



Courageous
CONNECTIONS

VOLUNTEER MANUAL

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WELCOME TO COURAGEOUS CONNECTIONS

Mission Statement: *To promote the physical and emotional development of people of all ages and unique abilities through safe, therapeutic, outdoor experiences.*

Email Address: volunteer@courageous-connections.org

Website: <http://www.courageous-connections.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/courageousconnections/>

Instagram: [@CourageousConnectionsTH](https://www.instagram.com/CourageousConnectionsTH)

Thank you for your interest in our volunteer program. Volunteers are a vital part of the services we provide and we look forward to having you join our team. **All volunteers are required to read and comply with the policies and procedures contained in the Volunteer Manual.**

INTRODUCTION

Courageous Connections uses Equine Assisted Activities (EEAs) for the purpose of contributing positively to the cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being of our participants. At Courageous Connections, equine activities encompass three distinct programs:

Equine Encounters/Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)-This unmounted class is designed to help participants develop self-confidence, resiliency, respect, and effective communication skills as they build strong, healthy relationships with both the horses and staff. These classes are conducted by an Equine Specialist in Mental Health & Learning (ESMHL) and consist of activities such as grooming, leading, and other activities specific to their individual goals. Horses are allowed a loose lead so that they can move about freely during the class. These may be private or group classes. Volunteers in this class are Horse Leaders.

Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP)-This unmounted class is designed for participants with mental health challenges that require a Mental Health Professional (MHP). These classes may have similar activities, but the MHP determines the goals and works with the ESMHL to construct a class to assist participants in meeting them. These are usually private classes. Volunteers in this class are Horse Leaders.

Horse Essentials-This unmounted class offers a unique opportunity to develop a strong foundation of horsemanship skills. Participants can expect to receive a broad range of topics in horse care, horse handling, and horse management. This class was designed to support individuals who are interested in developing their knowledge in the art of horsemanship and goals oriented around this curriculum. This class is appropriate for all ages, abilities, and skill levels and is taught by a PATH Certified Riding Instructor. Participants can expect to gain horse knowledge but will also experience additional positive impacts such as promoting body and behavioral awareness, building relationships with others and horses, and connecting with nature. Courageous Connections has contracted with Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) to provide this class for individuals who qualify.

VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

Horse Leader for Equine Assisted Activities: Must be 18 or older and have completed Informed Trauma Care class and horsemanship orientation offered for free by Courageous Connections, before volunteering. Horse experience is required.

Administrative/Event Volunteers: Determined by task/event. Training provided.

VOLUNTEER PAPERWORK

All paperwork must be completed before volunteers may begin. Parental consent and signatures are needed for those under 18 years of age. Current volunteers should let the office know if there is a change of address, phone numbers, email, as well as changes in health or recent physical injuries.

VOLUNTEER SCHEDULING

All scheduling is done through the Volunteer Coordinator (VC).

If you have a last-minute emergency (within 24 hours of lesson) and cannot make it to your scheduled class or are running late, please call: **425 232-3246 or 425-260-7340**. If there is no answer, please leave a message.

If you know you will be unavailable for a lesson and can give advance notice (at least 48 hours), please email the Volunteer@Courageous-Connections.org or call **425 422-1539** to leave a message.

In the event of a participant cancellation, we will notify you as soon as possible.

You are extremely important to the successful operation of our program. Courageous Connections could not function without our volunteers; therefore, it is very important that everyone be **prompt** and **dependable**. We understand that scheduling conflicts will occur, yet because of the nature of our program, volunteer cancellations affect everyone involved in the class. Advance notice, when possible, is crucial so we can plan the class accordingly.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Courageous Connections' staff and volunteers are required to maintain the confidentiality of all medical, social, referral and personal information in regards to participants and their families.

INCLUSION STATEMENT

Courageous Connections is committed to providing an inclusive community that promotes and values every individual. We believe that organizations that are diverse in identity and perspective create an environment where everyone, from any background, can be their best self. Courageous Connections strives to develop a board of directors and hire staff that reflect the community we serve to remain accountable to this vision.

COVID POLICY

Courageous Connections will comply with all Federal, State, and local guidelines for safety during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES

The following guidelines outline expected behavior while performing as a Courageous Connections Volunteer:

- Be aware of and practice safety rules at all times.
- Notify the appropriate person if you are unable to fulfill your commitment.
- Do not possess, use, or be under the influence of alcohol and/or illegal drugs while in any Courageous Connections class or volunteering at any event, meeting, or activity.
- Do not use obscene or discriminatory language in any Courageous Connections' class, event, meeting, or activity.
- Dress conservatively and appropriately at all times when on Courageous Connections' premises and while volunteering for any Courageous Connections event.
- Respect individual confidentiality, rights, safety, and property of others whether they are staff, participants, or fellow volunteers.
- No cell phone use when 'on duty'. Cell phones must be turned off or on silent.
- No dogs allowed on the property or in your car.
- Do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, political association, sexual orientation, age, mental condition or disability.
- Inform staff immediately if you have an injury or condition that would compromise safety to yourself, the participant, or others during your scheduled volunteer time.
- Follow established processes to report horse behaviors which are out of the norm to your instructor or therapist before you leave for the day.
- Handle Courageous Connections' horses as you have been trained, which includes to never strike, hit, slap, jerk, or discipline the program horses in any manner. Report the mistreatment of the horses to Courageous Connections' staff immediately.
- Do not feed or pet the horses during class.
- Wear nametag on your upper shirt or jacket area where it can be easily seen by participants, instructors, parents and other volunteers.
- Do not forget to sign in and log your hours, unless otherwise directed.

CLASS VOLUNTEER ATTIRE

Hot Weather

- Long pants are always recommended, but capris/below the knee shorts are acceptable.
- Summer shirts are acceptable. Shirts can be sleeveless, but no bare midriffs or low-cut shirts. Shirts must be long enough to cover the top of pants at all times.

Cold Weather

- Gloves are advisable for warmth and protection. For the safety of you, the participant and horse you cannot have your hands in your pockets. Dress in layers-removing clothing is easier than adding.
- Please be sure your gloves will have a firm grip on the lead rope.
- Bring a jacket with you. It can be cooler than you may think! Scarves should be tucked into your jacket.

CLOSED TOED/CLOSED HEEL SHOES ARE REQUIRED!

- Protect your feet! While tennis shoes are acceptable, hiking boots or paddock boots are ideal.
- Keep in mind that even during spring and fall, the ground may be wet and muddy (be prepared to walk through puddles, not around them, which could take you away from your horse and/or participant).
- Long hair should be tied back.

BARN AND ARENA SAFETY RULES

Keeping participants, volunteers, horses, families, visitors, and staff safe each day is our greatest priority and everyone needs to help! Observing rules in and around the barn is not only a necessity, it is **mandatory**; failing to do so could result in serious injury. Everyone must observe these basic rules at all times when working with our participants and horses. Thank you for being safe!

- No smoking anywhere on the property.
- Practice 'Safety Spacing' at all times. Whether in the barn aisle, arena or on the trail, never get too close to the horses around you.
- Participants should be escorted back to their parents/guardians and never left unattended. When in the barn or out of sight of the instructor, there must be 2 volunteers present with a participant who is younger than 18.
- No running or sudden movements.
- No shouting or loud noises.
- Arena, stall, paddock, and pasture gates must remain closed when horses are present. Ask the instructor for permission to enter.
- If you are unsure of what you are doing, ask for help.
- Never enter a stall without permission.
- Make sure the horse is aware of your presence before approaching.
- NEVER stand behind or go under a horse.
- Report any unsafe condition immediately.
- NEVER wrap the lead line around your hand while it is attached to a horse.

Communication Techniques & Suggestions

- Relax and be yourself.
- Be open, accepting, non-judgmental, and erase preconceived notions from your mind.
- Speak directly to the person with the disability.
- Use active listening skills. Children and adults will be glad to talk about themselves.
- Use simple, clear, precise language.
- Help participants only when it is needed. Please listen for "prompts" from the Instructor during class and resist the temptation to constantly assist students. Allow them to develop more independence by doing things for themselves.

EAL/EFP VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

You are directly responsible for the horse and the participant.

EAL/EFP volunteers play a key role in assisting participants to meet their goals. Both the participant and the volunteer will benefit from establishing a relationship with one another. Your feedback about the participant's experience to the instructor after class is helpful in lesson planning and evaluation of the day's lesson.

Class volunteers are the backbone of our Equine Assisted Activities. Your relationship with the participant helps to build confidence and self-esteem. Your encouragement and assistance during the lesson helps the participant to learn and be successful and foster independence.

- EAL classes will have one ES (Instructor) per class and one volunteer per horse.
- These may be either private or group classes.
- Horses are to be on a very loose lead so that they are free to move away or towards the participant.
- Volunteers are expected to participate in any opening or closing "check-in" exercises.
- When you are leading a horse into or out of the arena, have someone else open and close the gates for you.
- Pay attention to safety spacing at all times that horses are present.
- The main focus of these classes is to develop safe and respectful relationships between the participant, their horse, their volunteer, and the ES.
- Volunteers should feel comfortable asking ES to step in if participants are sharing personal information or become overly emotional during the class.
- Volunteers shall notify the ES immediately if they have any safety concerns for the horses as well as any concerns about the participant's behavior.
- EFP classes will have one ES and one MHP (Mental Health Provider) per class and one volunteer per horse.
- These classes are usually private (One participant per class).
- Horses are on a very loose lead so that they are free to move away or towards the participant.
- The goals of these classes are determined by the MHP who will communicate to the ES and volunteer any pertinent information about the participant.
- The horse related activities of these classes are determined by the ES who will develop exercises to support the goals outlined by the MHP.
- These classes may also include other activities such as art or drama therapy.
- Time will be provided for a "debrief" after each EFP class so that staff and volunteers can process any emotions or questions that arise during the class.

COURAGEOUS CONNECTIONS CODE OF CONDUCT

- In order to protect Courageous Connections staff, volunteers, and participants, at **no** time may a staff member or volunteer be alone with a single child where the staff member or volunteer cannot be observed by others.
- Staff and volunteers shall never leave a child unsupervised.
- Staff and volunteers shall not abuse children or use corporal punishment of any kind. This includes physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, mental abuse, or neglect. Any type of abuse is cause for dismissal.
- Staff and volunteers shall not give gifts or special favors to individual children.
- Staff and volunteers will not have private interactions through social media, computer, or handheld devices with any children in the program.
- Staff and volunteers will not transport individual children in their vehicles.
- Under no circumstances should staff release children to anyone other than the authorized parent or guardian.
- Staff and volunteers are required to report any suspicion of child abuse to the proper authorities.
- Staff and volunteers will respect all participant's rights to not be touched in ways that make them uncomfortable. Participants are not to be touched in areas of their bodies that would be covered by a bathing suit.
- Staff and volunteers will use positive techniques for guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement, and encouragement rather than anger or harsh words.
- Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in or on the facility grounds is prohibited.
- Profanity, inappropriate jokes, and any kind of harassment are prohibited.
- Staff and volunteers will interact with each participant with respect and consideration at all times and treat everyone equally regardless of gender, race, religion, sexual identity, or culture.

I understand that any violation of this Code of Conduct may result in immediate dismissal.