

NTRC Side Walker Manual

General

- If you have questions, ask!
- As a side-walker you are responsible for the safety of your rider. The safety of the rider is your number one priority, ALWAYS.
- The goal of the side walker is to help your riders towards independence. You are there to help and support the rider as needed, but always allow your rider to be as independent as possible.
- Make sure to arrive ready for class. However your day was before you arrive, you need to be ready to give your rider positive support in class. The riders will pick up on your enthusiasm and will feed off of it, so keep a positive attitude.
- Pay attention to the instructor at all times. While conversation is encouraged, it should be limited while instruction is being given. You are there to assist the instructor, not to teach the class or to teach general horseback riding. Keep your rider feedback relevant to the current class material. Side walkers are the extended arm of the instructor.
- Help riders follow instructions, whether that means repeating when they get distracted or giving physical assistance. Encourage riders to pay attention and allow riders to show their ability; don't do it for them.
- Use genuine, specific praise. 'Good job' doesn't mean as much as 'You did a good job holding your reins today'.
- Side walkers are a team, so have a plan about which roles each person will fill. Who will help mount? Who will speak first?
- Learn your rider's needs. As much as possible you will have the same rider every week. Will they want to hug you every time? Are they sound sensitive? Do they have any mobility needs?
- Riders can be overwhelmed if both side walkers and the instructor are all talking at once, so minimize input during class. Only one side walker speak at a time, and give your rider time to respond before repeating.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets, so they are available to assist the rider in an emergency.
- Inappropriate behaviour is NOT allowed from our riders, no matter the circumstances. No hitting, biting, hair pulling, spitting, etc. Allowing this is NOT in the best interests of the rider's development. If your rider is behaving inappropriately towards you or the horse, come to the center of the arena and the instructor will come assist immediately.

Physical Support

- Physical support is for riders that have physical difficulty performing tasks set by the instructor. This may include using holds to help the rider stay in the saddle properly or using techniques like 'hand-over-hand' to help a rider follow instruction and learn skills.
- Always begin by assuming riders understand the instruction, and the difficulty is solely physical. DO NOT assume all riders with physical needs also have cognitive impairments. While many of them will have both, it is much more respectful to our riders to add more cognitive support as needed than to assume physical needs require cognitive support.

- Hand-Over-Hand
 - Place your hand over the rider's hand, and use their body under your assistance to complete a task.

Cognitive Support

- Cognitive support is helping the riders with needs other than physical. This can include encouraging the rider to listen and pay attention as well as helping them understand the instructor. These riders may or may not need physical support as well.
- One of the most common types of cognitive support you will need to offer is repetition or demonstration for riders with processing difficulties. Some riders will hear an instruction and have trouble understanding what is being asked right away. Some riders will understand the instruction but will not be able to act on it right away. Some riders will not understand the instruction. All of these riders will need help with repetition of instructions or representing the instructions in a way they can understand.
- Always give riders time to process instructions before stepping in to help. Do not repeat instructions immediately and repetitively, this can just cause confusion and frustration.
- This support may also include helping riders with integrating skills into activities. If the class is playing a game be aware that the rider still needs to be working on the skills that are being taught, and may need reminders.
- Cognitive support can also include helping riders with basic tasks that they simply don't know how to do, such as reading a sign or helping with left and rights.

Other Support

- Social
 - If a rider has social difficulties, part of their support may just be talking to them and helping them communicate appropriately with their class.
 - You may need to remind a rider when certain topics or comments are appropriate and when they are not.
 - Encourage riders to enter social interactions with their peers.
- Communication
 - Some riders may have hearing, visual, or speech impairments and may or may not use aids.
 - Riders may rely on lip-reading, communication boards, sign language, etc. You can help them understand the instructor if they have trouble, as well as help them express what they have to say during class.

Holds

- Holds are used to give a rider physical support in sitting in the saddle correctly and safely. One or two side walkers may be used, one on either side of the rider.
- If there are two side walkers, holds must be symmetrical on either side regardless of which hold is used.
- Always walk even with the horse's shoulder, not back at the flank.
- NEVER leave the rider. Maintain the hold you were directed to use unless otherwise instructed. If you feel a hold needs changing, feel free to ask the instructor, but never make changes without their consent. Holds may change depending on the activity or the rider's ability that day.

- Your instructor may ask you to change the hold you do according to the rider's performance during a specific class or while performing a specific task.
- If your arm gets tired, DO NOT leave your rider. Come to the center of the arena and ask the instructor for assistance so that the rider is never left unattended on either side.
- There are two basic holds used at NTRC: thigh hold and ankle hold. Your instructor may give you specific instructions to alter or adapt a hold for a certain rider.
- Thigh Hold
 - Thigh hold gives maximum support to riders in the saddle. It may be used for riders just beginning, those with balance difficulties, or those that lack core/ trunk strength.
 - Gently rest your forearm closest to the horse above the rider's knee on their thigh and grasp the front of the saddle. If the rider tends to slip side to the side in the saddle, adding slight pressure can help them balance.
 - Do not clamp the rider onto the horse. You are there to provide support and balance, not to do the core work for the rider.
 - Do not lean onto the rider or the horse. Use a light touch unless otherwise directed by the instructor.
 - When your arm gets tired in a thigh hold let your team know and go to the center of the arena. The instructor will help you switch sides safely, making sure the rider always has a hold. Do not change your hold or move away from your rider.
- Ankle Hold
 - Ankle hold is a less restrictive and allows the rider to use more of their own body control. Some riders that use an ankle hold in reality require no physical support at all, but need a hold to feel comfortable and stable in the saddle.
 - Grasp the back of the ankle on the boot or shoe of the rider with the hand closest to the horse. Use gentle pressure to reposition the rider's leg if it slips out of place. A firmer grip may be used if the rider requires occasional help balancing in the saddle.
 - Do not yank the ankle or keep constant pressure downward on the ankle. If the rider requires constant pressure a thigh hold may be more appropriate, at the discretion of the instructor.
 - If the rider struggles with forward/ backward leg positioning or balance gently moving the leg forward will counterbalance them back and vice versa

Before Class

- Meet and greet your rider upon arrival. Stay with your rider from the time they arrive for class until class has ended.
- Only assist with helmets as needed; let the rider put on their own helmet if they can. If you are unsure that a helmet is correctly positioned or are concerned about helmet fit, bring it to your instructor's attention.
- Have your rider ready to go when class starts.

Mounting

- Riders may require different levels of assistance with mounting, just as with other activities. If you are unsure of the amount of aid to give your rider during mounting, ask your instructor.

- Before mounting you should have your rider ready at the gate with their helmet on, waiting for the instructor to call you into the arena. When the instructor calls for the rider, allow the rider to open the gate and close it behind them. Only assist as necessary. Then escort your rider to the mounting block, or wherever the instructor is waiting to receive them.
- If you are the only side walker, go to the off-side mounting block opposite the rider and instructor. If the rider has two side walkers, one goes to the off-side mounting block and one goes to wait for the team past the mounting area to relieve the instructor after they exit the block. In the indoor arena this will be at dressage letter K, and outside you may ask your instructor where they would like you to wait.
- The mounting block is the most dangerous area of the arena. A thigh hold is ALWAYS used coming out of the mounting block, no matter what hold is used during class.
- Stay in the thigh hold coming out of the mounting block and do not release the hold until the instructor gives you further instructions.
- Never force a rider's legs into position while the rider is mounting. If the rider cannot easily sit properly, give them support until the instructor can help reposition them.
- Croup mount
 - The croup mount is the default method of mounting. The rider mounts by swinging their leg back over the horse's croup and settles in the saddle
 - If the rider is unassisted, use your hands to apply pressure in the off-side stirrup so that saddle stays straight on the horse's back during mounting. This is especially important for heavier riders.
 - If the rider requires assistance, you may have to help the rider's leg over the cantle of the saddle and down to the stirrup. You may also have to help the rider sit up straight in the saddle once mounted.
 - Do not put the rider's foot in the stirrup while they are still in the mounting block. The instructor will be adjusting the rider's saddle and stirrups once you have left the mounting area, and leaving it out will allow the team to leave the block quicker and get adjusted more efficiently.
- Crest mount
 - A crest mount is used for riders that are physically unable to lift their leg over the horse's croup for a traditional mount. This may be due to lack of lower body strength or inflexibility in the legs or hips. For a crest mount the rider is lifted bottom first into the saddle and then the legs are swung forward to the horse's crest. From there the legs are gently separated and lowered to the stirrups.
 - If the rider uses a crest mount, the instructor will ask one side walker to join them on the mounting block and one to go to the off-side block.
 - As a team, the instructor and the first side walker will lift the rider into the saddle back first. The second side walker will catch the rider's hips and stabilize them in the saddle. Then, the first side walker will move their hands to the rider's shoulders to help stabilize them as they turn. The instructor and the second side walker will pivot the rider forward in the saddle as the instructor lifts the legs over the horse's crest. With the first side walker providing balance, the instructor and the second side walker will gently separate and lower the rider's legs down to the stirrups. Once the rider is correctly positioned in the saddle the first side walker will exit the mounting block and wait outside the mounting area to relieve the instructor as usual.
 - The instructor will always give instruction to the specific needs of the rider when using a crest mount. If you are unclear about what is needed don't hesitate to ask.

- Lift mount
 - A lift mount is used if a rider is too heavy or awkward for a regular crest mount.
 - As with a crest mount, the instructor will ask one side walker to join them on the mounting block and one to go to the off-side block.
 - The first side walker and the instructor will position the rider into the lift supports. Then the instructor will use the control panel to lift the rider while the first side walker makes sure the supports maintain the correct position. The instructor and the first side walker will swing the rider out overtop of the horse. The instructor will lower the rider into the saddle while both side walkers help the rider into the correct position. Then the first side walker will stabilize the rider while the instructor and the second side walker remove the lift supports. The instructor will remove the lift from the horse and rider. Once the rider is correctly positioned in the saddle the first side walker will exit the mounting block and wait outside the mounting area to relieve the instructor as usual.
 - The instructor will always give instruction to the specific needs of the rider when using a lift mount. If you are unclear about what is needed don't hesitate to ask.

Dismounting

- In general, riders use the same type of dismount as mount, but may need different levels of assistance. If you are unsure of the amount of aid to give your rider during mounting, ask your instructor.
- Nearly all riders can dismount to the ground, as long it is not unsafe for the rider or the horse. Riders that are unable to support themselves to the floor and are too heavy for the instructor to assist may dismount back onto the mounting block.
- At the end of class, the instructor will ask the riders to line up for wrap-up and dismounting. Do not release or change your hold from class until directed by the instructor. Encourage riders to keep holding their reins, keep their feet in their stirrups, etc. until the instructor comes to help them dismount.
- The instructor will ask the rider to remove their feet from their stirrups and place their reins high enough on the horse's neck that they are out of the way during dismounting. Only assist the rider as needed. As riders progress, this may altered to meet specific rider needs, eg. they may hold their reins to dismount independently, they may use the stirrup to support themselves in their dismount, etc.
- No matter the type of dismount used, once the rider has reached the floor come around the front of the horse to help your rider thank their team and escort the rider back through the gate to the waiting area.
- Croup dismount
 - The croup dismount is the default method of dismounting. The rider dismounts by leaning forward and swinging their leg back straight back over the cantle and sliding to the floor.
 - If the rider only has one side walker, once the instructor has approached the horse for the dismount you will go to the off-side of the horse. If the rider has two side walkers, the one closest to the instructor will fall back towards the horse's flank to stop any rider from moving towards the horse's rear once they have dismounted.
 - If the rider is unassisted, the instructor will ask you to confirm the rider has their foot out of their stirrup on the off-side and the rider will dismount independently. Use your hands to apply pressure in the off-side stirrup so that saddle stays straight on the horse's back during dismounting. This is especially important for heavier riders or riders that are very slow to dismount.

- If the rider requires assistance, you may have to help the rider's leg over the cantle of the saddle. Be sure to help the rider keep their leg straight by supporting them above and below the knee. A bent knee is more likely to get stuck on the cantle and impede the rider's dismount.
- Crest dismount
 - In general, riders that use a crest mount will also use a crest dismount. The rider will bring both legs forward over the horse's crest, pivot towards the instructor, and slide to the floor facing away from the horse.
 - The side walker on the instructor's side will help stabilize the rider's hips and shoulders in the saddle. The instructor and off-side side walker will lift the rider's legs together up to the horse's crest. The close side walker will take the rider's shoulders and the off-side will take the riders hips as the instructor pivots the legs towards themselves. The close side walker will step back and the off-side side walker will release the hips as the rider slides down the horse in the instructor's arms.
 - If the rider uses a mobility aid such as crutches or a wheelchair the side walkers may be asked to assist the instructor to move the rider to their device. The side walkers may also be required to physically help their rider leave the arena, whether that means pushing a wheelchair or giving support as a rider walks out.
 - The instructor will always give instruction to the specific needs of the rider when using a crest mount. If you are unclear about what is needed don't hesitate to ask.
- Lift dismount
 - A lift dismount is used extremely rarely, as most riders that use the lift to mount can be dismounted using a crest dismount. If the lift is used for dismounting your rider, follow all directions from the instructor.
- Emergency dismount
 - An emergency dismount is used to get the rider off the horse as quickly as possible. It is used when having the rider on the horse has become unsafe for any reason. The most common reasons for an emergency dismount are the horse's behaviour becoming unsafe or the rider experiencing a medical emergency.
 - A side walker almost never performs an emergency dismount; usually the instructor will be able to get to the rider in time. Although we use safety stirrups, you can assist the instructor dismount the rider by making sure the off-side foot is out of the stirrup and helping the rider release the reins.
 - Once the rider has reached the floor, stay with your rider. The horse leader will lead the horse away. The instructor will still have the rest of the class to attend to, so either help the rider to the gate if they are uninjured or stay with the rider on the ground until the instructor can make sure the rider is safe to move.

After Class

- At the end of class, walk your rider back across the arena to their family. Let the rider open and close the gate if they are able, but offer assistance as required.
- Helmets must stay on until the rider is out of the arena.
- After class, PLEASE take a minute or two to make a note about how your rider did today – you may have seen more than the instructor.

Rider Falls

- Falls in class are rare, but do occur. While we do not ask volunteers to put themselves in danger, we ask you attempt to break the fall if possible. As you are able, help the rider to the ground slowly and safely.
- Once your rider has reached the floor, DO NOT move your rider after a fall. The only exception is if they are in physical danger where they are, whether from environmental factors or are in danger of being trampled by the horse. If necessary gently but quickly move your rider to safety.
- Stay with your rider, the horse leader will lead the horse away. The instructor will assess the rider and give you further instructions about next steps. If it is decided that your rider can safely move out of the arena, continue to stay with your rider and their family until the decision is made whether the rider will be remounting to finish the class or not.
- If your rider falls, the instructor will fill out an incident report and will list you as a witness to the event.