

Therapeutic Horsemanship

Horse Handling Manual and Guidelines

2025

WELCOME!

We are thrilled that you've decided to volunteer with Topfield Equestrian Center

Thank you for bringing your horse experience and expertise

Topfield Equestrian Center. This manual outlines the policies and practices that guide our horse leading volunteers. Please note that we may do things differently than you do with your own horses or may have learned elsewhere, but our goal is to treat our lesson horses with as much care and consistency as possible. If you have any questions about this manual or would like to attend our weekly horse leader training, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

TOPFIELD VOLUNTEER PHILOSOPHY

We literally couldn't do this work without you! Our Volunteers, especially those with horse experience, are truly our greatest resource. The time, energy, talents, and skills you bring are essential to providing quality services and fulfilling our mission. You provide credibility, insight, perspective, and diversity, enriching our organization and connecting us to the community. Simply put, our pledge to the community is made possible by our volunteers.

TOPFIELD MISSION:

Partnering with horses to empower humans

TOPFIELD VISION:

Topfield Equestrian Center is dedicated to improving lives through equine activities. By fostering strong human-animal connections, we provide positive experiences that support well-being for both people and horses. We maintain the highest standards of professionalism in our mounted and unmounted programs, which are offered in the peaceful setting of the Hudson Valley.

TOPFIELD VALUES:

Teamwork, Encouragement, Compassion





A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear New and Returning Volunteers,

I am so happy and excited that you've decided to be part of the Topfield Team! We've all found our way to this community for different reasons and bring with us different life experiences, but we all have at least one thing in common: we want to support Topfield's mission to partner with horses to empower humans.

I have been riding and communing with horses for longer and more consistently than anything else in my life (starting at age 5!). I have also been actively volunteering in my communities since high school. I deeply appreciate the value and meaning that both animals and the act of volunteerism can bring to our lives. I feel so lucky that we get to do BOTH - by helping people with disabilities in our community connect with horses - here at TEC.



As a volunteer you are a critical part of the Topfield operation and we always want you to feel valued, appreciated, and clearly communicated with. Becoming trained as a Topfield Volunteer is just the first step on this journey into adaptive riding and we're here to help you with the rest!

If there is anything at all I can do to improve your experience at Topfield or to support your development as a volunteer, please feel free to contact me - call, email, or just drop into the office. You are always welcome.

Most Sincerely,

Sarah Uzelac, Ph.D.

HORSE LEADERS

The Horse Leader is in charge of the horse, constantly and vigilantly monitoring its mood, energy level, and behavior. Horse Leaders are responsible for the horses before, during, and after lessons. Horse Leaders will be trained on how to groom and tack horses, how to safely and effectively lead horses during lessons, and how to turn out a horse after a lesson if necessary. Most riders in our programs are not fully in control of the horse. It is the Leader who must help in guiding, stopping, and starting the horse, without making the rider feel that he/she is being led. We need our riders to be allowed to do as much as he or she is capable of doing, with the Lead Walker stepping in only when necessary.

Horse Leaders must be able to communicate with Side Walkers; and Horse Leaders must be careful not to push sider walkers into walls or fences. Horse Leaders must also be able to multi-task, focusing both on the horse and rider as well the instructor

Qualifications:

- Prior horse experience required.
- Must be responsible and professional.
- Able to comfortably halter, lead, cross-tie, and tack a horse.
- Able to groom a horse with light assistance or independently.
- Able to lift up to 20 pounds (saddle) above his/her head.
- Able to hear, speak, and understand instructions in the primary language of the client.
- Minimum age of 16 years old.

Responsibilities:

- Perform an initial check for health and soundness of the horse prior to class.
- Assist Barn Manager/ Assistant to ensure the horse is groomed, tacked, lunged (if necessary), in arena or ring prior to class.
- Lead the horse during class, within a group including Side Walkers, keeping primary focus on assigned horse while maintaining communication with the lesson/program team
- Listen to and execute the directives of the instructor.
- Un-tack and groom the horse after class (as necessary)
- Will need to be reliable and available even during the winter months.

Communicating with Equines

Horses are direct reflections of the person leading them. As a herd animal, they look to you to be their leader and provide them with direction and security. Your body language and attitude are your most effective tools of communication. Horses can tell when you are stressed or anxious. A relaxed and confident horse leader is the most effective way to manage your horse.

Your Eyes:

- Look ahead and direct your gaze in the direction you wish to go.
- Look in the direction you are turning.
- Looking down toward the ground will slow down or even stop a horse.

Your Hands:

- Slow moving hands result in resistance free, well balanced and smooth movements.
- Fast moving hands result in nervous, quick and jerking movements from the horse.

Your Voice:

• Talk to the horse. They understand verbal cues, such as *Walk On, Trot*, and *Whoa*. During a lesson, riders will give the verbal cues, which the leader will emphasize.

Empower your rider by always letting them give the cues to start and stop.

• The tone of your voice will affect a horse's mood.

Your Feet:

- In general, if you move your feet, the horse will move theirs.
- Try to be in rhythm with the horse. This promotes resistance free handling.

Your Placement:

- When moving, you should be at the horse's shoulder
- When stopped for a period, especially with a mounted client, you should face the horse.

Interacting with Horses

- ☐ Petting: Petting should only occur on the neck or shoulder, not the head or face.
- Discipline: Never discipline a horse. The instructor and equine staff are responsible for disciplining a horse. The only time where it is appropriate for a horse leader to discipline a horse is if the instructor or an equine staff member has specifically shown you how and you have been given direct permission.
- attentive horse leader should be aware the minute a horse's head moves out of the center line, facing straight forward. If the horse moves their head towards you or enters the human space, use your whole arm and hand to gently push them back into their space.

Equine Location

- Gathering a Horse from a Stall: Before you open the stall door, make sure that the horse's hind end is not facing the door. If it is, open the door slightly and call to the horse. When they are in a position that you can easily approach the head, open the stall door just wide enough for you to slip through. Make sure the door is all the way open before taking the horse out.
- ☐ Gathering a Horse from Pasture: Be constantly aware of the other horses in the pasture. They can quickly appear at the gate with you if they think it is time to come in!
- Turning Out an Equine: When turning a horse back out in the pasture, shut and latch the gate, walk away from the gate a few feet and turn the horse's head towards the gate before taking the halter off. If other horses are being turned out in the same pasture, all handlers wait for each other and un-halter the horses at the same time.

Horse Safety In the Stall and Cross Ties

- When leading a horse into and out of a stall, make sure the door is completely open. Walk straight in and make a wide turn until the horse is facing front. Always have an escape route in case of an emergency. Close the stall door most of the way and only let the horse loose while standing next to the door. Only allow students to lead horses into/out of stalls with permission from the instructor. Remember: If a person is in a stall with a horse, the door must always be unlocked.
- Horses should never be left loose in their stalls with tack on; they must be cross-tied. Cross ties attach to the side rings of the halter, not on the bit. Once a horse is fully untacked, let him loose in the stall and be sure to latch the stall door closed when you exit. Remember: If a horse is in a stall alone, the door must always be closed and locked.
- When cross-tying a horse, make sure the ties have slack in them. Horses on cross ties will usually shift around. Putting a horse on cross ties may make him feel as though he is trapped. It is important to make sure they don't walk far enough to feel tension in the ties, which could trigger a "flight" response. Monitoring this is especially interested the path of the Aircingthe aisle.
- When bringing a horse in from a paddock, know which halter belongs to your horse. Halters hang on hooks outside of the paddocks. Always lock the gate behind you after walking into and out of the paddock. Let the horse know you are approaching by calling his name. Be sure to walk up to him from the side so he can see you.
- When turning out a horse, walk the horse into the paddock while holding onto the gate. Turn the horse around to face the gate, then close and lock the gate. Double-check that the horse is facing the locked gate. It is now safe to remove the horse's halter and hang it on the hooks outside of the paddock.

Fetching a Horse for a Lesson

- **1. Approach:** Talk to the horse. Quietly but confidently approach the left side of the horse's head, facing the same direction as the horse.
- 2. Halter: Stand in a similar position to the leading position (standing parallel to the horse, facing the same direction as them, and next to their neck). With your right hand, hold the halter by the crown piece, not by the nose band. With your left hand, guide the horse's nose through the nose hole, so that the nose band is on top and the throat latch is hanging open underneath. Clip the throat latch to the ring on the left side of the halter.
- 3. Lead: Lead the horse out of the pasture, holding the lead line in your right hand 18 inches from the halter. Hold the remaining lead line in your left hand, folded neatly. Never wrap a lead around your hand/wrist/etc.
- **4. Stall:** Take the horse to their stall first so they can eat, drink, or relieve themselves prior to anything else, including grooming and tacking up for lessons. Halters should never be left on horses in their stalls.

Leading Equines

□	<i>Equine Space vs. Human Space:</i> The horse and the leader have their own defined rectangles of space. The leader may enter the horse's space to direct but the horse may not enter the leader's space.
	Location: Stand parallel to the left side of the equine, <u>next to the throat latch</u> on the horse's halter, so they cannot turn in front of you. Stand approximately one foot from the horse so they can see down the length of their body and you can see their head in front of you.
	 Posture: Stand with an <u>authoritative posture</u>, standing tall, straight and square. The horse should be standing straight, with their head on the center line. Do not allow the horse to move out of the halt until both your position and theirs is correct. The best way to influence the horse is through your body language and your movements, not through the lead rope.
	Look Up : Look up and towards where you want to be moving. Horses react to your body language and being looked at while leading can make them feel preyed upon.
	 Lead Rope: Hold the lead rope, 18 inches from the halter, in the right hand. The remaining rope is folded like a figure eight and held in the left hand. ☐ The leading arm should be carried with the elbow slightly bent and fingers forward with the palm facing downward (hand over hold). ☐ Do not allow the rope to drag or sag below the horse's knees.
	<i>Purpose</i> : Walk purposefully at an active pace, engaging your core. Do not allow the horse to get ahead of you, fall too far behind you, or walk right behind you.
	Pace: Maintain a steady, even pace. Avoid sharp turns or abrupt changes of gait. Maintain two horse lengths between horses.
П	Soft Commands: Do not pull the horse along. Use voice commands, such as "Walk On" and "Whoa," to reduce dragging on the lead rope.

Use the word "And" before all voice commands to cue the horse

that a transition of some kind is coming.

Leading Equines

■ Halting:

- 1. Slow down your pace and shorten your stride.
- 2. Say "And Whoa," asking the equine to halt.
- 3. Stop walking. Once the horse has halted, release the pressure on the lead rope.
 - The halt does not need to be immediate so that the horse is allowed time to prepare for the halt. Gradual halts help the horse to stand square when halted.
- **4. For short halts**, stay in the leader position, looking in the direction of travel.
- **5. For long halts**, stand facing the horse's shoulder, at a 45° angle, in front of the horse's head, with both hands on the lead rope at least 18 inches away from where the lead rope attaches to the halter.
 - Your left hand should be closest to the halter, with your right hand further away.

At the Walk:

- 1. Using your right hand, guide the lead rope forward, away from the horse's chest.
- 2. Say "And Walk On," asking the horse to walk.
- 3. Begin walking and the horse will follow your example and move at your speed.
 - Once the horse has begun to walk, release the pressure on the lead rope. Do not have constant tension on the lead rope.
 - Never pull on the horse or the lead rope.
- 4. Allow the horse to move their head freely up and down as they walk.
 - As they walk, all horses bob their heads up and down. This rhythmical movement starts at the head and moves all the way down the horse's spine.
- 5. Do not make sharp turns.
 - To turn away from the horse leader, move your hand underneath the horse's chin to turn their head away from you.
 - To turn towards the horse leader, ensure the horse remains an arm's length away from you, while gently guiding the horse's chin inward.

Leading Techniques

Hold the extra length of lead rope folded in your left hand in a figure-eight or a teardrop configuration. **Never** wrap it around your hand.



CORRECT

Walk on the left between the horse's head and shoulder so you can observe the horse's left eye, ear and nostril.



CORRECT:

Hold your right hand about 10 inches from the clip on the end of the lead rope, allowing the horse to have freedom to move his head and neck.





INCORRECT



HOW TO HOLD A LEAD ROPE FOR ADAPTIVE RIDING LESSONS

CORRECT

Stay focused on the lesson and on your team. Glance back occasionally at the client and the sidewalkers to be sure they are safe, but avoid engaging in conversation.

Wait for your student to cue the horse before proceeding. Before trotting, wait for your student to cue the horse before using the 1-2-3-trot verbal cues. Once trotting, look up and forward, and be aware of your horse's focus.



CORRECT



CORRECT

When leading, look up and forward, staying aware of the horse and his focus.

Keep a minimum of 2-3 horse lengths' distance between your horse and other horses in the ring, as not all horses get along with each other.



INCORRECT





INCORRECT

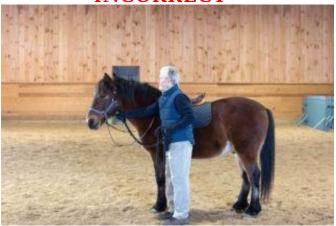
Do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground, as this may unseat the rider.

Remember: When trail riding, no grazing!









Adjust your step to the horse's stride, being careful not to get too far ahead, behind or away from the horse. Remember, you should always be able to see your horse's left eye, ear and nostril.

Avoid the temptation to interact and assist the client while leading a horse. The client is the sidewalker's responsibility. Allow enough room from the sidewalkers on both sides of the horse, especially the sidewalker along the wall.

For safety reasons, refrain from playing with the horse's nose and mouth.

ASSISTING DURING MOUNTING

Mounting is the most crucial part of riding, and great care must be taken to ensure the rider's safety. Stay alert and listen to the instructor talking to the rider during the mounting process.

Begin by leading the horse to the wall (toward letter F). Follow the wall and go deep into the corner before turning toward the mounting ramp/block.

As you are leading the horse into the mounting ramp/block, turn and face the horse at the beginning of the block, walking backward one step at a time so you are able top appropriately position the horse close to and parallel with the ramp/block. Do not push the horse or back it up to achieve the correct position. Start again if necessary. The leader may need to circle and realign the horse. When in position, face off and respect the horse's space. Keep the horse standing quietly.



Once the rider has mounted, wait for the instructor to have the rider ask the horse to "walk on." Then lead the horse slowly away in a straight line and proceed according to the instructor's directions.







Other Important Things To Remember:

- Visiting among ourselves causes neglect of the participant. Inattentiveness can result in an accident to you or your student.
- Our participants often have a lowered sense of safety awareness. Please be cognizant of where your student is at all times, both on and off the horse. They should never be allowed to be behind a horse or at the back of a stall. Pay attention to the horse's body language, remind your student to use a quiet voice, and be sure lead ropes are held correctly and not wrapped around your student's hands.
- Help your student only when it is needed. Overprotection keeps the student from progressing and developing independence. DO celebrate your student's achievements!
- Listen to the instructor during the lesson and reinforce what is being taught. Try to
 understand your student's challenges. While a participant's diagnosis will not be
 discussed due to confidentiality protocols, you are welcome to ask your instructor for
 tips on how to better assist your student.
- Be patient; each student processes information and learns at his or her own pace.
- Communicate with your instructor following the lesson or during the next week if you feel there is something the instructor needs to know.
- Have fun with your student, always remembering to keep attention centered on the lesson. Your commitment and dedication allows a student to participate. Be encouraging, providing praise and positive reinforcement for accomplishments.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURE IN LESSONS

Leader and Side Walker Roles:

• Remain with your team, stay calm and follow your instructor's directions.

• Leaders: Stop and face off your horse.

• Sidewalkers: Remain in position, employing an arm over thigh hold to secure the rider. The closer you are to the horse, the safer you are.

• A staff member may designate a volunteer to retrieve a first aid kit, get participant emergency paperwork, or assist with an injured rider or horse.



Our primary objective is to keep the rider on the horse (especially adults). However, if the instructor calls for an emergency dismount:

- Halt or line up where the instructor indicates.
- Leader: Face off with your horse.
- Sidewalkers: Remove the rider's feet from the stirrups and release the reins from the rider's hands.
- Leader: Bring the reins up to the horse's ears and secure the reins in one hand with the lead rope.
- Near (left) sidewalker: Assist the rider's upper body forward (hug the horse) and have the rider look at off (right) sidewalker.
- Off sidewalker: Assist with the rider's right leg over the horse's croup.
- Near sidewalker: Assist the rider in dismounting by allowing him or her to slide down the horse. Cradle the rider around the waist and direct him or her back and away from the horse.
- Leader: Move the horse away from the rider and sidewalkers, and stay with the horse.
- Sidewalkers: Walk/carry the rider to an instructor designated area and stay with them. Leader: Run up the stirrups, place the reins through the handhold and await further instructions from the instructor.

SAFETY

Topfield Equestrian Center is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and positive environment for staff, volunteers, clients, their families, as well as for visitors to our facility. Safety is our first priority. The volunteer coordinator will provide volunteers with information on facility safety plans and safety protocols related to the assigned volunteer position. Additional safety measures include:

- Gum is not to be chewed when participating in program activities
- We do not allow pets (except service animals) on the property at any time.
- Please be mindful of your tone and volume. No screaming or loud talking.
- Please walk, don't run anywhere on the property (except in emergency situations) .

In the event of an emergency that requires emergency services, please follow the following directive:

- 1. DIAL 9-1-1
- 2. Indicate the location of the emergency
 - a. Topfield Equestrian Center, 115 Stonecrop Lane, Cold Spring, NY
 - b. Physical location of emergency.
- 3. Pay attention and respond to all questions or requests by 9-1-1 personnel.
- 4. Including:
 - a. What happened.
 - b. Number of victims.
 - c. Indicate what action/help is currently being given to the victim(s).
- 5. ASK THAT EMERGENCY VEHICLE NOT USE SIRENS IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE BARN.
- 6. Remain on the line until you are told you can hang up.

A staff member certified in first aid is always on-site during program activities. This person is the ideal contact for reporting all accidents/incidents.

Topfield Equestrian Center is open and delivering services throughout the year, even during the winter months. In the event of severe storms, tornado threats or advisories, Side Walkers should escort clients and their parents/ guardians to the Volunteer Lounge, which is indicated on the building map as quickly as possible but always in a calm and orderly fashion. First and foremost, if time permits, Lead Walkers should bring the horses to the barn untack and return them to their stall as quickly as possible and immediately move to the storm shelter, which is indicated on the building map.

If a building or buildings need to be evacuated, all volunteers should report to the outdoor grass paddock as indicated on the building map.

Universal Precautions/Handling Bodily Fluids

Contact with bodily fluids (which may include but are not limited to: blood, drainage from scrapes and cuts, urine, vomit and respiratory secretions) may present a risk of infection from any number of germs. Personal protective equipment like rubber gloves is the best precaution and is always available.

Topfield Equestrian Center recommends that as a precaution, you check with your primary care physician about whether you are up to date on your immunizations.

APPENDIX



Bareback Pad
Used for riders
working on balance
or
movement
exploration, or who
may have difficulty
sitting in a saddle.



Fleece Pad
Similar to the bareback pad. Also used for riders working on balance or movement exploration, or who may have difficulty sitting in a saddle.



Anti-cast Surcingle
Can be used over a
bareback pad to
provide a handhold
and additional
support
for riders with
decreased stability.



A stirrup with a leather enclosure on the front of the stirrup that gives additional support to the rider's foot and prevents it from sliding through the stirrup.

Devonshire Boors



Peacock Stirrups
A stirrup with an elastic side that faces away from the horse.
When pressure is applied to the elastic, it releases, allowing the foot to leave the stirrup that Attaches to the front of the saddle and is

used as an aid for



"S" Stirrup
Another form of
safety stirrup. The
"S" faces front and is
located on the
outside of the foot.



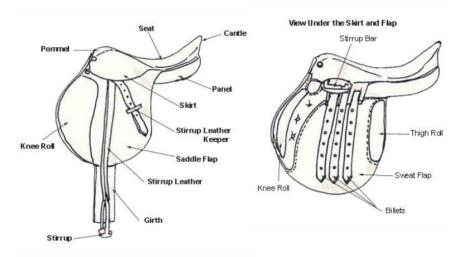
Neck Strap
Leather strap around the
horse's neck that is used as
an additional aid for
balance



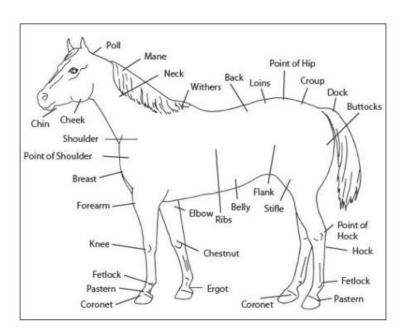
balance.

Safety Belt Belt worn around a rider's waist. The safety belt should only be used for a rider who has a tendency to jump off the horse, or if a physical therapist chooses to use one when working with a rider. NOTE: Sidewalkers are to avoid holding the belt handles during lessons, as it will provide uneven input to the rider and horse. This might cause difficulty with balance for the rider and discomfort for the horse.

Parts of the English Saddle



Parts of the Horse



EQUINE TERMINOLOGY

Aide: A tool for riding: natural (leg, hand, seat, voice) or artificial (spurs, crop)

Balanced Seat: A riding position that requires minimal muscular effort to remain in the saddle and not interfere with the horse's movement or balance

Collected Gait: A horse's gait that possesses lightness of

forehand with engaged hindquarters

Crop: A short riding whip; an artificial aid

Equitation: The art of horseback riding

Far Side: The right side of the horse

Forehand: The front of the horse, including head, neck,

shoulders and forelegs

Forging: Occurs when the tow of the hind foot hits the heel of the front foot on the same side, which can make the horseshoes click

Girth: The strap that holds the saddle in place

Half-Seat: A riding position in which the rider's seat is up and out of the saddle, the upper body is bent forward, and the hands rest on the horse's neck about one third of the way up

Impulsion: Energy coming from the hind end of the

horse, allowing forward, balanced motion

Near-Side: The left side of the horse

Posting: The raising and lowering motion of the rider in

time with the trot

Rythm: The pace (timing) of the footfalls at each gait

Stride: Distance covered at any particular gait

Surcingle: A strap that passes over the saddle or saddle pad to

hold it in place on the horse's back

Tack: Equipment used for riding horses (ex. Saddle, bridle, girth) **Transition:** Any change of pace – it can be upward (slower to faster) or downward (faster to

slower)

Trot: A two-beat gait in which the horse's feet move

in diagonal pairs

Walk: A four-beat gait in slow, even rhythm

RELIABILITY & COMMITMENT PLEDGE

We understand that you are volunteering out of the kindness of your heart and in service to your community, but we do ask that you treat your time of service in the same manner and with the same responsibility as you would school or your job. That means contacting the Volunteer Coordinator 24 hours in advance

of a scheduled service obligation if you are unable to make it so that we may find a replacement. Please arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the start of any program or lesson. This is a time when the instructor can explain what the lesson will be for that day and may share any necessary specifics on how to best work with your assigned client.

Please remember to always sign-in on the Volunteer Log, take a name-tag and go straight to the barn.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Topfield Equestrian Center recognizes confidentiality as a living principle based on the sanctity and dignity of the human person. Therefore, the agency will respect the privacy of personal information of those it serves or employs. You are responsible for maintaining confidentiality of all information to which you are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves staff members, volunteers, clients, or other people or involves overall program or organization business. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination or other corrective action.

HARASSMENT POLICY

Topfield Equestrian Center is committed to a work environment that is professional and harassment-free for all employees and volunteers. Harassment includes, without limitations, verbal, physical, visual, and innuendo. It also includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexually motivated physical contact and other verbal or physical conduct, or visual forms of harassment of sexual nature when submission to such conduct is either explicitly or implicitly made a term or condition of employment or is used as the basis for unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment for employees and volunteers.

Volunteers should report any issues to their supervisor.

MANDATORY REPORTING

While volunteering for Topfield Equestrian Center you have the legal obligation to report:

- Any known or suspected child abuse, neglect or any other behavior placing the health and welfare of children in jeopardy.
- Any known or suspected adult abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Per organization policy, staff are trained in reporting requirements and associated procedures. Because we do not train volunteers according to New York State Mandatory Reporting Standards, we ask that volunteers immediately consult with a supervisor or staff member when presented with a situation that they feel may warrant a child or adult protective report.

ENDING VOLUNTEER SERVICE

RESIGNATION & LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Your volunteer position may conclude at the end of a particular project, event, or set time period, but you are also free to end your volunteer service with Topfield Equestrian Center at any time. Because volunteers are so important to the programs and organization, however, we request that you provide advance notice of your departure and a reason for your decision.

TERMINATION

You may be terminated from your position as a volunteer for a variety of reasons. Some of these include: gross misconduct or insubordination, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, theft of property or misuse of organization equipment or materials, abuse or mistreatment of clients or coworkers, failure to abide by organization policies and procedures, failure to meet physical or mental standards of performance, and failure to satisfactorily perform assigned duties.

EXIT SURVEYS

When you leave your position, you will be given an opportunity to fill out an exit survey detailing why you are ending your service. The exit survey is also a great place to give us any further comments about your experience and to provide any potential ideas for improvements.