**Horse Handler Responsibilities Spring 2021**

***Remember:*** horses are prey animals with strong fight/flight and herd instincts;. Try to be aware and pay attention to your horse. Each one is different; if a horse reacts badly, instead of blaming the horse, ask yourself what you could do differently. (See: “It depends” at end of outline - :)

Please arrive 15-20 minutes BEFORE the lesson starts.

**When you arrive….**

Enter the arena through the smaller ‘people’ door, not the large horse entrance. Continue one at a time to use hand sanitizer, sign in, and proceed up to the barn and wait for your horse.

As soon as one person crosses the roadway, the next can proceed.

**No one is allowed across the road or up in the barn without permission**. Proceed to the barnyard and wait in front of the big barn for your name to be called. **Do not** go into the barn on your own, wait for instruction from the barn manager.

**Receiving your horse**

Take your horse when you are called and your horse is brought out. Remember, the horseman’s handshake is when you approach at angle with arm extended, hand curled under, stop and wait for acknowledgment (horse looks at you, accepts handshake, smells you), be patient. The Barn manager MAY ask for your help if the barn volunteers are all busy. Wait for all horses to be ready and all walk down with good spacing to the arena. Please do not touch horse or tack.

**Leading**

Hold rope with two hands...one about arm’s length from clip, one near end of rope (figure 8 or fold if long), never wrap rope around hand. Say horse’s name and command (e.g. “walk on”), stand between horse’s ear and shoulder so horse can see you, bring up your energy (bend head & shoulder/lift arm/ touch neck,). If horse needs encouragement, go back to shoulder and start again, or walk off to side, or try hooking finger briefly in throat latch, or slide hand closest to horse up and “scoop.” NO PULLING in front of them -- this is very harsh with a bit in the mouth.

Look where you want to go and where you want your horse to go.

Keep two horse lengths between horses in front and back of you when going down from barnyard and in classes.

Whole class leaves barnyard area as a “herd” and stops before road crossing.

**The Arena**

**Prepare for Mounting**

Please say “Door!” when entering the arena.

Enter arena, walk down right wall as far as possible, turn left, stay on outside track, turn left onto center line and halt, keeping a safe distance between horses.

Wait for the instructor to ask you to bring the horse to the mounting area.

**DO NOT CHECK GIRTH!** This is the now the Instructor’s responsibility.

No stretching legs as this is the Instructor’s responsibility. Horse Handlers wait for their client to be called into mounting area. Client or Instructor will take stirrups down not volunteer – Feel free to share with the client the “how to;s” of stirrups (taking down, measuring under armpit). (there is a video in the Windrush Youtube channel showing this)

Client should place non dominant hand on saddle to create saddle stability, pull leathers out and down slowly -- and adjust as much as possible; be sure stirrup on ramp side is up over withers and in front of saddle on horse’s neck. Ask client to do this when possible..

With the reins overhead, the Instructor checks girth one more time before entering ramp area.

Follow instructor’s directions. Generally, you’ll lead in facing forward, go between ramp and mounting block, stop horse with stirrup in middle of block (unless using ramp or lift); if client is leading horse too, you go through first, stand ahead and slightly to the side (not directly in front) of horse, send rider up steps to mount.

When rider’s leg is clear, ask horse to halt, put offside stirrup down and put rider’s foot in, otherwise wait until horse is out of ramp area. Instructor may need to hold onto rider’s leg until safely out of area (e.g., Devonshire boots).

Only lead off when rider is ready and asks horse to “walk on.” Let the client do the asking and walking on. Wait for their response before just leading out.

**During the lesson**

Go to center of ring if stirrups and girth need adjusting (not at ramp!) and WAIT FOR THE INSTRUCTOR to do this.

Instructor will always recheck girth.

Please do not pat or touch the horse unnecessarily. If you need to quiet an anxious horse patting is permitted.

Be aware of spacing -- other horses, pushing outside side walkers against wall. Give cues in steps of intensity (use the least amount of effort possible, but as much as you need to help the horse understand what you want.).

Avoid sharp turns as they are hard on the horse and can unseat the rider.

Pay attention to horse and try to keep a loose lead while watching for reactions.

Review suggestions for horse who turns in (elbow out, finger in jugular groove, hold outside rein), gets too fast (reach under for reins), doesn’t want to move (bring up your own energy, turn slightly, try hand behind elbow, finger in throatlatch), dives for grass.

Dismounting will occur in the center of ring, at ramp, or on rubber mat. Stand beside, not directly in front of, the horse. Instructor assists as needed.

**Going back to the barn**

Instructor will loosen girth.

Clients may put stirrups up or Instructor will run them up, not horse handlers unless asked by the instructor.

Instructor will re-attach muzzle (if it’s been taken off during class -- e.g., for a grass-diver).

Always keep “the herd” together, please cross the road all at once with Instructor in the road. Line up facing the barn and wait for barn help to untack. After late in the day classes the instructor MAY ask for your help in untacking and returning the horses to their stalls.

**Grooming**

Groom front to back, top to bottom. Watch for horse’s signals. Talk about the horse and how the horse breathes out, comment on ears, eyes, and tail.

Comment on how the client’s energy can affect the horse’s energy. If horse seems anxious, try less pressure or doing everything on one side first. Pass in front of nose, not under neck. Breathe! Encourage two hands on horse at all times, bend from waist and knees so you can move quickly, do not kneel on ground.

While using the curry, avoid face and below knees, be aware of horse’s reaction.

While using the hard brush make short, hard strokes in direction of hair, and you may need to brush gently below knees if muddy.

Soft brush is for everywhere, careful of eyes, long soft polishing strokes.

Hoof pick, when used - if possible, start with the foot without weight on it; position yourself facing the rear. With hind legs, position horse and yourself so you are safe and have enough distance from wall. Run hand down leg, gently squeeze, “pick up,” gently lean on shoulder. Hold foot low to ground -- with hand on toe -- so as not to stress joints. Place down, don’t drop. Tail -- pull around to side, may brush bottom but be careful not to pull out hairs. Explain why the tail is so important to the horse and why we do not brush it!