



**A Premiere Accredited Therapeutic
Horseback Riding Program**

Parent and or Caregiver/Rider
Handbook

Welcome to MTRA, a non profit 501c3 equine assisted therapeutic riding program. We teach basic riding and horsemanship skills to riders of all ages with special needs. At MTRA we do not believe that we are bound by our physical or mental limitations. Our program is designed to benefit our riders physically, socially and emotionally by using horses and volunteers who are trained to work with individuals of varying abilities.

The purpose of this handbook is to share our policies and procedures so that MTRA can give you the most effective therapeutic riding lessons possible and make your experience with us the best it can be. By reading this handbook and being an active participant in your lessons you will get the most out of your therapeutic riding experience.

The required registration forms necessary to begin your lessons can be found on our website www.mtraocala.org or from our office.

- Participant registration form/Photo release/Authorization for emergency medical release
- Participant Liability release
- Rider's medical history and physician's release-This must be completed, signed and dated by the Doctor. Rider height and weight must be completed on form, or form will be returned to you. Riders can not participate in any activities without this form. **Form must be updated annually.**
- Rider Questionnaire

The rider forms are updated annually. Please understand that this paperwork is necessary for MTRA to remain in compliance with our accreditation standards and insurance requirements.

Program Information

New Rider Evaluations

These are scheduled when an opening occurs. The initial meeting will not be the first ride. It will be a meeting to discover if the potential participant will fit into the program, volunteer needs, and horse and if lesson is suitable.

The first ride will take place during the first lesson where an evaluation of skills will take place.

Scheduling

We try to take into account the scheduling preference of the rider; however, we cannot guarantee the day/or time you prefer will be available. Riders will be placed in the most appropriate class according to the rider's abilities and age. We do maintain an active wait list.

Therapeutic Riding Lessons

Lessons are taught by a Path International Certified therapeutic riding instructor and provide each rider with a unique experience. We use a team of 1 to 3 volunteers per rider to assist during each lesson. Riders participate in tasks and games that encourage physical strengthening and cognitive improvement, while learning basic riding skills.

Instruction is tailored to fit each of our rider's specific needs and to help improve their levels of strength, balance, mobility and confidence during the riding experience. The emphasis is on developing riding skills in a safe environment that is both therapeutic and fun. Specific goals are set for each rider at the beginning of a session based upon input from the rider's parents, physician and therapist.

Continued Participation in the Program

Ongoing assessments are done on the progress of riders. If a rider has been determined as not gaining any benefit from therapeutic riding, he/she may be removed from a class and reassigned or removed from the program. During these assessments we will also determine if a rider still requires our specialized services. If it is determined that a rider no longer requires our services, the rider may be promoted out of our program to allow for riders requiring it. If able we can assist a rider to enter another riding academy program.

Billing and payment policy

MTRA has taken great care in setting participant fees for our services. Our fees are necessary to help offset the cost of operations.

Therapeutic and Non- Therapeutic Riding Lessons

- Group session \$40 per session \$320.00 for 8 weeks with a 10 % disc (\$288) if paid in full.
- Private session \$50 per session \$400.00 for 8 weeks with a 10% disc(\$360) if paid in full

Equine Facilitated Mental Health

- Individual sessions \$120 per 1 hour session
- Family Group Sessions \$250 per 1 hour session

Lesson fees and Billing

Lesson fees are billed in advance for all scheduled riding lessons within each session and must be paid in full prior to the first class. Alternative payment options are available and must be discussed with Executive Director prior to the first class to avoid late charges. Payments will still be required for all absences, unexcused and excused. Absences due to a medical emergency or other medical procedure will be taken into consideration on a case by case basis.

Payments must be made prior to first riding lesson. If payment has not been received a **\$10 late fee will be assessed**. Statements will be issued monthly for accounts with a balance due after 30 days. Unless you have a payment plan, a \$10 late fee will be assessed every 30 days that your account is overdue. You must contact the Executive Director if you are not able to make your payment when it is due.

Checks and money orders should be made payable to MTRA. They can be turned into the office before the lesson or mailed to: Marion Therapeutic Riding Association, Inc. 6850 SE 41st Court, Ocala, and Fl. 34480 (However these payments must be received prior to the scheduled session.) You may also pay on-line through pay pal.

Scholarships and Financial Aid:

There is an application process which will include your most recent IRS income tax return, schedule C or a copy of an SSI check. A sliding scale based on the Federal Poverty guidelines will be used to determine the amount awarded. If you have contacts that would be interested in donating to a scholarship fund please give MTRA contact information. There are many riders who desperately need assistance.

Account Balances:

Rider accounts that are over 60 days past due will result in the Rider's removal from the program until payment is received in full. At that time they can be returned to the program if there are openings available. If you are having difficulty making payments, you can apply for financial aid. If you do not meet eligibility criteria, then you can request a payment plan. *–Please note: If you do not follow the terms of your payment plan, then the balance owed shall immediately become due in full and the participant will be prohibited from participating in the program until full payment is received.*

Returned Checks:

Your account will be assessed a return check fee for each check that is returned to our office (the fee will be based on the what the bank charges MTRA). The returned check fee shall be assessed by invoice and that invoice shall be subject to a late fee if it is not paid within 30 days.

Policies and Procedures

Rider limitations:

MTRA has a weight limit of 180lbs. Weight limitations may differ for persons requiring a full weight transfer and will be at the discretion of the Instructor. Horseback riding may not be a suitable recreational activity for certain individuals and therefore it is necessary for you to have your physician complete and sign the Physicians release/Rider medical history form. Should the physical condition of the rider change at any time, MTRA is to be notified immediately and a new Physicians release form must be completed and filed with the office.

Children must be at least 4 years old to participate in the Therapeutic riding Program. Younger children are inappropriate for mounted activities because their structural and neurological development is inadequate to organize the sensory input from the equine or to accommodate its movement.

Certain conditions require additional precautions to be taken when on or around horses and **some conditions are contradictions to riding.** Most activities have some type of precautions and guidelines for participation and horse riding is no exception. For example; individuals who have spinal curvatures that are unable to accommodate the movement of the horse, and those who lack neck and trunk control may not be suitable rider participants.

Clothing:

For both evaluations and lessons, riders should wear long pants such as riding breeches, jeans or leggings to prevent chafing. Girls may not wear skirts during their lessons at any time. A closed toe shoe with a hard sole and a small heel are the safest form of footwear. We have riding boots available for use.

Riders should avoid wearing jewelry, long dangling necklaces and earrings will not be allowed during lesson activities. Safety helmets that meet ASTM-SEI requirements are to be worn by all riders and if necessary, will be provided.

Inclement Weather:

Please do not assume that classes will be canceled due to bad weather. We often provide stable management and horse care activities in place of riding. Remember this is Florida: it may be raining where you are, but clear at MTRA. Please refer to our “inclement weather policy” for more information.

Attendance:

Riders/Parents need to contact our office as soon as possible if they need to cancel their lesson. Any absence that MTRA is not notified about 24 hours prior to class will be considered unexcused. Any participant having three unexcused absences in one session will be removed from the schedule for the session and their time slot will be replaced with a qualifying participant.

A student arriving more than fifteen minutes late after class is scheduled to begin, or if the arena gate is already closed and mounted activities have started, will not be able to participate in the lesson. If there are extenuating circumstances for your tardiness, it is the instructor’s discretion if you will be allowed to participate in the lesson that day. Excessive tardiness will result in the rider being removed from the schedule for that session.

Rider paperwork:

All rider paperwork must be up to date and the medical release form must be updated annually. No student will be allowed to ride without these forms properly completed, with original signatures, and turned in prior to class. Medical release forms must be completed in full with rider height and weight, diagnosis, doctor signature, and dated. Incomplete forms will be returned to you.

MTRA No-Show and Cancellation Policies

1. Please **arrive on time or a few minutes early** for your scheduled lesson time. Getting helmets, clothing changes and bathroom breaks need to be handled prior to your lesson time. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late and the arena gate is closed this means the lesson has already started, you will not be able to ride that day.
2. If you will be absent, please call the office or instructor as soon as possible. (office 352-732-7300) Please leave a message if you get voice mail. Our volunteers fight the traffic as you do in order to help. By letting us know that you will be absent, we can let our volunteers know so that they can plan their day.
3. Payment for the session is expected regardless of absences and no-shows.
4. There will be **no refunds** for lessons missed or canceled by the participant or parent. Please note that illnesses not requiring hospitalization will be considered an absence.(we allow one absence with credit that is to be used for extreme circumstances and you must speak with the Executive Director prior to expecting the credit – see # 5)
5. Please notify MTRA as soon as possible in the event of illnesses requiring hospitalization or other unforeseen emergencies. Based on individual circumstances, a credit may be applied to your account.
6. If you will be out of town during the riding session, please speak with us **at the beginning of the session** to discuss payment adjustments. These absences will be considered advanced and you will not be expected to pay for these missed lessons. However, if you fail to inform us of this information in **advance** you will be charged.
7. Excessive absences (3 or more) or no-shows (more than 1) will disqualify the rider from the remainder of the session and the rider will be placed on the waiting list for the next available session.
8. **Riders who are receiving financial aid** and have more than 1 no-show will be subject to forfeiting the financial aid and becoming ineligible for future aid.
9. **If MTRA must cancel a class** due to weather or other circumstances, we will make every attempt to schedule a make-up class. If our calendar does not allow for a make-up class, the riders will receive a credit for the canceled class.
10. Due to our schedule, MTRA does not provide individual make-up lessons in the event of absence or no-show.

Please don't be a "NO-SHOW, NO-CALL" this results in:

Unnecessary tacking and un-tacking of our horses

Inefficient use of staff and volunteers

Excessive absences take up a time slot that could be used by another rider in need.

MTRA-INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

Please do not assume that classes will be canceled due to bad weather. We often provide stable management and horse care classes in place of riding. Remember, this is Florida: It may be raining where you are, but clear at MTRA.

If you have not been called, your class has not been canceled.

If MTRA cancels the lesson due to inclement weather, if time allows, a make-up will be scheduled through your instructor or a credit will be applied to your account. At the discretion of the instructor and depending on the severity of the weather, mounted lessons may not be feasible. It is MTRA policy to provide ground/barn lessons in the event that a mounted lesson is not possible. It is your final decision of whether you or your child participates in the lesson, mounted and unmounted: however, if you choose not to participate and the lesson is still held, you will not be given a make-up or a credit to your account.

Inclement Weather Standards:

- Mounted lessons will not be held when the heat index is above 95 degrees.
Please note that MTRA bases this on the actual temperature plus the relative humidity-which Provides us with the estimated “feels like “temperature or heat index. This is not only for the Safety of our riders, but also our volunteers, Instructor and most of all, our horses.
- Mounted lessons will not be held when the wind factor is below 45 degrees.
- Mounted lessons will not be held during heavy rain.
- Mounted lessons will not be held if there is visible lightening or thunder regardless if it is raining.

MTRA rule is that no rider can be on a horse within 15 minutes of the last thunder/lightening.

MTRA Time Standards:

- If the rider has participated in 50 % or more of the lesson time-it will be considered a full completed lesson.
- If the rider participation is less that 50% of the total lesson time it will be considered a cancellation by MTRA.

Safety Rules and Barn Policies

1. All students who are not responsible for themselves should not be left unattended at any time and must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian until the student is escorted by the instructor or volunteer to their lesson.
2. A parent or adult guardian must be present during the entire riding lesson for all riders under the age of 21.
3. A parent or adult guardian must be present during the entire riding lesson for all non-verbal or blind riders.
4. MTRA reserves the right to extend the parental/guardian policy to other riders as deemed necessary.
5. Riders and parents must wait at the gate or arena until their lesson time. No rider or parent should be back in the barn while other lessons are being held or if the instructor is elsewhere.
6. During lessons **Only students and volunteers are allowed in the barn area**-parents / caregivers are asked to remain in the designated areas around arena.
7. A safety helmet must be worn at all times during their lessons. MTRA has helmets available for use or you may purchase your own at a tack shop or online.
8. Riders, parents, visitors, volunteers and staff are **required** to wear closed toed shoes when in the barn and around the horses at all times. Individuals that arrive on property without the proper foot attire will not be allowed in the barn area.
9. **At MTRA we do not feed hand treats to the horses** If a rider wishes to bring treats, they may give them to the horse in a bucket at the Instructor's discretion and will be done within the time constraints of the riders' lesson.
10. There are **no pets** allowed on MTRA property.
11. Remember this is Florida-Riders should be properly hydrated and protected from the elements. Cool wrap bands, sunglasses, jackets, etc. can be worn by the rider as long as they do not prevent lesson activities.
12. Any bleeding or open sores must be covered with a bandage, or the rider cannot attend that lesson.
13. Please be sure to advise the instructor of any medical changes such as recent seizures or illnesses that may affect their riding abilities.
14. Please refrain from coaching or speaking with your rider from the sidelines. It is important that their focus remain on the instructor and assisting volunteers.
15. Please make sure that any visitors you bring (including siblings, other family members and friends) are kept under supervision. No climbing/sitting/standing on the fence, no shouting or loud voices, no running around the riding arena, barn or parking lot, etc.
16. Horses get scared of strange noises and sights. Children other than the student are welcome with adult supervision, but must sit at the appropriate areas or use the designated play area. Any visitors that are causing a safety hazard will be asked to leave the premises.
17. Our Instructors are always available to answer any questions you have regarding you or your child's riding lessons. Please understand that they may not be available directly before or after the lesson, but can set up a day/time to address your thoughts.
18. All phones and other electronic devices on our premises must be put on **silent**. This is a distraction to our lessons and can potentially frighten the horses.
19. **Absolutely no smoking allowed at the MTRA facility.**
20. Abusive behavior, lack of respect for volunteers, staff and horses, or any violation of MTRA rules will result in immediate dismissal from property.

**Thank you for following our safety rules.
Safety is our number one priority!**