



Volunteer Training Handbook

RIDING PROGRAM 2026

This year's lesson dates TBD

Day of Ride contact: Paula 403-389-1079 or Reta 403-431-3017

You may find it helpful to save the contact's number in your phone.

Our Vision

We champion the benefits and joys of equine activities for those with diverse physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural needs in the Bow Valley.

Our Mission

- Provide safe and adaptive equine activities for those of all ages.
- Through connections with the horses the participants build confidence, strength, independence while having fun.
- Our village of volunteers and partners are instrumental in the program's success.

Our Value Statements

Teamwork We achieve more when we collaborate and work together.

Adaptability We tailor each participant's lesson based on their individual needs.

Diversity Each member's unique story brings strength to our program.

Respect We value and treat people, horses and the land with dignity and professionalism

Accountability The board and members are committed, fiscally responsible and provide a safe, inclusive environment.

Connection We build friendships and partnerships within the Bow Valley and equine community.

Volunteer Handbook

Thank you for volunteering to help out with the Bow Valley Equine Adaptive (BVEA). We are happy to have you on board and hope you enjoy your time with us. We are very fortunate to partner with YMCA Camp Chief Hector to provide this program, and would ask that you make sure you follow any posted signs while on the YMCA site. Please follow the signs to the stables and park considerately, making sure not to block the feed bins and gas tanks. Please obey the posted speed limits - there are often children and/or wildlife in the area.

General Requirements

1. Please arrive on time. Your rider depends on you to get the horse ready. If you know you will be late, please contact us to let us know when you will arrive. (Jenny Clarys 403 688 4508)
2. Your role as a volunteer is what makes the program run safely and effectively, no matter what your role is. There is always someone who depends on you. It is important to let us know if you will be absent for a session as far in advance as possible. This way we can make alternative arrangements.
3. Check the bulletin board for updates, email schedules and new information every week. When you arrive add your name to the sign-in sheet and record your time of arrival. When you are leaving, record the time on the sign-in sheet. Any notes of rider accomplishments can be left in the *Participant's Comment Binder*.
4. Please dress in comfortable, weather appropriate clothing with a minimum of jewelry. Class volunteers should wear sturdy boots or shoes with a low heel for safety. Boots that come above the ankle are best. Remember, horses occasionally step on toes by accident!
5. ANY accident or injury that occurs at Camp Chief Hector must be reported to the Instructor in charge and an incident form completed.
6. Smoking is not permitted anywhere at Camp Chief Hector.
7. Occasionally there may be media presence for public relations purposes, however, it is imperative that confidentiality is maintained. The Instructor or BVEA member present should be informed of any media presence. Photography or video is not permitted without prior permission from the guardian or parent present.
8. We are **not to feed** the horses anything without express permission from Camp Chief Hector staff.
9. We aim to provide water that is usually located in the trailer next to the arena. Please help yourself!

10. You are very important to BVEA and we want you to enjoy your time with us. If you have any questions or are at all unsure during the lessons, please ask the Instructor or another BVEA volunteer. Please let us know of any difficulties or conflicts during your volunteer experience - we are keen for you to continue to work with us!

CONFIDENTIALITY

While volunteering with BVEA, you may gain knowledge about a rider or riders which is confidential. It is imperative that riders not be discussed outside of BVEA in any way which may break confidentiality.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

1. Please sign in and sign out on the sign in sheet which will be left outside of the barn on the steps.
2. Riders and their parents/caregivers will make their way down to the arena area when directed by the Instructor or volunteer. They will wait outside the fencing until directed by the Instructor.
3. Horses will be led to the arena area by volunteer leaders and will wait inside the arena along the fence line for participants to arrive.
4. Loud noises and quick movement may startle horses.
5. All riders must be wearing a properly fitted helmet and footwear before entering the arena. Volunteers you can help riders be ready by ensuring helmets are properly fit and fastened.
6. Riders are only mounted/dismounted under the supervision of the *Instructor In Charge*.
7. Never approach a horse from the rear. Make sure it can see you and that you speak before touching it. Keep a hand on the horse's body when moving behind it.
8. Never let go of the reins or lead rope on a horse and do not allow them to dangle on the ground where they may be stepped on or caught by a leg.
9. Tie horse with a quick release knot to a solid post. Always tie the horse by the halter and lead rope, never the reins. Tie at a height level with the horse's back or higher. When putting on the Sidepull Bridle over the halter, untie the horse lead-line.
10. All staff and volunteers will be trained in the correct tying of a quick release knot. If you are ever unsure please ask the instructor or another experienced volunteer to check your work.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Student Accident

Remain Calm

Roles of instructor

- Leader in all incidents and emergencies

Leaders

- STOP your horse immediately
- If not directly involved in the incident ensure you are away from the incident
- If you do not have a sidewalker, remember to attend to your rider as well. You may need to enlist parental assistance.
- Follow all directions given to you by the instructor – getting a first aid kit, calling 911, managing bystanders etc.

If your rider is involved in the incident:

- If you can safely move your horse away without causing further risk do so and the sidewalker/s will stay with the participant.
- Do not move a participant who has landed on the ground.

Sidewalkers

- Please stay with your participant and be prepared to dismount them, ideally distract student with another activity on the horse – a drink of water, warm up arm exercises, feet out of stirrups - toes up, down, circles, alphabet drawings
- If your participant is too wiggly sitting in the saddle on a still horse you may need to dismount before being given direction to. DO WHAT SEEMS SAFEST
- Do not let your participant wander in the arena.

If your rider is involved in the incident:

- Stay with your participant if it is safe for you.
- DO NOT move participants unless directed to do so by the instructor.
- You need to provide comfort to the participant and do your best to keep parents at a safe distance.

If we have an emergency situation and you have any issues after with overwhelming stress, anxiety, depression, or other day to day activities. We advise that you seek professional mental health support. There is mental health support available at Canmore General Hospital in Banff Mineral Springs daily from 2-9pm.

GENERAL INFORMATION - LESSONS

Leaders - Arrive **1 hour before** the first class. This will give you time to check for any updates to information and make sure the horse is prepared for the first class. Lead your horse to the arena area when asked and walk the horse on the inside fence line. The Instructor will give directions for mounting order.

Sidewalkers - Please arrive 30 minutes before the class is due to start. Check for updates to information and locate your rider. Accompany riders and parents/spectators to the arena area. Assist with helmet/ boots/belt if required. Wait with the rider in the spectator area until the Instructor asks the rider to enter the arena.

Fitting Helmets

The helmet must be fitted properly, fitting snugly but without creating pressure or being uncomfortable. An appropriately fit helmet will move eyebrows up and down when the helmet is lifted slightly up and down. The ear straps go in front and behind the ears. The chin strap is snug and comfortable. A riding helmet fits the same way as a bike helmet. A properly fit helmet provides adequate protection. The instructor will have assigned a helmet from the BVEA supply that is properly sized.

During Class

Volunteers must be alert at all times to the requests and directions of the Instructor, who retains responsibility for the smooth running of the class and the safety of participants.

If you are having problems with a particular horse, speak to the instructor quietly but do not alarm your rider unnecessarily.

End of Class

The Instructor will give directions for dismounting order. Riders should be accompanied by the sidewalker/s to thank their horse, and should be escorted back to the parent/caregiver in the spectator area. There may be time for the rider to take a turn to brush the horse.

Lessons are run back to back. Instructors and Leaders should check to see if any different tack is required for the next rider. The next rider should be waiting in the spectator area. The sidewalker should greet the next rider and wait with them until the Instructor directs the rider to enter the Arena.

LEADERS

The Leader is responsible for the horse at all times. On occasion, a rider may be directed to go off the lead for parts of the lesson, in which case the leader should remain in the leading position between the horse's (on the left) head and shoulder, ready to assist or take control again if necessary.

1. At the start of the lesson, warm up the horse until the Instructor directs you to bring the horse to the mounting area. When approaching a mounting block, lead the horse from the right side so that the horse's left side is against the block. Halt the horse and make sure it is still and quiet. Keep your attention on the horse.
2. After the rider is mounted, the instructor will tell you to 'walk on' for a few steps and then halt again so that stirrups and rider position can be adjusted.
3. Usually horses are led from their left side with the leader's hand 6-8 inches from the horse's halter, with the extra rope folded in the left hand. Maintain a position slightly behind the horse's head. Leaders will lead on the inside to hear directions from the instructor.
4. The Instructor will tell the rider what to do with the horse. The leader's job is to assist the rider in carrying out these instructions safely.

Points to Remember:

Learn the name of your rider and sidewalkers.

Check that everyone is ready before walking on.

Do NOT wrap the lead rope around your hand.

Leave sufficient space for the rider's legs and sidewalkers when passing obstacles or going through openings.

Make large gentle turns - sharp corners can throw a rider off balance.

Leave two horse lengths between your horse and any other riding team in front of you.

Be ready to slow the horse down or halt if the rider becomes unbalanced (your sidewalkers will warn you).

Allow the rider to do as much as possible alone. Wait for the rider to attempt to complete the instruction before assisting. (make sure the horse performs for the rider). Help riders to achieve success.

When the riders are stopped to do exercises, it is the leader's job to see that the horse stands still and squarely on all four legs. Stand to the left of the horse facing your rider during these exercises.

Falls are rare but can happen. If your rider falls, your responsibility is for the horse you are leading. The Instructor will take care of the rider.

If another rider falls or a horse gets loose or shies, STOP your horse and hold it securely until all is calm. NEVER let go of your horse. Follow the emergency procedures depending on the severity of the accident.

SIDEWALKERS

The sidewalker is responsible for the **rider** at all times and should stay at the Rider's side to prevent falls and to assist the rider to carry out the Instructor's directions. The Instructor will inform you of individual **rider's** support requirements.

Many of the students need help with the 'hand over hand' method to learn or perform a skill. Perseverance and repetition with lots of encouragement will allow the **rider** to succeed. Encouraging the **rider** to achieve the task is often much harder than doing the task ourselves, but it is important for the **rider's** development that they do the task as independently as possible. Carrying tissues is helpful when supporting riders.

Right sidewalker - hold onto the stirrup leather and provide enough weight so that the saddle stays straight on the horse (counter weight).

Support the rider - It is important the side walkers apply support as directed by the instructor. Different levels of support may be required depending on the activity or ability of the rider.

Minimum hold - is used for riders with good balance needing a little support to steady their position or encourage the leg to stay long and heel down. The sidewalk will cup the rider's ankle with the closest hand to the rider.

Medium hold - is used when the rider needs more support and is often used coming out of the mounting block or when trotting. The sidewalk holds the front of the saddle flap with the hand nearest the rider. The forearm rests just above the rider's knee. (Be careful to keep the thumb lined up with the fingers to prevent injury to the thumb if the horse should stop or turn suddenly).

Maximum Hold - is used for riders who need a lot of support. It is basically the same as the medium hold except the sidewalk's forearm supports the rider at the hip joint. When applied by both sidewalk's this hold provides a lot of support physically and gives confidence to timid riders.

Full hold - is occasionally used to give an unbalanced rider extra security when needed, for example, when riding up and down hills on the trail or when learning a trot. The sidewalk supports at the knee or ankle with the outside hand and uses the inside hand to support the rider's back.

Occasionally there may be an unforeseen Rider absence. In this situation, it can be beneficial to observe the lesson or talk with parents to gain insight into the therapeutic riding experience. As you get to know the riders your volunteer role will be increasingly rewarding.

Points to remember:

During mounting, it may be useful for one sidewalker to stand on the 'off' (right) side of the horse to prevent it moving away from the mounting block, and to assist the rider from that side as necessary.

Keep your rider interested and occupied until all riders are mounted and the Instructor is ready to begin the class. Once the class has started, try to avoid excessive chatting and encourage the rider to concentrate on the Instructor's directions.

Walk next to the rider's hips, facing forward.

Do not lean on a horse or support yourself on the Rider.

Always be aware of your rider's position on the horse. If the rider starts to slip sideways, don't panic, but support them, warn the leader, and encourage the **rider** to correct their position themselves. If the **rider** cannot correct his or her own person, have the Leader halt the horse in the centre of the arena and help the rider back into the correct position.

Where two sidewalkers are used, you may need to change sides to avoid muscle fatigue. Alert your leader, who will halt the horse so you can change sides one at a time.

Be alert for signs of fatigue or discomfort in your **rider**. Let the Instructor know if there is a problem.

Escort your **rider** back to the spectator area after dismounting.

**VOLUNTEERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO SEEK INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE
WHENEVER THEY ARE UNSURE OF A PROCEDURE.**

It is always better to be safe than sorry!

Thank you for volunteering with Bow Valley Equine Adaptive!

