



Parent Handbook

Misty Meadows Mitey Riders

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Our Mission

- ✓ To offer effective and creative equine-assisted therapy to children with special needs;
- ✓ To provide a positive, non-judgmental environment for riders and their families;
- ✓ To encourage the development of human-animal relationships;
- ✓ To use our riding activities to support goals from other therapies, schools, etc.

Our Vision

To offer equine-assisted therapy to children with special needs for as long as those needs exist.

Founders & History

Marilyn and Harry Swimmer began their Misty Meadows dream in 1968. With three children — Scott, David and Jody — Misty Meadows took shape as a premier facility for the breeding, training and showing of Saddlebred horses. In 1993 the Swimmers changed gears, and dedicated their farm in Weddington to a therapeutic riding program where children with special needs ride horses each week, free of charge, assisted by over 175 wonderful volunteers. Riders with challenges like cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, spina bifida or autism, benefit from relationships formed with other students, volunteers and even the horses, whose gentle rhythmic movements closely parallel those of human gaits.

The inspiration for Mitey Riders came in the form of a 6 year old girl by the name of Stacy Marx. When Harry sat Stacy on a horse for the first time, she seemed transformed by the experience. Stacy, who is deaf, challenged with poor body coordination and strength, and unable to walk, inspired Harry to research therapeutic riding and to open his heart and his Misty Meadows Farm to others with disabilities.

The partnership between Harry Swimmer and Joy Simon allowed his dream to take shape. Joy - Program Director of Mitey Riders, was born and raised in Charlotte where she developed her background in education as well as veterinary and horsemanship. Joy continues to be the driving force in the operations, creativity and results of Misty Meadows Mitey Riders.

Misty Meadows Mitey Riders therapeutic center is fully accredited by Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International and continues to gain respect of professions like the American Physical Therapy Association and the Occupational Therapy Association. The Mitey Riders goal is to continue to provide the opportunities and benefits of their program for as long as there are people with physical and mental disabilities.

How to Prepare Your Child to Ride

To prepare your child to ride, please make sure he/she:

- Has had a snack or meal
- Has had enough sleep the night before
- Is outfitted with a helmet, long pants and hard-sole shoes with a heel
- Is dressed for the weather, with gloves if needed to keep hands warm.
- Is excited about his/her lesson

Please let the farm staff and/or the Volunteer Coordinator know if your rider's schedule or medications have changed, as both of those can affect the success and safety of their lesson.

What to Expect During Lessons

Class activities are designed to challenge and benefit our riders in physical, cognitive and social ways, and are a combination of riding skills and creative educational games. The basic riding skills we teach and develop include: walk, halt, trot, canter (when appropriate), 2-point, turning, barrel courses, cavaletti poles and more. In addition, we strengthen these skills through games such as bowling, beanbag toss, memory, matching and more. For added benefit, we take riders through our Sensory Trail — an interactive learning trail ride within the wooded acres of Misty Meadows Farm. Visit our web site to learn more about specific class activities.

A Rider's Team

Mitey Rider Teams are the combination of one horse, one rider and as many as three volunteers. Throughout the course of each riding season, we do our best to keep the same "teams" together as often as possible. The consistency built within the team allows for the riders to succeed at their highest level, while gaining trust in his/her horse, leader and side-walkers. While we definitely understand that our teams will not be fully available 100% of each season, volunteer involvement on our teams means a lot to your rider's success in our program!

Required Forms & Prescriptions

EVERY season, regardless of tenure in the program, the following must be renewed or updated and submitted to the farm for our files:

- Profile form with address, phone numbers and email
- Prescription from a general physician
- Additional prescription from a specialist or approved therapist [if requested]
- Rider information release forms (if requested)
- Emergency contact information for rider and parents
- Photo, marketing and liability releases (if requested)
- Atlantoaxial instability verification for students with Down syndrome

Mitey Riders WILL NOT allow your rider to participate in classes until all updated paperwork has been submitted and filed in our office. This policy is to adhere to safety standards set forth by PATH Intl. and maintain our center's Premier Accredited status. For more info: www.pathintl.org.

Sign-In and Sign-Out

ALL parents and relatives who volunteer MUST sign in and sign out each time they are at the farm. Please use the labeled binder for "PARENTS ONLY" and please PRINT your information completely each time. This process not only records parent and family contributions to the Hours-4-Ours program, but also helps the farm keep track of how many people are on the property at each time, and to keep everyone safe.

Tardiness and Absences

Our policy on tardiness and absences is in place to keep our schedule running smoothly, to prevent class disruptions and to be fair to all other riders and volunteers.

Please arrive 10 minutes before your scheduled class time to prepare properly. **Riders who are 20 minutes late - without calling ahead - will not be permitted to ride.**

If a rider is unable to attend, you must call BOTH the farm and the Volunteer Coordinator. Advance notice is very important to ensure proper care of the horses and proper use of our volunteers. If you know a rider cannot attend a future lesson, advise us in writing on the sign-in sheets as soon as possible so we can make the necessary staff/horse adjustments.

If a rider is unable to attend a lesson and we do not receive a call, it will be considered a "no show." Due to the size of our program and the number of families on our waiting list, four "no shows" in one program season will result in the rider being removed from the program.

Policies

Etiquette and Behavior

- Please stay in the designated waiting areas until class begins.
- Please do not leave the farm during your rider's lesson.
- Please supervise your rider before and after class.
- Please DO NOT give treats to the horses.
- No running, screaming or throwing objects.
- No climbing on fences or gates.
- No SMOKING anywhere on the property.
- No gum chewing (for riders).
- Please stay off the mounting ramp unless asked by an Instructor.
- Please put away games and books in the office when you are done using them.
- Please make sure all trash makes its way to the trash receptacles.
- Please treat all humans and horses with respect.

Weather and Cancellations

- If we do not have enough trained volunteers present on any day to provide a safe ride, sessions may be cancelled.
- If the weather is below 32 degrees or there is snow/ice, sessions will be cancelled on a class-by-class basis.
- Even if morning classes are cancelled due to weather, afternoon classes may still take place – be sure to check the website and expect a call from the Volunteer Coordinator.
- If there is a severe thunderstorm, mounted sessions will be cancelled.

Attire

- All riders should be dressed in proper riding attire!
- Long “non-slip” pants (jeans or riding breeches) are required.
- Please no sweatpants, capris pants, shorts, leggings or “warm-up” suits!
- Shoes with a hard sole and a heel are required.
- Approved helmets must be worn at all times.
- Dangling jewelry may be unsafe and should not be worn!
- NO perfume or cologne, as it can attract insects.
- NO open-toe shoes, sandals or dress shoes.
- If you need help finding appropriate attire for your rider, just ask!

Helmets

Mitey Riders requires all riders to wear a safety-approved equestrian riding helmet EVERY TIME and ANY TIME they are on the back of a horse. Additionally, riders should purchase a new helmet after 3-5 years of use, or if the helmet has been banged around or is showing any cracks. The farm staff is happy to assist with fitting and/or purchasing riding helmets.

Siblings and Friends

Please DO NOT bring younger siblings or friends to a rider's lesson. This can be distracting for your rider, and other riders in the class. Older siblings who volunteer in the program are allowed. If you do not have an alternative but to bring younger siblings with you, they must be accompanied by a parent or guardian at all times. Please no swinging when lessons are taking place in the outdoor arena.

Pets

Please DO NOT bring your pets to the farm. Pets can be distracting for your rider and for the horses. If you do bring your pets to the farm, we will ask you to take them home immediately. Respectfully, we will keep all dogs who live on the farm out of the way of the lesson program, and ask that you do the same.

Lost and Found

Throughout the season, our main office accumulates clothing and riding gear that has been left behind. Please label your rider's clothing with their name so that we can keep it safe for you until the next time you return. If "found" items do NOT have a name on them, we will donate them directly to Goodwill.

Duration in Program

As we near the end of our riding season in April, and you know that your rider will NOT continue with Mitey Riders in the following year, please let us know AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Each year we accumulate a very long wait list, and the sooner we know of an available spot, the sooner we can start evaluations for new riders.

If for some reason Mitey Riders feels as though your rider should graduate from the program, you will be contacted directly by Harry and/or Joy to discuss the reasons and process. There are many reasons why a rider might be unable to continue in the program including, but not limited to: desire to ride, lack of physical, emotional or mental benefit, seizure control, behavior in a social setting or if we do not have an appropriate horse for the rider at the time.

New Riders

If you have a friend or family member who you would like to refer to the Mitey Rider program, he/she must follow the steps in our New Rider Policy:

- New rider applications are only accepted between April 1 and July 1 of each year.
- Applications must be FULLY COMPLETED to be accepted.
- There must be a current Doctor's Prescription attached to the application.

We will review all applications the first week of July and either contact you to come in for an evaluation or let you know that there is not an appropriate spot available for the upcoming riding season. If an applicant is deferred from the upcoming season, he/she may reapply the next year, again between April 1 and July 1, to be reconsidered.

Please note, there are many reasons why a rider might be deferred from the program including, but not limited to: scheduling availability (we have very limited openings each year), desire to ride, lack of physical, emotional or mental benefit, seizure control, behavior in a social setting or our ability to provide an appropriate horse or volunteers for the rider at the time. Parents may contact us for further explanation if their child is deferred from the program.

Parent Volunteering

One of the key ingredients to our program's success is the direct, hands-on participation from our parent and family volunteers. In exchange for offering therapeutic riding to our students free of charge, we ask parents and family members to become part of our Hours-4-Ours program and provide volunteer time to Mitey Riders each year. This commitment allows us to continue providing lessons at no financial cost to you.

There are virtually hundreds of tasks that need to be accomplished daily to keep a program of this magnitude effective and safe for our riders, horses and volunteers.

A few examples include:

- Leading*
- Side-walking*
- Sweeping barn
- Cleaning stalls
- Washing blankets, etc.
- Cleaning tack room
- Cleaning offices
- Cleaning bathrooms
- Photographing and/or filming classes
- Grooming horses*
- Mending fences
- Painting barn
- Getting others involved
- Organizing fund raisers

*These jobs require additional training sessions and experience-level prerequisites.

We try not to have a child's parent side-walk with them directly, as it can lead to distractions. However, if a parent would like to side-walk with another child in class, we will offer the option as long as it does not distract their own child from learning. In addition, there is a comprehensive list of tasks available that need to be done in and around the barn each day.

Thank you in advance for your hard work, support and dedication to the program. For more information on parent involvement, please e-mail us at ridewithus@miteyriders.org

Mitey Riders Volunteer Committees

Parents may volunteer to help with one of the specific committees listed below to coordinate activities at the farm.

Mitey Market Committee

- organizes Mitey Market
- keeps a quarterly, up-to-date inventory
- keeps a quarterly, up-to-date sales log
- makes suggestions for new product each season
- coordinates display of merchandise for special events such as Spring Festival

Spring Festival Committee

- assist with planning, organization, and execution of the annual Spring Festival
- schedules parent participation both before and during the Spring Festival event

Volunteer Appreciation Committee

- coordinates events and gifts for Volunteer Appreciation Week
- organizes distribution of gifts to the volunteers on class days through parent participation

Spring Festival

The Mitey Riders Spring Festival is an annual-day event celebrating the end of the riding season. Typically held in the first Saturday in May, Spring Festival showcases every one of our amazing Mitey Riders! It is a fun, family-friendly day for everyone! Riders will show off their skills in a “horse show style” format and may invite family and friends to come and watch. There is no cost to attend the Spring Festival.

In February letters will go out to each family asking for their commitment to ride in the Spring Festival at a specific time. Your prompt response will acknowledge your child’s involvement on that day. Additionally, sign-up sheets for parents and volunteers will be publicized at time. Every family is expected to sign up for a Spring Festival booth or committee.

It requires an incredible amount of time and energy to plan this unique event. Anything that you can do to help us keep it smooth and organized is much appreciated!

Mitey Golf Challenge

The Mitey Golf Challenge is an annual all-day event, typically held the first Monday in June, featuring a charity golf tournament, catered dinner and a silent auction. In addition to hosting over 100 golfers from around the country each year, many of the Mitey Riders are present this day to ride in Harry’s golf cart, greet players, bring refreshments and tell their stories about riding at Misty Meadows. The Mitey Golf Challenge is our largest fundraiser.

In the spring, registration for this event will be made available that you can distribute to family, friends and local businesses as you see fit.

If you would like to get involved in the planning committees for either of these special events, please contact the farm.