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March 2004

Volume 2

STRIDES VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

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Normally, we would send out a newsletter monthly, but this extra edition is to remind you that Strides will be closed for Quarter Break from March 29 to April 4, 2004. Although there will be no riding lessons that week, we will be working with the horses, compiling evaluations and writing lesson plans.

Working With Riders Who Have CP



If you are under the gun with a deadline for volunteer hours, please contact Nora at (818) 341-4737 or at the ranch to arrange to help with the work we will be doing during the break.

Tips on Horse Leading

Only trained volunteers are allowed to lead a horse. This is because horses can be unpredictable, and the horse leader is our greatest safety measure. The horse leader is responsible **ONLY FOR THE HORSE**. In an emergency, the horse leader keeps the horse calm and takes the horse away from any fallen riders.

Cerebral Palsy, or CP, is brain damage that occurs at, just before, or during birth. Depending on the portion of the brain that has received the damage, the symptoms may be very mild, moderate, or severe. Speech may or may not be affected. Muscles may be tight and spastic, or loose and flaccid, or a combination of the two. The person who has CP may or may not be mentally impaired. Hearing is occasionally impaired as well. Fine motor (small movements, such as picking up an M&M) and gross motor (large movements, such as walking) abilities are usually affected to some degree.

Horse people normally lead their horses from the left side. In therapeutic riding, the horse can be lead from either side. The horse leader stays between the horse's head and the horse's neck while the horse is moving. When standing still, the horse leader moves to the front of the horse and holds the bridle or halter as well as the lead rope.

How you work with a rider with CP will depend upon the kind of CP the rider has. If the muscles are tight

The lead rope should be held with

and spastic, motion will be limited. We will try to gently stretch the leg muscles prior to mounting if the legs are tight. The rider may have to mount sitting sideways, and move to facing forward when the muscles have relaxed from the movement of the horse. Never pull a tight muscle, as it can tear easily. Gently ease the leg into position as far as it can go and don't ask for more.

It is not uncommon for a rider who has CP to have a very strong "startle reflex". Loud noises and sudden movements can cause the body to go into strong spasm. For this reason, try to do everything slowly, and, while we appreciate your enthusiasm, try to keep the volume to a minimum.

The rewards of working with riders who have CP are great. Many of our riders were never supposed to walk or talk, yet with the help of the horse (and you!) they are learning to do just that. You will see changes from week to week. It's what makes volunteering at Strides so rewarding and fun!

[Find out more....
http://www.strides.org/physical.html](http://www.strides.org/physical.html)

Quick Links...

- [Strides Web Site](#)
- [Volunteer Application](#)
- [Volunteer Manual](#)

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the hand closest to the horse being 6-8 inches from the snap. Holding the rope directly on the snap makes most horses nervous. The other hand holds the rest of the rope FOLDED in a figure 8. Never loop the lead rope around your hand, as a spooked horse could cause the rope to tighten on your hand and cause injury. Never let it drag on the ground, as you or the horse could trip on it. Throwing it over your shoulder could cause it to get tangled around your neck. We certainly don't want THAT to happen!

We allow our riders to do as much as they can, so horse leading really means just being there for safety. Let the rider decide when and where to turn or stop, not you. As our riders progress, you can hold the lead rope even more loosely, as much as 2 or 2 1/2 feet from the snap. This gives the rider even more control. We love to see our riders progress, and this helps them to do it.

[For more tips on horse leading,
read our volunteer manual.
http://www.strides.org/Volunteer%
20Manual.PDF »](http://www.strides.org/Volunteer%20Manual.PDF)

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