

The leader should walk on the left side of the horse, slightly behind the head near the shoulder. The shank (lead) should be held in the right hand about eight (8) inches away from the snap. The shank should be slack to allow the student to take control of the horse. Do not walk in front of the horse's shoulder nor should you walk behind the shoulder; either way you will interfere with the horse's natural gait. Please keep your hands away from the horse's mouth. Do not wrap the extra length of shank around either hand; instead, the extra shank should be held in the left hand loosely. Be careful that the shank does not interfere with the reins.

No matter how slow or lazy the horse is, the leader should not try to pull the horse to speed it up. The student should be encouraged to increase the speed. The instructor will ask you to assist the student if necessary. If you try to speed up the horse with a steady pull on the shank, you will not have a positive effect. In fact, you may cause the horse to become excited or irritated. The small pull and release method is the best way to work with the horse.

**The Leader At The Mounting Ramp - Please do not attempt to assist the students during the mounting process. The therapists and instructors will mount all the students. Riders always mount from the near**

(left) side of the animal. When mounting, grooming or during social visits with the horse, students should always address the horse from the front.

If you are leading for a student who mounts from the ramp, please pay close attention to the instructor/therapist. You will want to place the animal as close as possible to the side of the platform from which the student will mount. Your responsibility, while the student is mounting, is to keep the horse as still and as quiet as possible. Stand quietly, directly in front of the horse during the entire mounting process. When the student is safely mounted, you will be asked to move the horse forward away from the platform to a safe area in the ring to make any adjustments to the stirrups or tack. After all adjustments are made, the horse is ready to begin the lesson.

If you are leading for a student who is learning to mount independently, you will be guided by the instructor/therapist. If a mounting block is used, the horse needs to be positioned closely beside the block. Stand directly in front of the horse, unless informed differently. Keep the horse still and calm during the mounting process. Do not attempt to help the student mount, the therapist or instructor will assist if necessary.

Leading The Horse During The Lesson - Once the student is safely mounted and all adjustments have been made to the rider and tack, the lesson will begin. During the entire lesson, observe all safety precautions. Be sure to keep the horse a safe distance from other horses in the ring. Remember that if you ride too closely to the horse in front of you, the horse in front may become threatened or upset. If this happens he will use the only defense he knows how to use - he will kick out. This will be avoided if you keep at least one horse length distance between all horses all the time. If the student is unable to maintain this distance, it is your responsibility to intercede and space the animals correctly.

Leading at the walk - Please remember that there are sidewalkers with you; therefore, do not allow the rider to get too close to the fences, which can be uncomfortable for the sidewalkers. During the exercises, do not make any sharp turns or sudden stops. Please let the rider use all of his/her skills. The lessons are designed to teach riding skills, it is important to let the rider use these skills in learning to control the horse. Do not do the work for the rider, only assist the student to maintain safety or if the instructor asks you to do so.

Leading at the trot - Some students will be learning to trot. It is important to keep a slow, steady pace. The leader should help keep the horse moving forward evenly until the instructor asks you to stop. If the horse is reluctant to trot, don't get in front of the horse and pull on the shank, this will cause more resistance. Try to maintain your position beside the horse, urging him forward. If this does not work well, the instructor will help you. Keep your eye on the student to ensure that he/she is in a safe position.

Leading during games - Games are an important part of instruction. The instructor will give the rules for the game, please listen carefully so that you can help your rider understand the directions. The leader and the sidewalkers should encourage the student to do as much as he/she can. When the leader and sidewalkers show an interest in the game, their enthusiasm can make the game more exciting to the student. However, allow the riders to do the work themselves as this provides a feeling of accomplishment and pride. During the excitement of the games, please obey all safety rules. Watch distances between horses and avoid sharp turns and quick stops.

Leader during the halt - Whenever a HALT is called, after the student has stopped the horse (some students will require assistance to halt, you will be so advised), you will step in front of the horse, face the rider and remain in this position until further directed.

Leader at the dismount - The instructor or therapist will assist those students who require help at the dismount. You will receive specific instructions regarding your rider. During the dismount, you should stand in front of the horse and keep him still and calm until the student has dismounted, run up the stirrups and said good bye to the horse.

Leader responsibility during an emergency - There is always the possibility of an emergency. To ensure the safety of all those in the ring, emergency procedures must be practiced. If an emergency is called; stop your horse; step in front of the horse; face the rider; help keep the rider and other volunteers calm. **Never let go of**

**your horse!** *A loose horse in the riding area is a serious problem.* The key to emergencies is to remain calm, and do your part quietly. Let the instructor and other PETS' staff handle the immediate problem. If there is the need, an **emergency dismount** will be called. This procedure will be practiced before the sessions begin as well as periodically during the sessions.

### ***The Sidewalkers***

The job of the sidewalkers is to attend to the rider at all times. Student requirements vary from full maximum attendance to sidewalker observation. Some students will require that you place your arm directly on the saddle-lightly contacting the student. Some students will require that you have contact during some of the lesson and not during other parts. Some students will be attempting to ride unassisted and you will walk beside the student during that part of the lesson. Some students will require two sidewalkers and others only one. Your role is not to *"hold the rider in the saddle"*, rather you are there as a safety measure. You will be the primary persons responsible for removing the student from the horse if an **emergency dismount** is required. This procedure will be practiced before the riding session begins and periodically during the sessions. Both students and volunteers will practice this important procedure.

Since the sidewalker is so close to the rider, often the rider may want to engage in conversation. Do not ignore the rider, but help focus the attention to the instruction. If your rider is not paying attention or doesn't hear the instruction, you can help by repeating the instruction. Please do not add to the lesson. The lessons are designed to teach a progression of skills. Additional comments may be correct, but may not be appropriate during that lesson.

One of the worst distractions in the ring is excessive talking. Please do not talk to the leaders, sidewalkers, parents, etc. while you are working with the student. Some of the riders have attention difficulties and any cross talking is confusing. It is very appropriate for you to reinforce the lesson and encourage the student to try harder. Enjoy the student's progress; tell the student when he/she has done well. Remember to keep all talk to a minimum during instruction time.

### **Remember that the basic rules for all staff and volunteers are simple:**

- **Use common sense**
- **Think safety at all times.**
- **Respect the students, horses, and other volunteers.**
- **Become a part of the team – horse, rider, leader, sidewalkers, therapist, instructor, & parent.**
- **Laugh and enjoy our activities.**
- **Allow each student to succeed through his/her own achievements.**

### ***Some general information about the students/riders:***

The student riders coming to the PETS program bring various types of disabling conditions -- both visible and invisible. The goal of PETS is to provide a program that will meet the needs of each student and build upon his/her abilities. You will be given information regarding the students on an *"as needed basis"* to enable you to work effectively with the student rider you are assigned. **Please remember this information is confidential.** If you have questions or suggestions, please speak with the instructor or director.

**POLICY:** Prior to the start of each program year, all volunteers will be trained or retrained. They will be given a written handout for review. They will routinely rehearse emergency procedures and will be encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to expand their skills/knowledge level. Leaders and sidewalkers must successfully demonstrate the ability to perform the requirements outlined in the job descriptions of these roles.

The information in this handout outlines the job descriptions for both leaders and sidewalkers. The role of leader requires horse handling experience. Knowledge of horses allows the leader to evaluate and respond appropriately with the interactions of the riding team. The sidewalker's role requires size and strength to assist the rider as necessary and the ability to evaluate and respond appropriately with the horse/rider team. Leaders and sidewalkers must demonstrate the ability to fulfill the requirements outlined in this handout.

Please do not make changes to the rider's assigned equipment nor augment/alter instruction without the instructor's knowledge and approval.

The greatest gift you bring to your student rider is to allow him/her to succeed or not to succeed through his/her own achievements. It is important to allow the rider time and opportunity to concentrate, to problem solve, to process information and to arrive at the solution without intervention. Learning travels through errors on the road to success. Prompting and cueing the rider reinforces negative thoughts about his/her disabilities and over shadow his/her abilities. "Talk" disrupts the rider's attention which needs to be directed to the task at hand.

**Treat all information you may share, infer or observe regarding students, family members, volunteers, staff or horses with respect and confidentiality. Respect the rights and privacy of all members of the PETS program. Any concerns you may have should be discussed directly with the Instructor or Director.**

It is the volunteer's responsibility to initiate communication regarding PETS related concerns, problems, and/or positive feedback. Please understand the evenings we ride are hectic at best. **These responsibilities make conversation difficult. Productive communication needs a more relaxed atmosphere. The staff is available after they have finished all the necessary chores. If you are unable to stay that late, please leave a message -- a note on the clipboard in the office, a message on the answering machine (301-627-4308), or Email [pgcpets@gmail.com](mailto:pgcpets@gmail.com) when using the answering machine, please speak slowly and leave both your day and evening telephone numbers.**

**Remember:**

- **Use common sense- Review the Emergency Information**
- **Safety First**
- **Allow each student to succeed through his/her own achievements.**

*Progressive Equestrian Therapeutic Services, Inc.*

**Volunteer Information Addendum continued**

**Signature Page**

PLEASE READ, SIGN, AND RETURN TO DIRECTOR

I have attended a **Progressive Equestrian Therapeutic Services, Inc. (PETS)** training session and I accept the responsibility to review the information contained in the handout.

I agree to follow these guidelines and procedures.

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date