



MY HEROES, LLC.
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES, ONE HOOF AT A TIME

SIDE WALKER MANUAL

Updated 2021

The Side Walker Position

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

Sidewalker location and positioning:

Sidewalkers are positioned at the rider’s knee. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security to the rider if needed. It is also a safe place to be positioned for your safety around the horse.

Balance:

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

Changing positions or sides:

Since the student with less muscle tone requires the volunteer to exert enormous physical energies, you may need to change sides throughout the lessons. To do so,

notify the instructor and horse leader that you need to “switch” sides. Come to the center of the arena and change with the other sidewalker one at a time. The student must never be totally left alone during a change over since falling could occur.

Correct rider position:

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

Communication:

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

Assisting the rider with instructions:

When an instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process before responding. If the instructor says “turn to the right toward me”, and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, “right” to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and learn when they need help and when they’re not paying attention. Sometimes volunteers forget that the riders are to do the exercises. The same applies to games: don’t get so competitive that you start to take over for the rider because you want them to win. The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow to be as independent as possible. You are there to support and help challenge the rider to be the best of their ability.

Attention:

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

Anticipate:

Sidewalkers will learn from experience how to anticipate difficulties from the horse or rider which might create accidents. Be as prepared as possible for the unexpected. Use your judgment as necessary. The horse does not always act in a predictable manner or “according to procedure”. Always be alert to your surroundings. We have unique situations at My Heroes and the Temple Grandin Equine Center that come from our environment.

Types of Holds

Thigh Hold:

The thigh hold is the most common type of hold, which provides a good amount of support and stability for the rider. To perform this hold, place your forearm over the rider’s thigh and create an “X”. This hold is always used out of the mounting area and during a trot.

Gait Belt Hold:

Some of our riders will require a gait belt hold, which requires the use of both hands. With your closest hand, grab a hold of the gait belt, and with your other hand either do a thigh hold or ankle hold. Though this hold is much more involved, do not walk backwards (trust us, we’ve seen it all). If you have any questions regarding this hold, just ask your therapist or instructor.

Ankle Hold:

The ankle hold provides the least amount of hands on support. By grabbing the clients ankle near their achilles tendon, this allows the leg to stretch down into proper position, as well as prevent “happy feet” from kicking the horse. As good as our horses are, with lots of kicking or applied pressure, many of our horses think this is a cue to walk faster or even trot.

Floater:

The last position is the floater position. In this position you will walk alongside the rider without any direct hands on support. With this position, staying alert to the rider and horse are key. While staying close to your rider in case of needed support or an emergency, this position allows the most freedom to riders.

Always check with your therapist or instructor on which hold they prefer for the rider. If you are unsure, just ask! Safety is always our top priority, and in this setting, there are no wrong questions.