



MYHEROES, LLC.
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES, ONE HOOF AT A TIME

HORSE LEADER MANUAL

Updated 2021

The Horse Leader Position

The job of the leader is to control the horse or pony from the time the animal leaves the stall, throughout the lesson session, and upon return of the animal to the stall or pasture area.

The proper position for the leader is to walk just back of the horse's or pony's head. DO NOT GET IN FRONT or TOO FAR BEHIND. The lead should never be used to pull the mount forward. Care must be taken to ensure the horse's head is not merely pushed up in the air since that may throw the rider off-balance. Also, do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground as this may pull the rider forward. Keep your hands away from the horse's mouth. A good rule of thumb is to hold the lead in your right hand approximately six to eight inches away from the ring or buckle and hold the extra length of lead in your left hand but NEVER wrap it around your hand.

Remember: just as the size of horses varies, so do their steps. With some animals you will be able to walk faster than with others. Adjust your step to that of the horse so that you are not pulling him forward or holding him back.

No matter how slow the pony or horse you are leading, the leader should not try and take the place of the rider either by pulling the mount forward or turning or stopping the horse. It is the rider's responsibility to do as much as they can. The instructor will point

out to you when the rider needs assistance and as you work with riders you will start to get a feel of when to step-in.

In order for the rider to have complete freedom to use the reins correctly, care should be taken to ensure that the lead line does not run over the rider's reins; the lead line must be hanging between the rider's rein not over the top.

AT THE MOUNTING BLOCK or RAMP

If you are going to lead a rider that has to be mounted from the ramp, pay close attention to the instructor because they will tell you where to position the horse in the mounting area. You will want to place the horse as close as possible to the side of the ramp on which the rider will be mounting. Most mounting and dismounting is done on the left side of the horse. It is your responsibility to keep the horse as quiet as possible while the rider mounts, (rubbing the horse's neck is very reassuring and calming).

Stand slightly to the side but turn your body in towards the head facing the horse with both hands on the lead. Do not hold the halter as it may cause the horse to throw its head and back up. Our horses and ponies love to be talked to and petted while being mounted, however use care and be alert to each mounting situation.

At this time you should face forward and assume your position at the head of the horse. Be sure to listen to the instructor, follow their instructions.

MOUNTING IN THE ARENA

If your rider will be mounting in the ring, the instructor will give you the specific directions. The rider may lead the horse to the arena with or without your assistance or you may be asked to lead the horse to the center of the arena and the rider will come to you. PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT TO MOUNT THE STUDENT.

During this type of mounting, stand near the front but slightly to the side of the horse's head. If your rider is standing with you please be careful that the rider does not go behind the horse. The rider should stand quietly beside you.

LEADING IN THE ARENA

Once the rider is mounted, the instructor will tell you where to stand with the horse. Be sure you are a safe distance from the horse in front of you, (a horse's length between is a good gauge). As the class begins all instruction will be given to the student by name. All volunteers on the team should be familiar with the rider and also give them the opportunity to learn your name. Please wear your name tag at all times.

It is tempting to turn around to talk with or assist your rider but your responsibility is to pay attention to the horse and where you are going. Listen to the rider and sidewalkers for instructions or whether or not assistance is needed for a certain maneuver.

AT THE HALT

While it seems unnatural, we ask you to pivot yourself from the side of the horse to slightly in front of the horse at a 45 degree angle while at the halt. This will keep the horse from moving forward. This is especially important while the riders are doing their exercises. The halt is also used as a “breather” for the horses and you should not hold their heads too tight. Allow the horse freedom to move its head around. If the horse is getting too restless, rub the neck; this is a good way to calm them down. Occasionally the horse will need to walk around but the instructor will alert you to those situations.

AT THE WALK

Many leaders forget that the riders may also have sidewalkers. Be aware not to get too close to the side of the arena, toys, or other obstacles as you will not have room to fit your sidewalkers through safely. GIVE YOURSELF ROOM FROM THE HORSE IN FRONT OF YOU. Although none of our animals are known to be kickers, all horses can kick if they feel pressured by a horse following too closely behind them. If your rider cannot maintain a safe distance, it is your job to do so. If you have to make a turn suddenly for safety reasons verbalize your intentions to your team (the sidewalkers and rider), because a sudden turn can throw off a rider’s balance and sidewalkers need to be well aware of the imminent risk.

Do not assist in making turns unless directed by the instructor. Use common sense: if you see that your rider is getting into trouble and is unable to follow directions given by the instructor, it is your job to help. The sidewalker(s) should be prompting to keep students “tuned into” their instructor’s directions.

AT THE TROT

Often during a lesson the students will be asked to trot. Since trotting is faster than walking, the leader has to be more alert to the horse, rider and surroundings. The instructor will come over, if necessary, to give specific instructions to the student and to you. Before starting the trot, be sure the rider and sidewalkers are ready.

If a horse is reluctant to trot, start to walk a little faster and say “trot”. Most of our horses are good with voice commands however, some horses will need a little additional prodding. DO NOT PULL ON THE LEAD.

Do not run in front of your horse and immediately “walk” or “stop” (“whoa”) when the instructor gives the command. This must be done on a straight in order to keep the rider balanced. Make the transitions smooth, with no sudden stops or starts, and make sure the team is ready.

DURING THE GAMES

Games are an important part of every lesson. They may be as simple as “Simon Says” or “Red Light, Green Light,” or a more complicated game such as the “Cow Game”. The leader is an important part of all games. The instructor will give the riders and volunteers the rules of the games to be played. The sidewalker will need to watch the rider to see if they understand the directions. However, if there is no sidewalker, you will need to talk to the rider and pep them up and get them ready for the games. Your enthusiasm is contagious, but remember it is the rider playing not you. Allow the student to do as much as possible by themselves. During the games everyone can get excited and lose focus on safety. Make sure the horses remain at a safe distance apart from each other.

FALLS DO HAPPEN

Though falls are very rare, they can and do happen. If your rider falls, your only concern is the horse you are leading. The instructor will take care of the student. If another rider falls and the horse gets loose, then STOP IMMEDIATELY in front of your horse and hold the horse as you would while mounting. NEVER LET GO OF YOUR HORSE if possible. Do not panic if there is a fall. A fall off a horse is really not any worse than any other type of fall. Your job is to stop and hold the horse. If the rider falls close to the horse and the horse stops, walk the horse a safe distance away from the rider to allow the rider to be attended.

LOOSE HORSE

If a horse gets loose DO NOT CHASE THE HORSE. If they feel they are being chased they may run faster. They are prey animals and they use flight as a defense. All other horses need to be stopped where they are. When horses are scared they will seek comfort and may go to another horse. Wait for further instructions from the Instructor.

DISMOUNTING

Unless otherwise specified, the instructor will dismount the student. You will receive specific instructions as to whether to bring your student to the ramp or remain in the center of the arena. Once again, keep your mount quiet by standing slightly to the front and turned in to the horse’s head while your rider dismounts.

Leading reminders:

- Keep attention on the horse
- Follow instructor's instructions; listen to sidewalkers/leaders if assistance is needed
- Improper leading can change the movement of the horse affecting their physical health and affects what the rider is feeling.
- Horses have two blind spots: directly in front of and directly behind the body
- Horses are protective of their personal space, do not lead too close behind or beside another horse
- Horses are able to sense what you are feeling so it is important to stay calm
- You are not always doing the steering during lessons, you are a "fixture" at the horse's head for safety

Leading "Dos":

- Use voice commands
- Walk beside the horse (about an arm's length away) in the area between head and shoulder
- Look up and where you are going at all times
- Allow the horse to have free head and neck movement
- Maintain distance between other horses in the lesson
- Tune in to the horse's body language so you are able to know when something is going wrong

Leading "Don'ts"

- Walk in front of and pull the horse to move faster
- Turn suddenly or sharply, it will knock horse and rider off balance
- Assume that the rider is unable to control the horse, many of them can
- Look down at ground, stare at horse, let eyes wander in a 'day dream'
- Wrap the lead line around your hand or let it hang low to the ground

Bottom line - always remain cautious around the horses. While your skills and confidence may increase while working with them, a healthy respect for their size and ability to act out of their typical behavior will help you greatly. If you follow the safety procedures and remain alert to your surroundings and environment you will be able to reduce the risks associated with working around horses.

Please ask questions. If you are not comfortable completing a task - DON'T DO IT. Instead ask someone to help you until you are comfortable. Your safety, the rider's safety, and the horse's safety are the utmost importance to us.

Grooming Tools

Grooming: the process of cleaning and caring for a horse's skin, coat, and hooves including currying, brushing and cleaning their hoofs.

Grooming Bucket: each horse has their own bucket of grooming tools.

Curry Comb: a round or oval rubber utensil used in a circular motion to remove caked-on mud and improve circulation.

Hard Brush: a large oval shaped brush with a hand support strip which is used to remove dirt, dust and dandruff from the horse's coat; the length of the bristles determines the stiffness of the brush.

Soft Brush: a brush with short, softer bristles used after the hard brush.

Mane and Tail Comb or Brush: used to comb tangles out of the mane and tail.

Hoof Pick: metal pick used to remove debris from the bottom of the hoof.

Shedding Blade: a rounded metal blade used to help a horse shed loose hair or to help remove dried on mud and debris



Grooming Procedures

When grooming a horse, start at the top of his neck and work your way to his rear, then switch sides and repeat.

1. Start with the **curry comb**. The rubber curry should be used in a circular motion to loosen dirt that has settled under the horse's hair. NOTE: Be very careful and gentle around the bony areas of your horse's body (such as his back). Don't use the curry on your horse's legs unless you can be extremely gentle with it. Never use the curry or any stiff brush on your horse's face.
2. If your horse has extra dried on mud or is shedding a lot, use the **shedding blade**. The shedding blade should never be used on the legs, face, mane or tail. Use caution when using this grooming tool and always be gentle.
3. Next, use the **hard brush**. The motion for this brush is like the same motion you would use when sweeping a floor. You "flick" the brush away and up from the coat so that the dirt comes off his coat. Unless your horse is already extremely clean, you should see a slight cloud of dust with each stroke. If you don't use this "flicking" motion, the dirt will just get pushed back under the hair, potentially causing irritation to the horse.
4. Then, you use the **soft brush**. The body brush is meant to smooth down the hair and to get rid of any traces of left-over dirt after you have thoroughly used the stiff brush. With the body brush, you do not use the flicking motion, instead, you smooth it flat over the horse's coat to flatten the hair. This brush often gives the horse a shiny, clean appearance.

5. Next, use the **mane and tail comb or brush** to gently comb the horse's mane and tail. You can also use the stiff brush for the tail. Start from the bottom of the tail and gently work your way up removing tangles and debris.
6. Now, on to the hooves! This can be done by running your hand down your horse's leg, then gently squeezing his fetlock (ankle). When you use the **hoof pick**, always scrape away from you, just as you would if you were using a carrot peeler. It is important to thoroughly clean out the hollow areas of both sides of the frog, and around the sole of the foot. The frog is the most sensitive part of the horse's hoof. When done gently lower the hoof to the ground, do not drop it. Watch the positioning of your feet so that you are not in the same area where he will be dropping his hoof.

Tack and Equipment Used

	<p>Peacock Safety Stirrups</p> <p>Peacock stirrups are similar to a regular stirrup iron. The inner side is the regular stirrup iron but the outer side is designed with a heavy rubber band attaching to the top & bottom of the stirrup. Used as a precaution for the rider should the rider fall or the foot slide forward in the stirrup. The heavy rubber band will release the foot so that the foot is kept from being caught in the stirrup</p>
	<p>Helmet</p> <p>The riding helmet will protect the rider's head and is required for all riders whenever riding or working with or near the horses. It should have a full chin strap harness. For all therapy and therapeutic riding sessions, helmets must be ASTM-SEI approved.</p>

	<p>Alternative Helmet</p> <p>May be utilized by clients who are unable to wear a regular hard helmet due to head/neck control or improper sizing.</p>
	<p>Halter and Lead Rope</p> <p>The halter is the piece of equipment on the horses head and is used for leading the horse. The lead rope is what the horse leader holds while leading the horse.</p>
	<p>Western Saddles</p> <p>Used for riders who need more support, as western saddles have a deeper seat and more structured stirrup leathers.</p>
	<p>English Saddles</p> <p>English saddles are great for riders still working on balance or learning riding skills. They provide less support than a western saddle, but more support than a bareback pad.</p>



Bareback Pad

Bareback pads provide the least amount of support, but provide the closest contact between horse and riders. Therapists enjoy using this form of tack for smaller riders working on balance and core strength.



El Compañero

Similar to a bareback pad, the “comp” pad provides more surface area on the horses back for riders working on different positions such as hands and knees or tall kneeling.



Surcingle

Surcingles usually sit on top of a western pad, and allow the riders to hold on to the handle for additional support.



Mounting Area and Lift

The mounting area is where a rider will mount their horse with the assistance of their therapist or instructor.

A lift can be used for clients who might have trouble doing a manual mount.