

Guidelines When Assisting Participants With (Dis)abilities

Participant/volunteer relationships are an integral part of the Hope Haven experience. Please keep in mind that you “*help the participant more by assisting them less*”. Instructors will share the focus of each lesson, as well as long-term goals, and tell you how much help to give the participant. If you are unsure, please ask. The lessons are a team effort and everyone is learning.

Before you say or do something for the participant stop and consider the following:

1. Can they do it themselves?

How much help do they need? It doesn't matter if it takes them a long time

2. Have they had time to process and respond to instructions?

Give them at least 10 seconds (it feels like a long time!) to respond. If you repeat the instruction too soon they may have to start the processing all over again

3. Is it really necessary?

Has the instructor already said it? The goal is to foster *thinking participants* who can be proud of their abilities and achievements and eventually do things independently

4. Is the participant becoming “prompt dependent”?

Expecting someone to cue them, participants often wait and respond to the prompt instead of initiating an action themselves. Let them take the responsibility and learn to plan ahead.

5. Did the instructor ask you to reinforce directions? Is the instructor still talking with the participant?

It is enough for anyone to listen to one person at a time

6. Allow them to make mistakes

(As long as they don't jeopardize anyone's safety including the horse). Consequences speak louder than words.

7. Try to resist the temptation to cue the participant

Participants will learn that it's up to them to make the horse walk on - they don't like just sitting there.

8. Give them a chance to figure out what's next before asking “what's next?”

9. Allow them to problem solve

I.e. let them figure out where to put their gloves when they take them off

Less is more. You will be impressed by how much participants can do given time and a supportive environment in which to make mistakes and learn from them. Initially participants may be reluctant to try on their own but will eventually take pride in what they can do.

Remember:

- Participants are people first. Focus on their ability rather than their disability.
- Let participants try by themselves first, giving assistance only as required - let them learn.
- Let participants answer questions - the instructor needs to know how much they have learned.
- Treat adults as adults
- Remember that a person in a wheelchair treats their chair as an extension of their body - don't hang or lean on the chair or put things on it.
- Listen carefully and patiently to someone who has difficulty speaking; wait for them to finish, ask short questions, repeat what you have understood and let the person respond, don't pretend to understand.
- Place yourself at eye level with someone in a wheelchair or on crutches.
- Relax and be yourself.
- Consider who is in the environment before passing on suggestions and input to the Instructor.
- The use of the participant's given name is used during lessons. We avoid the use of nicknames or terms of endearment unless otherwise directed by the Instructor as they may be offensive to a participant.
- Given the nature of an adaptive riding program there are many instances when staff or volunteers will have to touch the participant to assist them with various tasks. For example mounting and dismounting, correcting their position on the horse or assisting with grooming and tacking the horse.
 - When assisting with grooming or tacking the horse, the hand-over-hand method is appropriate but the volunteer or the staff member must always ask the participant before making contact.
 - When assisting in mounting or positioning on the horse the sidewalker should wait for direction from the Instructor with regards to when or how to physically assist the participant.
 - An important part of what we do is celebrating successes and achievements. We encourage the use of a handshake, high fives, fist pumps as demonstrations of a job well done (versus hugs).
 - While it is important to establish a friendly, caring relationship with our participants it is also important to maintain respectful and professional practices for everyone's sake.