



# Side Walker

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The primary goal of the side walkers is to be a mentor and to provide a safe environment for the riders. While in the arena, side walkers work under the direct supervision of an instructor. Side walkers assist the instructors by encouraging the riders to stretch, grow and develop to their fullest potential.



## Types of Therapeutic Riding (TR) / EFL Classes

- **Private TR Sessions:**
  - Volunteers work side-by-side with an instructor
- **Semi-Private or group TR Sessions:**
  - Instructors have 2-3 students in one session so they must divide their attention among all students
  - Volunteers play a larger role by directly assisting the student work on the therapeutic goals set by the Instructor

### Side Walker Goals

- **Assist with social skills and confidence:**
  - Side Walkers assist the student as a mentor or coach
  - Help build a mutual trust to enable the student to gain confidence in themselves and others
  - Model good behavior and social skills
  - Provide moral support and encouragement to the student
  - Assist the student to grow and develop life skills
- **Assist with Safety:**
  - Volunteers ensure the safety of the student at all times
  - Side Walkers are directly responsible for the safety of the student
  - Horse Handlers are the horse's advocate and communicator of their needs thus maintaining a safe environment for the student

### Before Class

- Talk to Instructor about any special instructions for this class and about the goals and objectives for the lesson
- Help the instructor set up the arena
- Greet Student and/or Family

### Mounting/Leaving Ramp:

- Ramp Mounting
  - SW stands on off-side during mounting
  - 3 types of Mounts:
    - Croup Mount-student stands on on-side and swings their right leg over the back of the horse



- Crest Mount-student sits in the center of the horse's back and swings their right leg over the front of the horse
- Step Mount
  - SW stands off-side to hold stirrup down while student mounts
- Leaving the Ramp
  - SW and Instructor use over the thigh and ankle hold making sure the student's feet and legs are clear of the ramp
  - Once horse is out of ramp area ankle hold is released

## Safety Holds

There are many safety holds appropriate to therapeutic riding. The instructor will direct the side walker on the appropriate safety hold for the student. It is important for these students to have symmetry, so the side walker should use the same hold as the instructor or second side walker.

These may include:

1. Gait belt
2. over-the-thigh
3. ankle
4. hands free

**\*If you are ever unsure about which hold to use at any time during the class, please ask the Instructor!\***

## Student Levels of Independence

- **Independent rider:**
  - Extremely well balanced
  - Generally no Side Walkers needed
  - Student rides unhooked controlling the horse on their own
  - Horse handler is standing by if needed
- **Semi-independent rider:**
  - Very well balanced
  - Generally only 1 Side Walker is needed
  - Volunteer may use less of a hold or no hold at all
  - Student may ride unhooked controlling the horse on their own
  - Horse handler stays with horse for guidance if needed
- **Mild physical dependence:**
  - Generally well balanced
  - Volunteers will most likely be asked to use an ankle hold



- **Moderate physical dependence:**
  - Needs assistance with balance but student can generally hold themselves up
  - Student might have a physical disability
  - Volunteers will most likely be asked to use an over the thigh hold
- **High physical dependence:**
  - Needs hands on assistance
  - Student has physical disability
  - Volunteers will most likely be asked to use an over the thigh hold or gait belt

## The lesson

- **The warm up**
  - Sometimes the instructor may ask for “less words” so that the horses movement can facilitate calmness which will lead to improved listening skills
  - Side Walkers may be asked to model the warm ups and prompt the client to do the warm ups
- **The objective of the lesson**
  - Will usually involve a riding skill.
  - It will be achievable and measurable.
  - The instructor may ask for your assistance in tracking the students success.
- **Activities**
  - Singing, games, and toys may be incorporated into the lesson to reinforce the objective of the lesson and make it fun.
    - Singing provides a distracting entertainment for a student working on a difficult physical activity
    - Games, puzzles and ball playing are part of building strength, balance and mobility.
  - Students and instructors love volunteers who come with energy, fun ideas and a willingness to sing! So have fun!
- **When to Talk & When to Listen**
  - Side walkers should help the student focus their attention on the instructor and the task at hand. While social interaction is very important for some of our students, it is important not to overwhelm or distract the rider.
  - Allow enough time for the student to process directions.
  - Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone and to students who already have perceptual/sensory problems, it can be overwhelming.
- **Assist... Don't Do**

In their desire for the rider to succeed, volunteers sometimes forget that the student's goal is to accomplish the task on their own.

  - Encourage students to use their own muscles.



- Give them time to process and execute the requested task.
- If the student seems confused or distracted, the instructor will gently repeat the request.
- If the student still seems confused, the instructor will give you prompts on how to help the rider achieve success.
- Start with the minimum assistance that you can give. Increase the assistance as needed, but always try to reduce the assistance given
- Remember to let the instructor know how far the client has progressed!
- **Levels of assistance or prompting are:**
  1. Hand over Hand Assistance: Your Hand will hold the rider's hand to show the them what is expected.
  2. Hand prompting: touch their hand to remind them what task they need to do
  3. Verbal prompting: repeating the task
  4. Visual prompting: demonstrating the task

- **Types of behavior modification**

Poor behavior is often due to a belief by the client that he is not being listened to. If we work hard at really trying to listen even when the client is nonverbal, behavior modification is rarely needed.

- Listen
  - Rider is pulling at your arm may be asking you to let go. If you don't, this may lead to pinching.
- Techniques
  - Push down on hand to release the grasp of pinching or hair pulling
  - Duck and weave
- Modeling
  - Always model acceptable social behavior
  - Can say "No."

## **Dismounting**

- **Dismounts** -The side walker's job during dismount is to assist the student's right leg over the horse.
  - There are two basic dismounts. They are:
    1. The Croup Dismount - The instructor will direct the student to lean forward, swing their right leg over the back of the horse and dismount on the left side of the horse with the assistance of the instructor.
    2. The Crest Dismount – The side walker will assist the rider in bringing their leg forward and over the crest of the horse's neck.
- **Saying Thank You** -Once the student has dismounted, he or she is instructed to thank



their horse, horse handler and side walker.

- This is an important opportunity for teaching appropriate social interaction. Make sure that you respond to the student.
- The side walker's responsibility to the student does not end until the student leaves the arena and is reunited with their caregiver.
- The side walker should then return the helmet to the helmet cabinet after spraying the inside with lice-spray.

## **Emergency Situations**

As a side walker, your #1 responsibility is the rider. Emergencies and falls are extremely rare, and we want to keep it that way.

- If *another* horse misbehaves or any surprises occur that could scare your horse, remind your horse handler to halt and await instruction.
- If *your* horse spooks or otherwise misbehaves and the rider falls or must be taken off the horse, the instructor and side walker **MUST** ensure the rider's safety.
  - As the rider falls towards you wrap your arms around the rider's chest (under the arm pits) and clasp your hands around your wrists. If there is a second side walker, they should make sure that the rider's foot releases from the stirrup and does not get caught on the saddle.
  - Step backwards pulling the rider off of the horse.
  - Let gravity do the work. Keep your knees bent. Do not use your back!
  - Let the rider's feet hit the ground.
  - Continue to move away from the horse.
  - Make sure that others in the arena are aware of the situation so that they may go to the other end of the arena and stop their horses.

*If you feel tired or for any reason unable to walk/trot for a full class, please notify a member of the instructor. We are happy to accommodate your needs to keep you and our students safe.*