

Guide to RDA Volunteer Training Program



Guide to RDA Volunteer Training Program 2009

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Further information can be obtained from:

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Training volunteers for the RDA Program

Volunteers who are participating in the RDA Riding and Driving programs need training specific to the tasks that they will be undertaking. This is important to ensure that the RDA program is safe for all volunteers and riders.

General Safety

Like most recreational activities horse riding presents the participants with inherent risks, and as such **safety** is a key part of the RDA program.

Each volunteer is responsible for their own safety, the safety of other volunteers, riders, visitors and horses.

All volunteers must be aware of what to do in case of emergency.

Volunteers are covered by personal accident insurance when they are:

- *Signed on at an RDA centre,*
- *Participating in RDA activities,*
- *Working with accredited RDA horses,*
- *Under the supervision of a qualified RDA coach, and they are*
- *Following RDA procedures.*

For safety volunteers must:

- Wear suitable clothing for the job they are doing, such as long trousers and closed in flat shoes (with suitable tread) and clothes to protect them from cold and hot weather
- Avoid wearing excessive or dangly jewellery and clothing which can present a hazard during lesson or whilst operating machinery
- Notify the coach of any pre-existing condition/illness or other limitations which may preclude them from certain activities e.g. lifting due to a back injury
- Understand the role they are required to undertake, if not ASK QUESTIONS
- Receive adequate training for the tasks they undertake, including when they are asked to use maintenance equipment such as lawn mowers, tractor, chemicals, power tools etc.
- Be familiar with the Centre's Emergency Evacuation Plan and the location of the assembly area
- Know where the First aid kit is located and who is trained to administer first aid
- Attend training days and read available information regarding the RDA Volunteer Training program and safety (especially the *RDA Volunteer Information Booklet*).
- Use correct lifting techniques, always bending your knees and protect your back from injury. Ask for help when lifting heavy objects.

Safety around Horses

RDA centres are largely designed to keep people, horses and vehicles in separate areas.

The paddocks and horse tie up areas are out of bounds to riders and visitors. This includes new volunteers unless supervised and until they have completed their training.

DON'T

- Allow unsupervised people to wander among the horses
- Walk behind a horse without speaking to it
- Feed horses tidbits or treats unless instructed by the coach
- Run or make loud noises around horses or during lesson times

Safety during Lessons

Once a lesson has commenced the coach for that session is totally responsible for the safety of the riding session.

As such it is important to follow the directions of the coach at all times as they have received training in all aspects of the RDA SA program, risk management and safety.

Pay attention to the coach and avoid unnecessary chatter with other volunteers and riders.

Horse Preparation

Horse preparation involves the following tasks:

- Catching, leading and releasing horses
- Tying up using a quick release knot
- Rugging and un-rugging horses
- Grooming and cleaning hooves
- Saddling and bridling
- Preparing feeds and feeding horses

Horses should not be prepared for riding until a qualified coach is on site (or unless volunteers have completed a Horse Preparation Certificate course – *currently under development by RDA Australia*).

New volunteers may perform the above tasks under supervision until the coach decides they are competent in the tasks.

Training – Horse Preparation

Training can be one to one or in group sessions. Start with the presenter (a coach or volunteer coordinator) demonstrating the various tasks as listed above.

Talk about the situations particular to RDA such as:

- **NEVER** walk under the lead rope or in front of horses when tied up.
- **NEVER** tie up a horse when the rider is mounted, and
- How to work around the horse when cross tied etc.

Fun Activities for Group Sessions:

Parts of the Horse

Write different parts of the horse on sticky labels. Volunteers take turns choosing a label and sticking it to the named part of the horse.

Grooming Kits

Mix up grooming kits and ask volunteers to swap items until they have all the required items in their kit. Volunteers have to use correct name for each item.

Gear checking

Tack up a horse for riding making deliberate errors and ask volunteers to identify and correct the mistakes.

Videos

Watch the RDA Bicentennial Training Video section called "Gearing Up" (18 mins).

Other Resources

Refer volunteers to other RDA resources to learn more about the tasks involved in horse preparation.

- Basic Horsemastership chapter in the OTC Manual
- 1995 Coaching Manual
- Bicentennial RDA Training video
- Volunteer Information Booklet

Signing off on 'Horse Preparation Training'

Once volunteers can safely demonstrate the practical activities involved in horse preparation, the coach (or Volunteer Coordinator) can sign off this section of their training.

Competencies are:

- Demonstrate the correct technique for approaching, catching, leading and tying up a horse using a quick release knot.
- Demonstrate rugging, how to remove a rug. Identify 3 reasons for rugging an RDA horse
- Name the parts of the horse
- Demonstrate the grooming and hoof cleaning procedure, identify 3 reasons for grooming a horse and name the items commonly found in a grooming kit.
- Name the parts of the saddle/bridle
- Demonstrate correct saddling and bridling techniques
- Identify the different feeds used at the RDA centre and prepare feeds for horses
- Demonstrate safely releasing a horse into a yard or paddock with other horses (one horse per handler).



HANDOUT

JOB DESCRIPTION

POSITION:

LEADER

RESPONSIBLE TO:

The leader is under direction of the RDA Coach in charge of the session. The Coach is responsible for the safety and welfare of the riders and volunteers during the riding session.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

During the lesson the **leader** is responsible for the **horse**.

The leader **positions** and **controls** the horse during mounting, dismounting and during ridden activities. Where there is no side walker, the leader's job may also involve verbal support to the rider, to relay the coach's instructions and explain how to give a command to the horse. Leaders should offer as little assistance with guiding the horse as is necessary so that the rider can develop their skills.

During a therapy session the leader should ensure that the horse is moving with an active stride at the speed asked for by the coach/therapist.

Duties may include:

- Catching the required horse(s) and bringing in for the lesson
- Grooming, saddling and bridling the horse ready for the lesson
- Fitting special equipment appropriate to the rider
- Warming up the horse
- Working in a team with the coach, side walker(s) and the rider
- Unsaddling, grooming and releasing the horse
- Cleaning and putting tack and equipment away
- Completing some basic paperwork as instructed by the coach

Responsibilities include:

- Being reliable and advising the coach if you are unable to attend
- Participate in regular training sessions
- Abide by RDA policies
- To act in a safe and responsible manner
- To treat RDA clients with dignity and respect, and treat their private information confidentially
- To report any medical conditions that may affect your work and any accident or injury that occurs during RDA activities.

QUALIFICATIONS & REQUIREMENTS:

All RDA volunteers must be between 12 and 80 years of age and physically capable to participate in the duties they undertake.

NB: leading an RDA horse is a responsible and strenuous activity. Horse knowledge is welcome but not essential, as training will be provided. In South Australia, all volunteers over the age of 18 years must have a Police History clearance before working with children and people with disabilities. Your RDA centre can assist with free police history checks.

Leading and Side Leading

Horses are prey animals and in moments of stress or fear the horse will react according to its primal survival instincts. RDA riding sessions often create the environment that may trigger the horse's two greatest fears: *pressure* and *restraint*.

Pressure – two side walkers, a coach and a leader crowded around a horse's sides and flanks create pressure. The horses' primal response to pressure is flight/escape.

Restraint – leaders and horse handlers can commonly be seen in the RDA setting to be "dragging" the horse when leading, applying pressure to the lead rope and therefore on the horse's head. In 90% of cases the horse will tolerate this pressure, however if the horse is spooked, the restraint is the first thing the horse will feel and the natural instinct is to pull away violently in order to escape.

Correct leading techniques can eradicate these problems because it focuses on building and maintaining a bond between the leader and the horse.

These are some of the poor habits commonly observed between RDA horses and leaders:

- Horse and leader are not "connected"
- Horse is lethargic and inattentive
- Leader is lethargic and inattentive
- Horse's movement is poor because the horse is not straight nor forward moving
- Horse's ears pin back when approached
- Horse bites leaders/handlers
- Horse cow kicks side walkers
- Horse becomes unwilling to stand still especially during mounting and dismounting
- Horse spooks suddenly for no apparent reason

RDA horses are expected to be well mannered, obedient, responsive to voice aids and provide a safe and comfortable ride for RDA clients.

Remember that RDA horses work with different volunteers each session so you should try to use the same commands as other leaders at your centre.

NEVER let go of the horse with a rider
NEVER smack a horse while a rider is on

The Warm Up

Leaders should take time to get to know the horse that they are leading and ensure that the horse is obedient to their commands. The warm up is a time to "tune" the horse's mind to their job and to warm up their muscles. A whip may be used in the warm up session until the horse is responsive to voice aids.

Step 1

An obedient horse is willing to move forward when asked. Using the voice command "Walk on" wait for the horse to take the first step. You should expect an active forward walk. Hold the lead rope loosely in your left hand (do not loop the rope around your hand) and walk at the horse's shoulder encouraging it to walk next to you.

Step 2

Check that the horse is obedient when asked to halt. Always ask the horse to stand square with all four feet positioned under the body to better carry the weight of the rider. Ask the horse to step back 3 -5 paces.

Step 3

Work with the horse for at least 10 minutes. Asking for the walk, trot, halt and step back until the horse is attentive to your commands. The more time you spend with the horse on a regular basis will help you to develop a better relationship and understanding.

During the lesson

- Observe safety requirements at all times
- Listen to the instructions of the coach
- Keep the horse on task and paying attention
- Watch that you always keep at least one horse length from the horse in front
- Change the sides that you are leading, keeping the horse on the outside track
- Keep turns smooth and not too tight as this can unbalance a rider
- Give enough room for side walkers and riders knees around gates and barrels etc
- Be aware of leading under low tree branches that may brush against the rider.
- Allow the rider to control the horse as much as possible
- Watch for any stress or change in your horse's behaviour and alert the coach
- If you need to stop, bring the horse into the centre of the arena to avoid traffic jams.

HANDOUT

Horse Communication

Horses are largely non-verbal animals and mainly communicate with their ears, eyes, tail and body language. Horses are herd animals and live according to a pecking order in the herd. Horses higher in the pecking order establish their dominance by driving other horses out of their personal space. A horse that "crowds" it's handler by pushing, swinging its head towards you, stepping on you or nipping/biting is trying to establish it's dominance over you. When the handler fails to address these habits the horse will continue to behave poorly. Horses respond best to firm, but caring discipline and relationships are best developed if we mirror the horse's natural behaviour. Rewards can be offered in the form of a pat/stroke and friendly use of the voice, "good boy/girl" but the best reward is for the horse to be left alone. When a horse is behaving well, give him a single pat and leave him alone.

The horse must **never** be disciplined by the handler when a rider is on, other than with a firm use of the voice. Smacking a horse can cause a sudden reaction that may unbalance the rider. Therefore the best time to establish a good working relationship with the horse is prior to or after riding lessons.



EARS

- ✿ Ears laid back – unhappy, frightened or feeling threatened
- ✿ Ears forward – with a tense body means the horse's attention is elsewhere and may lead to a spook
- ✿ Ears moving forwards and backwards mean the horse is listening to his rider/handlers



TAIL

- ✿ Unless the horse is swatting flies, excessive swishing of the tail indicates the horse is annoyed, uncomfortable or stressed.
- ✿ When feeling threatened the tail may clamp down ready for flight



EYES

- ✿ The desirable eye in an RDA horse is attentive, calm and relaxed.
- ✿ Horses with half shut eyes are "switched off" and inattentive.
- ✿ Horses' eyes also show worry, stress and fear and in very tolerant RDA horses this is how they tell us they need a break or they are in pain.



SIGNS OF STRESS include:

- ✿ Grinding the teeth/bit
- ✿ Excessive tail swishing
- ✿ Pinning ears back
- ✿ Biting horses/handlers
- ✿ Charging at the ramp
- ✿ Failing to stand still at the ramp
- ✿ Fidgeting
- ✿ Pawing the ground
- ✿ Listlessness/lack of energy

It is important to recognise when a horse is tired, stressed or in pain. Unhappy horses can react in sudden, unexpected ways which can potentially result in an accident. Horse handlers should advise coaches of any changes in a horse's normal behaviour.

HANDOUT

Mounting and Dismounting in the RDA Setting

This is the time when the rider is most vulnerable. Mounting and dismounting should be carried out in an orderly, calm and quiet way.

It should be undertaken only with a coach, or helper specially trained for the task and nominated by the coach in charge. It should only take place in a specifically designed area, free from all obstacles and distractions.

Mounting and Dismounting - (ambulant riders)

When a more physically capable rider is mounting from the ground, block or ramp, they may require the assistance of up to three helpers.

1. The **leader** positions and controls the horse
2. The **off-side helper** is responsible for counter-balancing the saddle by pulling down on the off-side stirrup leather, positioning the rider's hands and assisting the rider's right leg over the saddle.
3. The **near-side helper** (a coach or a trained person nominated by the coach) directs the procedure. They help the rider greet the horse, place the hands in correct position, place left foot in the stirrup and support the rider's left leg as it swings over the horse's rump, ensuring that the rider sits down gently. For dismounting the near side helper assists the rider to place their hands in the correct position, ensures both feet are out of the stirrups, helps the rider to lean forward and land safely with slightly bent knees.

Important safety note:

You must never:

- Lift a rider onto a block or ramp or up stairs
- Mount a rider when a horse is tied up
- Tie a rider on to a horse
- Lift a body weight beyond your ability or OH&S guidelines
- Mount riders with insufficient numbers of helpers.

The Role of the Leader

The leader plays an important part in the mounting and dismounting procedure by **positioning** and **controlling** the horse.

The leader stands facing the horse slightly to one side, such that the horse's head faces towards the leader's chest (*not* chest!).

The leader lightly holds the reins either side of the bit. Usually a horse will stand more comfortably if the leader gives space around the head, only increasing contact with the reins if the horse attempts to move forward.

If the horse begins to walk backwards the leader *must not* apply pressure on the horse's mouth. Instead, release the pressure; then reposition the horse.



HANDOUT

JOB DESCRIPTION

POSITION:

SIDE WALKER

RESPONSIBLE TO:

The Side Walker is under direction of the RDA Coach in charge of the session. The Coach is responsible for the safety and welfare of the riders and volunteers during the riding session.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

During the lesson the **side walker** is responsible for the **rider**. Side walkers walk beside the rider and are there to give both physical and moral support. However, they should only support or assist the rider if necessary. When there are two side walkers, you must work together as a team with only one person nominated to relay instructions to the rider. In times of emergency, side walkers must stay with their riders at all costs, e.g. even walk through puddles on trail rides. The side walkers should monitor the rider for fatigue or discomfort and advise the coach accordingly.

Duties may include:

- Greeting and escorting rider to and from the mounting ramp
- Correctly fitting approved safety riding helmets
- Ensuring riders are appropriately dressed for riding (jackets to be buttoned/zipped up and not flapping)
- Assist the rider to carry out the coach's directions
- Fitting special equipment appropriate to the rider
- Working in a team with the coach, leader, other side walkers and the rider
- Completing some basic paperwork as instructed by the coach

Responsibilities include:

- Being reliable and advising the coach if you are unable to attend
- Participate in regular training sessions
- Abide by RDA policies
- To act in a safe and responsible manner
- To treat RDA clients with dignity and respect, and treat their private information confidentially
- To report any medical conditions that may affect your work and any accident or injury that occurs during RDA activities.

QUALIFICATIONS & REQUIREMENTS:

All RDA volunteers must be between 12 and 80 years of age and physically capable to participate in the duties they undertake.

NB: side walking with an RDA rider is a responsible and strenuous activity. Knowledge of disabilities is welcome but not essential, as training will be provided. In South Australia, all volunteers over the age of 18 years must have a Police History clearance before working with children and people with disabilities. Your RDA centre can assist with free police history checks.

Signing off on 'Train the Leader'

Once volunteers can safely demonstrate the practical activities involved in leading a horse, the coach (or Volunteer Coordinator) can sign off this section of their training.

Competencies are:

- Demonstrate the correct technique for leading a horse into and out of the mounting ramp, holding and positioning the horse in the ramp.
- Demonstrate correct techniques for warming up a horse prior to the lesson.
- Demonstrate correct techniques for side leading a horse
 - With side walkers
 - Without side walkers
- Demonstrate an understanding of basic school movements in the arena
 - Following directions for 20m circle, crossing diagonal, serpentines
 - Keeping one horse distance at all times
 - Passing left shoulder to left shoulder.

Signing off on 'Side Walker Training'

Once volunteers can safely demonstrate the practical activities involved in side walking with clients a horse, the coach (or Volunteer Coordinator) can sign off this section of their training.

Competencies are:

- Demonstrate the correct technique for assisting a rider in the mounting ramp
- Demonstrate appropriate handholds for supporting a rider e.g. open hand, changing position frequently to avoid loss of sensation in the rider's legs etc.
- Demonstrate safe lifting techniques for assisting the coach to mount riders
- Demonstrate correctly fitting helmets, adjusting stirrups and other equipment (e.g. Posey belts).
- Describe common signs of fatigue, illness and onset of seizure activity.
- Participate in a lesson, displaying good support to riders
- Demonstrates respect for people with disabilities, using age appropriate language and respect for confidentiality.

Other Types of Training

Maintenance tasks

Centres that have access to tractors, mowers, power tools and other equipment must ensure that the people authorised to use them can do so safely.

Committee meeting minutes must reflect the names of the people authorised to use particular equipment.

Before commencing any maintenance task a volunteer needs to consider:

- Is the coach aware that I am undertaking tasks?
 - Is a lesson in progress?
 - Will my activities pose a safety risk to clients?
- Do I have permission from the centre committee to undertake the set tasks, am I authorised to use the required equipment?
- If I am using chemicals have I been trained in their correct use, storage and disposal?
- Do I have committee approval to perform the activity during lesson time?
- Do I fully understand the requirements of the task – if not ASK for instructions?
- Have I received appropriate training for the task?
- Is there adequate supervision to ensure my safety?
- Is the equipment in safe working order?
- Are there sufficient helpers to perform the task?
- Am I appropriately dressed (e.g. ear protection, goggles, gloves, mask)?

PLEASE NOTE:

NO POWER TOOLS, MOWERS, TRACTORS OR OTHER VEHICLES ARE TO BE USED DURING RDA LESSONS.



Stage 1 – Volunteer Induction

This checklist is to assist with the introduction of all new RDA volunteers. Volunteers wishing to actively participate in RDA lessons must also complete Stage 2 – Basic Program Training.

Volunteer Information

- RDA is an Equal Opportunity organisation and will consider all people offering to perform volunteer work for the organisation solely on the basis of their skill, aptitude and relevant qualifications. Volunteers between the ages of 12 years and 80 years must demonstrate that they are physically capable of performing the required duties they are allocated. Children under the age of 18 years must have parental permission to volunteer.
- Volunteers over the age of 18 years may be required by State/Territory legislation to undergo criminal history screening relevant for their State.
- Issue Membership Form and police clearance application (if necessary)
- Issue RDA Volunteer Information Booklet and discussed the following sections of the booklet:
 - o Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers
 - o Position descriptions for volunteers in Leader and Sidewalker roles and other roles available in RDA
 - o Guidelines on protection of infectious diseases
 - o Basic principles of lifting and back care
 - o Volunteering Code of Practice
- Outline the structure of RDA Australia, affiliated State Associations, and Centre Management Committees.

Volunteer Management Policies

- Times of arrival and departure must be signed in the Volunteer Attendance Register
- Volunteers are insured for personal accident and when travelling for RDA business
- Volunteers may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses (travel costs to and from the RDA centre on your normal day of volunteering are not eligible for reimbursement). Speak to your Centre Management Committee for details.
- RDA recommends that volunteers wear sun protective headwear, long sleeves, trousers and sunscreen whilst at RDA. Closed foot wear is mandatory. Thongs, high heeled shoes, flowing scarves, loose jewellery or hats that blow off should not be worn.
- Discuss the grievance policy
- Please follow directions of the Coach who is responsible for the safety of volunteers and riders during RDA activities with horses and on training days
- Safety is everyone's responsibility – report any concerns to the Coach or a Committee Member
- RDA is committed to providing a safe environment for all members. Volunteers are obligated to participate in Program Training appropriate to their allocated tasks and attend ongoing training days when requested.
- Discuss training opportunities under the 2005 Coach Education system

Centre Information

- Describe the Centre Emergency Evacuation Plan including assembly areas and responsible officers
- Explain First Aid procedures including first aid person(s), location of kits and Incident and Accident reporting
- Outline Centre procedure for advising of absences
- Outline Centre procedure for cancelling lessons due to extreme weather
- RDA is a Non-smoking organisation. Smoking is only allowed in designated areas.
- No dogs allowed on RDA premises (Guide Dogs excepted)
- Privacy and confidentiality of clients is paramount. Photos are not to be taken without parental permission
- All gates to be kept closed
- Speed limit throughout the centre is not to exceed 10 km/hr
- PROVIDE A TOUR OF FACILITIES HIGHLIGHTING ANY OUT OF BOUNDS AREAS.

VOLUNTEER NAME: DATE: SIGNED OFF BY:

