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## Volunteer & Staff Handbook

### **Misty Meadows Mitey Riders**

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Waxhaw, North Carolina 28173

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# WELCOME!

Thank you for volunteering with Misty Meadows Mitey Riders! We really appreciate your interest in wanting to help improve the quality of life for our riders, and without you, we could not maintain such a premium program.

This packet contains helpful tips, guidelines, volunteer roles and other resources that may be useful as you volunteer with Mitey Riders. If you have been here before, please note that some things have changed around the farm – new processes, new faces, and new horses. However, even though some things have changed, our objective remains the same – to offer safe, effective and fun equine-assisted therapy to our Mitey Riders. We could not do this without you!

Please know that we do expect you to gain hands-on learning as the season progresses, so do not feel as though you need to know everything by your first day. While this information is helpful, accurate and directive, you will want to absorb as much as you can from other volunteers, the riders themselves and the staff around you. As always, feel free to ask us any questions you might have, and provide feedback so we can continue to strengthen and grow our program.

**We look forward to a great year with our Mitey Riders!**

# General Guidelines

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## General Volunteer Guidelines

- Must be 15 years of age, Leaders must be at least 16 years of age
- Barn Volunteers and Leaders must have previous horse experience
- Must be available a minimum of 1.5 hours per week (same day and time each week)
- REQUIRED to attend a Volunteer Orientation / Safety Training session each year
- LEADERS and BARN Volunteers must attend an ADDITIONAL training session each year
- Volunteering involves moderate physical activity - please make sure you are comfortable with the physicality of the role you have selected.
- Please arrive at least fifteen minutes prior to class
- When you're in the arena, the instructor is in charge!
- Keep talking to a minimum as this lets you and others listen and pay attention to the Instructor's directions
- LEADERS are responsible for the horse at all times while leading
- SIDEWALKERS are responsible for the stability and safety of the rider while mounted
- If you have suggestions or ideas, talk with the Instructor or Volunteer Coordinator
- Please NO gum chewing!
- Please NO smoking, anywhere on the property!
- Please NO cell phones during class time!

## Dress Code

- Hard-soled shoes with a low heel are preferred but sneakers with heavy tread are OK
- Shoes must be tied securely
- Open-toed shoes, sandals, and slip-on shoes are not permitted
- Dress appropriate for the weather; dressing in layers is often a good choice
- No tops with spaghetti straps/shelf bras or low-cut necklines
- Shirts must cover your stomach/back;
- NO t-shirts with beer/alcohol/drug references or foul language
- Shorts must be at mid-thigh or longer (No skirts please!)
- Please do NOT wear perfume or cologne
- Please no dangling jewelry

## Please Note

Consistency is extremely important in keeping our programs running smoothly. Every volunteer is encouraged to have a regular schedule for the length of the session in the day(s) and hour(s) they volunteer. As dependability is essential be sure to contact the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as you are aware of any circumstances that will delay/keep you from your scheduled lesson time(s).

## Volunteer Role Descriptions

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**LEADERS** | Leaders are responsible for the horse – before, during and after class. Leaders direct the horse's pace according to the instructor's guidelines for the rider aboard. Guiding the horse and reading his body language are important things for a leader to pay attention to. In times of emergency dismount, the leader is responsible for positioning the horse to protect the rider. To become a Leader, interested volunteers **MUST** attend an additional Leader training session, be at least 16 years old, and have 2+ years of horse experience. **We ask that all volunteers interested in becoming a leader work as a sidewalker for one full season first and have horse experience.**

**SIDEWALKERS** | Sidewalkers are responsible for the rider. The Sidewalker on each side should position themselves according to information from the instructors. The Sidewalker on the RIGHT side of the rider should be the communication avenue to the rider. This volunteer is responsible for helping the rider understand what the instructor has said if the rider cannot hear or needs reinforcement of the exercise at hand. The Sidewalker on the LEFT side of the rider should remain non-verbal, as much as possible. Too much information from too many sources can become confusing to some riders. Sidewalkers should be mindful of any language processing delays in their riders. Sidewalkers can exchange places when necessary.

**BARN TEAM** | For those volunteers who want to really get “up close and personal” with the horses this is the perfect job. These volunteers provide special horse and stall care for their assigned horse each week. To become part of the Barn Team, volunteers **MUST** attend the Barn Orientation and have some prior horse experience.

**BARN SUPPORT** | Barn Support volunteers assist in the barn with limited horse contact.

**FACILITY MANAGEMENT** | From painting, to irrigating, to building fences, to cleaning and everything in between – we have endless volunteer opportunities for “handy” individuals or groups that want to work together on a project. These volunteers are essential to Mitey Riders!

**OFFICE VOLUNTEERS** | These very important volunteers help with an array of tasks – including bulk mailings, photo copying, filing, word processing, computer/systems support and answering the phones. It is a wonderful volunteer opportunity for people who may not be keen about being around horses, or may need to limit their physical activity but still really want to lend a hand.

**FUNDRAISING AND SPECIAL EVENTS** | We always need volunteers who are willing to help plan and implement fundraising and other special events. These are fun and rewarding opportunities to be creative and really bring a project to fruition. Such events make an impact in drawing the community's attention and support to the Mitey Riders.

**SPECIAL SKILLS** | If you possess skills or professional/technical experience that may benefit Mitey Riders, such as photography, grant writing, computer knowledge, photography, etc., we encourage you to contact us.

## Your Experience

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During your volunteer time here at Mitey Riders, you will experience many different things, all of which make our program a unique volunteering opportunity.

### You CAN expect to:

- Have fun and laugh a lot
- Make great friends – both riders and other volunteers
- Feel great about the work you are doing
- Work hard!
- Learn a lot about others and yourself
- Learn that no amount of money could equal all that you are doing
- Be outdoors – a lot – in all types of weather conditions, hot and cold
- Step in horse manure
- Get dirty (and enjoy it!)
- Get more out of the experience than you originally thought you might
- Feel needed
- Gain a new understanding of self-worth
- See a new meaning in the smile of a child
- Test your vulnerability
- Challenge your creativity
- Expect to follow rules – even when you don't agree with them, or they seem unfair
- Try new ways of doing things – even when you know another way might work
- Have an experience that you will take with you to other areas of life
- Do things you never thought you would, or could
- Feel like you've done your share, and then still be asked for more
- Improve the quality of life for those with disabilities
- Make mistakes
- Work with people you like and people you don't
- Work with people of all ages, creeds and colors
- Test your sense of empathy
- Gain a heightened sense of awareness of what life might be like with a disability
- See past the wheelchairs and crutches
- Be aware of others needs before your own
- Deal with some uncomfortable situations
- Realize that people with disabilities are the same as those without
- Be a friend to others who need friendship more than you might realize
- Have an open mind

### You CAN NOT expect to:

- Do something you don't feel 100% comfortable with
- Be bored
- Receive a lot of public credit, even though we all really appreciate you
- Have your own needs met all the time
- Spend class time socializing with other volunteers
- Have things always go as planned

## Required Skills and Characteristics

- 15 years of age or older; minors must have parental permission to volunteer
- Friendly, flexible, dependable and compassionate
- Good communications skills
- Comfortable working with individuals who have special needs
- Comfortable working around horses of different sizes
- Able to walk for 45+ minutes indoors and out
- Able to hold arm above shoulder height and support a rider's weight & execute emergency dismount if needed
- Able to accurately understand and follow directions from the instructor
- Willing to be outdoors in many weather extremes

## Required Time Commitment

- Must be available for at least 90 minutes at the same time and day each week
- Must be willing to commit to a full season (with understood vacations and sicknesses)
- Must be willing to attend a Volunteer Safety Orientation each year

## Duties and Responsibilities

- Follow all of Mitey Rider's policies, procedures and safety regulations
- Inform Mitey Rider Volunteer Coordinators and Staff in a timely manner of absences
- Dress appropriately
- Arrive at least 15 minutes before class starts
- Promote rider independence and success
- Alert instructor(s) of any rider safety or health concerns
- Assist instructor(s) in maintaining a safe environment
- Assist in Emergency Dismount procedures, when necessary
- Walk beside a mounted rider to provide physical assistance when necessary
- Help rider to understand and follow instructor's directions
- Communicate with rider when appropriate
- Address rider with age-appropriate language and emotion
- Remain focused on assisting the rider
- Refrain from any negative comments about any part of the team - including the horses!

## **SIDEWALKER** DOs and DON'Ts

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### Our Top 10 SIDEWALKER DOs

*While being a sidewalker at Mitey Riders, please **DO**...*

01. Greet your rider and fellow volunteers
02. Ask an instructor what the needs of your rider are
03. Assist the rider in any way when asked
04. Pay attention to your rider at all times
05. If your rider needs stability, place your forearm across the rider's thigh, facing forward and hold the front of the saddle. Generally, both sides should use the same hold on the rider.
06. Evaluate the rider you are walking with: Are you comfortable with the idea that you can assist the rider if he/she starts to fall? If the rider is too heavy, or has a disability that you are uncomfortable with, ask an instructor or Volunteer Coordinator to make a change.
07. Remember that as a sidewalker, you are responsible for the rider. If the horse spooks, resist the instinct to get out of the way and focus on protecting your rider.
08. Be aware of your surroundings. Watch for uneven ground, and pay attention to those who are in front of you.
09. Pay attention to the lesson plan for the day – you may need to assist your rider in remembering or completing the lesson and activities to the best of their ability.
10. Communicate with the leader if you feel your rider needs the horse to stop, turn, or go faster/slower at any time.

### Our Top 10 SIDEWALKER DON'Ts

*While being a sidewalker at Mitey Riders, please **DO NOT**...*

01. Carry or answer your cell phone
02. Talk to the rider if another person is addressing them
03. Ignore your rider, leave them unattended, or talk as though they aren't there
04. Interfere with instructor's direction to the rider/class
05. Lean on the horse for your own stability at any time
06. Talk to the rider at a level lower than their actual age
07. Walk near the flank or rear of the horse
08. Allow your rider to mount or dismount unless told to do so by an instructor
09. Poke the horse in the side to get him/her moving faster
10. Hold onto the rider by their arms, backs, ankles or other body part

**Note:** If your rider is having difficulty on their horse, alert an instructor, or stabilize them by crossing your forearm over the leg and holding onto the front of the saddle.



## Required Skills and Characteristics

- 16 years of age or older; minors must have parental permission to volunteer
- At least 2+ years of horse handling experience
- Friendly, flexible, dependable and compassionate
- Good communications skills
- Comfortable working with individuals who have special needs
- Comfortable working around horses of different sizes
- Able to walk for 30+ minutes indoors and out
- Able to adjust their experience to the needs of our therapy horses
- Able to accurately understand and follow directions from the instructor
- Willing to be outdoors in many weather extremes

## Required Time Commitment

- Must be available for at least 90 minutes at the same time and day each week
- Must be willing to commit to a full season (with understood vacations and sicknesses)
- Must be willing to attend a Volunteer Safety Orientation each year
- Must be willing to attend an ADDITIONAL Leader Orientation each year

## Duties and Responsibilities

- Follow all of Mitey Rider's policies, procedures and safety regulations
- Inform Mitey Rider Volunteer Coordinators and Staff in a timely manner of absences
- Dress appropriately
- Arrive at least 15 minutes before class starts
- Promote rider independence and success
- Alert instructor(s) of any horse safety or health concerns
- Assist instructor(s) in maintaining a safe environment
- Assist in Emergency Dismount procedures, when necessary
- Lead horse during the lesson or walk alongside a horse without a lead
- Remain focused on working with the horse
- Be aware of potential hazards to horse and rider in the arena and/or on the trail
- Address riders with age-appropriate language and emotion
- Refrain from any negative comments about any part of the team - including the horses!

## Our Top 10 LEADER DOs

*While being a leader at Mitey Riders, please **DO**...*

01. Greet your fellow volunteers
02. Meet your horse in the assigned area and wait for mounting quietly
03. Always ask if the girth needs to be tightened, or other equipment checked
04. Pay attention to your horse at all times
05. Become familiar with your horse's individual traits, equipment and likes/dislikes
06. Use voice commands, like "walk on", "whoa" or light clucking sounds
07. Pay attention to your spacing with other horses and people in front of and behind
08. Make sure your horse is not walking too fast or too slow for your rider
09. Check to make sure your horse's rider feels secure
10. Ask for a change in assignment if you feel uncomfortable leading your horse

## Our Top 10 LEADER DON'Ts

*While being a leader at Mitey Riders, please **DO NOT**...*

01. Carry or answer your cell phone
02. Chat with friends
03. Discipline the horse at any time, in any way
04. Interfere with instructor's direction to the rider/class
05. Lean on the horse for your own stability at any time
06. Talk to the rider during class - allow side walkers to engage the rider.
07. Wrap the lead rope or reins around your hand
08. Poke, hit, jab or push the horses
09. Allow sidewalkers to give the horse commands
10. Ride the horses in between lessons
11. Allow rider time to process and prompt horse before you step in and engage horse.

**Please note:** You must complete an additional Leader Training Session, be at least 16 years old, and have 2+ years of horse experience in order to be a leader with Mitey Riders. Contact us if you are interested in being a leader at any time, or if you have any further questions.

## Required Skills and Characteristics

- 14 years of age or older; minors must have parental permission to volunteer
- At least 2+ years of horse handling experience for Barn Team. No prior horse experience required for Barn Support.
- Friendly, flexible, dependable and detail-oriented
- Good communications skills
- Able to be pro-active and responsive to commands from superior
- Willing to be outdoors in many weather extremes
- Willing to muck stalls and get dirty

*For Barn Team working directly with horses:*

- Willing to learn how to tack up horses “The Mitey Rider Way”!
- Comfortable working around horses of different sizes
- Able to adjust their experience to the needs of our therapy horses

## Required Time Commitment

- Must be available for at least 90 minutes at the same time and day each week
- Must be willing to commit to a full season (with understood vacations and sicknesses)
- Must be willing to attend a Volunteer Safety Orientation each year
- Must be willing to attend an ADDITIONAL Barn Team Orientation each year

## Duties and Responsibilities

- Follow all of Mitey Rider’s policies, procedures and safety regulations
- Inform Mitey Rider Volunteer Coordinators and Staff in a timely manner of absences
- Dress appropriately
- Arrive at the scheduled time set by the Tack Coordinator
- Check tack for wear, cracks or other safety concerns
- Alert Staff of any horse safety or health concerns
- Assist Staff in maintaining a safe environment

*For Barn Team working with Horses:*

- Remain focused on working with the horses
- Check horses for any signs of lameness, illness or other concerns
- Properly handle and secure horses when grooming and tacking
- Social conversations should be limited to warm up laps.

## **BARN TEAM DOs and DON'Ts**

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### Our Top 10 BARN TEAM DOs

*While being on the Barn Team at Mitey Riders, please **DO**...*

01. Be on time, and work in a timely manner to prepare all horses for lessons
02. Handle the horses in "The Mitey Rider Way"
03. Show respect for all horses and tack
04. Refrain from any negative comments about any part of the team - including the horses!
05. Become familiar with the horse's individual traits, equipment and likes/dislikes
06. Put equipment back where you found it
07. Speak up when you have concerns about a horse's health or safety
08. Turn horses out (with cleanly picked feet!) in their appropriate pastures and lock all gates
09. Clean stalls "The Mitey Rider Way"
10. Ask questions anytime!

### Our Top 10 BARN TEAM DON'Ts

*While being on the Barn Team at Mitey Riders, please **DO NOT**...*

01. Carry or answer your cell phone
02. **Discipline the horse at any time, in any way**
03. Leave tack and equipment on the floor
04. Wrap the lead ropes or reins around your hands
05. **Turn a horse out if you aren't sure where they go**
06. Startle the horses with noise or movement when they are in cross-ties
07. Allow riders, parents or guests to visit the horses in the stalls (unless authorized)
08. **Pull the girth tight more than 2 holes at a time, or have one side higher than the other**
09. Leave horses cross-tied when you aren't there, or the stall door open
10. Ride the horses in between lessons
11. Close any gate you open even if no horses in pastures.
12. Keep stall doors closed unless horse is supervised.

**Please note:** You must complete an additional Barn Training Session, be at least 15 years old, and have 2+ years of horse experience in order to be a leader with Mitey Riders. Contact us if you are interested in being a barn team member or leader at any time, or if you have any further questions.

## A Day at Mitey Riders as a Volunteer

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We rely on you - our volunteers - to help us stay on-time as much as possible! Each day, when you arrive at Mitey Riders for your scheduled time, please complete this timeline check-list:

01. When you arrive, please **SIGN IN** at the book in the main office [please PRINT!]
02. Check the whiteboard for your assignment for that day
03. If you are a LEADER, wait in the office or bull pen until someone brings you your horse
04. If you are a SIDEWALKER, wait in the office or mounting area with your rider
05. If you are a SIDEWALKER/PARENT, make sure your rider is ready when he/she is called to mount
06. Once your rider is mounted, follow instructions as to where to go until all others are mounted
07. After the lesson, please return all equipment to the proper place
08. Before you leave, please **SIGN OUT** at the book in the main office

**If you are unable to attend one week due to vacation, sickness, work or anything else, please let us know as soon as you can. We will be sure to find an appropriate replacement! In this case, please contact both the farm AND the Volunteer Coordinator.**

### A NOTE TO VOLUNTEERS EARNING SERVICE HOURS

If you are helping at Mitey Riders to complete service hours for school or the community, you **MUST** sign in on the appropriate Sign-In Sheet. If you do not do this, we will not be able to keep track of all of your hours for you. If you need any paperwork signed or approved to complete your service hours, please see the Volunteer Coordinator and/or an Instructor to request completed documentation.

**In the case of an emergency, please keep in mind the following:**

### Emergency Posters / Phone Numbers

Posters with EMERGENCY NUMBERS including Fire, Ambulance, and Vet are posted throughout the barn and offices. Phones are available in the Upper Barn office and the Upper Barn hallway.

### Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are located throughout the farm. In the Upper Barn they can be found:

- One in each hallway
- One by bullpen
- One in "Sign-In Room" by door
- One by Rider Loading area

### First Aid Supplies

A portable human first aid supply kit is located in the sign-in room on the counter next to the water fountain. Additional first aid supplies are located on shelving in the bathroom. Equine first aid supplies are available in the Upper Barn and are managed by Mitey Riders staff.

### AED

A portable AED for CPR is located in the sign-in room next to the water fountain. This unit can be used on children or adults.

### For Medical Emergencies occurring outside a class session:

- Notify the nearest Mitey Riders Staff Member of the emergency (provide who is affected, what is nature of emergency, location of emergency).
- Notify staff even if 911 has already been called so staff members can direct ambulances/assistance onto farm to location of emergency.

### Procedure for In-Class Emergencies:

*(E.G. Rider fall, horse issues, severe weather changes, etc.)*

- The instructor will give the command to halt all horses, **"Emergency HALT!"**
- Volunteers and students respond immediately, and all rides stop
- Horse leader to assume halt position at horse's head
- Sidewalker(s) to stand beside rider with hands in place for an emergency dismount
- If situation warrants, instructor will give the command, **"Emergency DISMOUNT!"**

- Volunteers are not to leave their assigned rider or horse for any reason, except under the direction of an instructor
- All volunteers keep one eye on horse and rider, and one eye on the emergency situation
- All volunteers keep ears open for instructor directives
- Volunteers try to involve their rider in some attention-getting exercise to distract them from the emergency in a safe way
- Return to normal rider activities when the instructor gives the command, “**Riding RESUME**”
- Try to assess any effect the emergency situation may have had on the rider and/or horse. Inform the instructor if the effect is significant.

## How To Do An Emergency Dismount

Emergency dismounts must be done quickly and efficiently (and as quietly as possible!). The purpose of the dismount is to get the rider off the horse and away from the horse and any other danger that might exist at that moment.

**Procedure for One Sidewalker:** While the leader disengages the rider’s left foot from the stirrup, the sidewalker will disengage the rider’s right foot from the stirrup and get a firm grip on the rider (not their clothes!), and pull the rider off the horse toward their own body. The sidewalker will then walk or carry the rider a safe distance away from the horse and/or danger. This dismount will be toward the direction of the sidewalker regardless of the side the helper is on at that moment.

**Procedure for Two Sidewalkers:** The sidewalker on the near (left) side of the horse will catch the rider in an embrace and pull or lift the rider from the horse. The sidewalker on the off (right) side of the horse will assist by disengaging the rider’s foot from the stirrup and pushing rider (in their mid-section) toward the near sidewalker’s embrace. The sidewalker with the rider should turn away from the horse, so that he/she is between the horse and the rider. Then, walk or carry the rider a safe distance from the horse and/or danger.

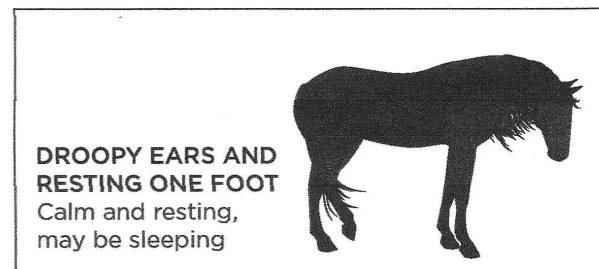
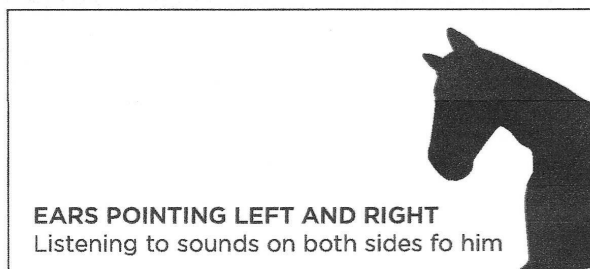
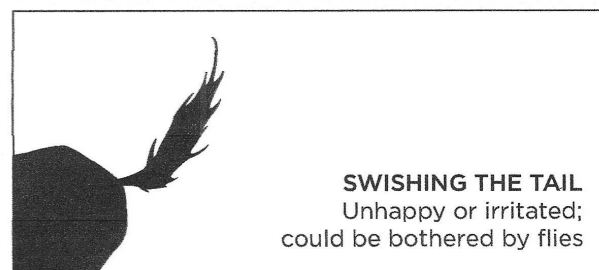
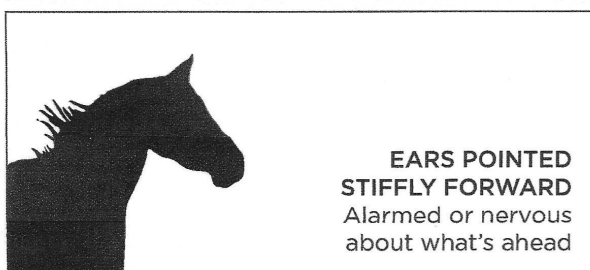
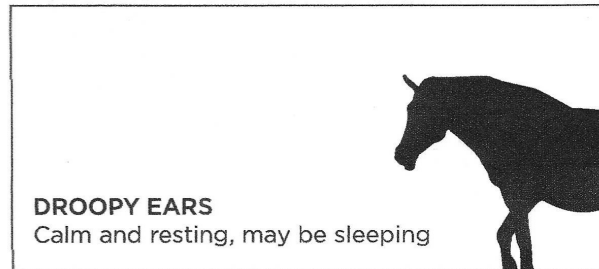
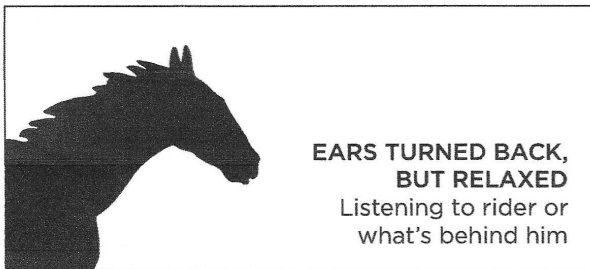
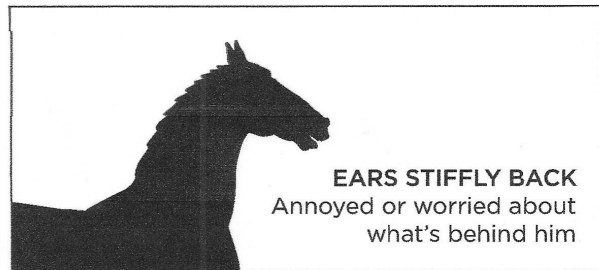
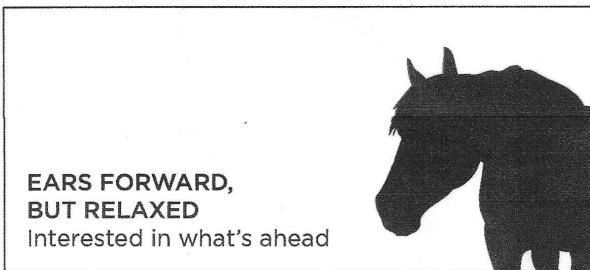
## Emergency Dismount - Bottom Line

The emergency dismount cannot be defined in a simple format. This process depends on the ability of the rider, and the severity of the situation. The process outlined above may also be reversed, dismounting to the right side, should the rider’s disability warrant that solution.

## Listening to Our Horses

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Even though your horse may not be able to talk to you in words, there are other ways to know what your horse is thinking. By looking at your horse's ears and body language, you can learn a lot. Please let us know if you see anything out of the ordinary when working with and around our horses. Without them, we would not have the tools to assist our riders every day.





# About 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 is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International Premier Accredited Center for therapeutic horseback riding.

## Contacts

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### Misty Meadows Farm

Telephone: (704) 841-0602

Email: [ridewithus@miteyriders.org](mailto:ridewithus@miteyriders.org)

Web: [www.miteyriders.org](http://www.miteyriders.org)

### Mailing Address

455 Providence Road South

Waxhaw, NC 28173

*Note: Misty Meadows is technically located in Weddington, but uses the Waxhaw Post Office address.*

### Volunteer Coordinator

Pam Perez

[pam@miteyriders.org](mailto:pam@miteyriders.org)

(704) 408-0079

### Emergency Numbers

Posters with EMERGENCY NUMBERS including Fire, Ambulance and Vet are posted throughout the barn and offices. You will not be responsible for calling 9-1-1 in the case of an emergency unless you are asked directly by a staff member.