

# WILD HEARTS

## EQUINE THERAPY CENTER

**HANDBOOK**

**April 28, 2018**



*Connecting the heart of the horse with the soul of the human*

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# **Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Center – Volunteer Handbook**

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## **HANDBOOK INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc. Thank you for volunteering your time. We want you to feel fulfilled, supported and safe during your time at the Center.

Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc. (also referred to as Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Center or the Company) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that cultivates powerful connections between people and horses through innovative and customized equine-assisted therapy and learning programs following standard methods of Riding Therapy, EAGALA and Natural Lifemanship.

We ask you to become acquainted with and abide by the policies and procedures outlined in this handbook. Please ensure that, along with this handbook, you view the safety video provided to you.

## **Background and History**

Founder Jessica Fry's love for rescuing and training horses spawned both a highly effective method of natural horsemanship and passion for allowing the loving, well-mannered and "tuned-in" horses she has trained to be the cornerstone of innovative and comprehensive equine-assisted therapy programs. In addition to Jessica's desire to help people grow, she also loves educating people. As such, future include being able to host team-building exercises and equine educational events.

Jessica has extensive equine training and riding experience. Having spent most of her life in the presence of a horse, she has developed a keen sense that few people possess. She has spent several years hosting riding therapy sessions for children and dedicating countless hours helping others to better themselves. She is formally trained in EAGALA and is well-trained in Natural Horsemanship, following the methodologies of Mark Rashid. At Hoppin' Horse Farm, she currently trains horses and provides riding lessons. Possessing a true passion for horses and people, Jessica initiated Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Center – a place for any and all who need assistance wading through the waters of life.

## **Handbook Purpose**

This handbook is presented as a matter of information and has been prepared to inform all Wild Hearts personnel about our philosophy, practices and policies.

THIS HANDBOOK IS NOT A CONTRACT, EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, OFFERING OR GUARANTEEING ANY TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME.

## **Handbook Changes**

The Company reserves the right to unilaterally revise, suspend, revoke, terminate or change any of its policies, in whole or in part, whether described within this handbook or elsewhere. If any discrepancy between this handbook and current company policy arises, conform to current company policy. Every effort will be made to keep you informed of the company's policies, however we cannot guarantee that notice of revisions will be provided. Feel free to ask questions about any of the information within this handbook.

This handbook supersedes and replaces any and all policies and manuals previously distributed, made available or applicable to our personnel. We ask that you read this handbook carefully, become familiar with the Company and our policies, and refer to it whenever questions arise.

## **COMPANY OVERVIEW**

Why do we invest our personal time and effort into this program? Why do we ask you to volunteer your time? Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc. is a direct response to a growing number of people struggling with physical, emotional or intellectual disabilities.

### **Mission**

Our mission is to provide a safe and compassionate environment that fosters physical, emotional and behavioral growth in programs that utilize the intuitive nature of the horse to enrich the quality of life for people of all ages.

We share our love of life and horses with everyone and believe in giving back as much as we have been fortuitous enough to receive.

### **Vision**

Our vision is to provide enriching and innovative equine-assisted programs that help people thrive. Whether we are providing emotional or physical healing, physical strength or confidence building, personal growth or authentic leadership skills, our programs offer unlimited growth potential that only horses can provide.

### **Focus**

Our focus is on children and adults who need help wading through the waters of life. Our programs enrich the quality of life for people of all ages. Every day, we are amazed at the tangible, heart-warming results that come from the powerful guidance provided by a horse.

Targeted at emotional and physical enrichment of people, our program is the first of its kind in Oconee County. To date, we have formed partnerships with Upstate Warrior Solution,

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South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation, South Carolina Continuum of Care, the Tamassee DAR School, the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Oconee School District.

### **Goals**

The goal of this program is to go beyond riding and horsemanship lessons by tailoring equine-assisted activities to the unique needs and goals of each individual or organization. Experienced and compassionate professionals are coupled with proven horses to foster unlimited growth potential. In many instances where EAGALA principles are applied, there is no riding; just simple connection and relationship building.

### **Objectives**

Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc. has been established to provide low or no-cost equine-assisted therapeutic services to children and adults, as well as team-building activities, leadership training and community educational events in the underserved Upstate area of South Carolina. These services include:

- Assistance to special needs children or adults
- Help for Heroes – serving active duty military and veterans
- Guidance and direction for at-risk youth
- Team-Building Programs/Leadership Retreats
- Community Outreach/Educational Events

### **Are horses really that different?**

Why horses? Horses have a distinct and fundamental ability to provide immediate feedback and reactions to people. The interactions between horses and clients help heighten a client's awareness to his or her feelings, perceptions and actions. This type of therapy goes beyond riding and horsemanship lessons to promote social, emotional and behavioral growth. As such, our motto is, "If it's not good for the horse, it's simply not good." Everything we do centers on ensuring our horses are the cornerstone of our programs.

Additionally, a wealth of research studies from around the globe indicate that equine assisted intervention and therapy modalities are compatible for working with physically disabled individuals, autistic children, at-risk youth, self-harming youth, schizophrenic people, victims of abuse, persons with eating disorders, drug and alcohol addictions, active and retired military personnel...and the list goes on.

Horses are so in tune with humans that they are able to synchronize their heartbeats within 8 feet of a human, thus helping us bring our heart rate and energy down to a manageable level.

### **A GROWING NEED**

In a 2010 report, the Federal Census data indicated that 56.7 million people in America are living with a physical disability, an increase of 2.2 million since 2005. Among children 1.7 million kids had an intellectual or developmental condition.

In 2012 Cornell University Study reported that 12.1% of Americans (or 36,627,800 people) of all ages had a disability. In ages 5-15, 5.3% were affected; ages 16-20 was 5.5%; ages 21-64 was 10.4; with 25% of people ages 65-74 and a whopping 50% of people 75 or older affected by disabilities. Of those people, the largest percentage were affected with an ambulatory disability, followed closely by a cognitive disability. And in 2012, the percentage of working-age civilian veterans with VA determined Service-Connected Disability was 20.2% in the US. The US disability prevalence rate in 2012 was 10.4. In South Carolina, the prevalence rate was 12.7, well above the national average.

With regard to mental health, and according to statistics provided by the National Institute of Mental Health, The National Alliance on Mental Illness reports:

- 20% of youth (ages 13-18) live with a mental health condition
- 11% of youth have a mood disorder
- 10% of youth have a behavior or conduct disorder
- 8% of youth have an anxiety disorder

Moreover, the impact of these conditions is alarming.

- 50% of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24.
- The average delay between onset of symptoms and intervention is 8-10 years.
- Approximately 50% of students age 14 and older with a mental illness drop out of high school.
- 70% of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have a mental illness.

Worse yet, suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in youth ages 10-24, with 90% of those having had an underlying mental illness.

We also focus on military veterans who have sacrificed so much to defend the freedoms we enjoy on a daily basis. A recent study determined that over 66% of our most seriously wounded soldiers were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Because we can't see it like we can see an amputated limb or burn scars, the invisible emotional scars often go untreated. It has been estimated that it takes 12 years for someone with PTSD to seek assistance. During those twelve years, many unfortunate situations occur. Suicide, divorce, and other self-destructive behaviors. Families continually plead with Congress to intervene and care for our veterans.

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Equine therapy programs have been proven to make a tremendous difference in the lives of people with PTSD. Horses are able to unlock doors previously locked by emotional life-altering experiences. No equine experience required. Silent and seemingly magical bonding occurs. A mutual trust developed between human and horse is unfailing...someone finally understands. Connecting the soul of a horse with the soul of a human is what Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Center is all about.

While PTSD is most commonly associated with military personnel, it can also affect everyday people. Regardless of who it affects, PTSD goes beyond the psyche of the person affected. It adversely affects family members, communities, our entire society and economy.

According to the National Institutes of Health, Department of Veteran Affairs, and Sidran Institute, the societal and economic burden of PTSD is extremely heavy. Important facts, numbers, and statistics include:

- An estimated 8% of Americans, 24.4 million people, have PTSD at any given time.
- The annual cost to society of anxiety disorders is estimated to be significantly over \$42.3 billion, often due to misdiagnosis and under treatment.
- People with PTSD have among the highest rates of healthcare service use. People with PTSD present with a range of symptoms, the cause of which may be overlooked or misdiagnosed as having resulted from past trauma.
- PTSD is recognized as a psychobiological mental disorder than can affect survivors not only of combat experience, but also terrorist attacks, natural disasters, serious accidents, assault or abuse, or even sudden and major emotional losses.
- PTSD is associated with changes in brain function and structure and these changes provide clues to the origins, treatment, and prevention of PTSD. Some cases may be delayed, with only subtle symptoms showing up initially and more severe symptoms emerging months after the traumatic event.
- According to VA, experts estimate that up to 20 % of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans, up to 10 % of Gulf War veterans, and up to 30 % of Vietnam War veterans have experienced PTSD. Consequently, demand for PTSD treatment continues to grow.

Mental health professionals agree that traditional office counseling often requires more time and money than hands-on interaction with horses to achieve the desired result.

### **MEETING THE NEED**

During the summer of 2015, Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Program was in its infancy. Although the formality of the company was being developed, riding therapy sessions were beneficial for a number of people, including youth, adults, families and persons with disabilities.

Additionally, weekly “farm days” were held throughout the summer as a means of reaching out to kids already dealing with divorce, abuse, abandonment and lack of self-confidence. The youth who benefited from these “farm days” were impacted in a positive manner and will carry the lessons learned into adulthood.

In early 2016, the Center began working with Upstate Warrior Solution to develop its Help for Heroes Program. This program uses non-traditional methods of Equine-Assisted experiences to rebuild trust and confidence. In this scenario, both the Veteran and the horse benefit from this process. For the Veteran, communication with horses becomes the catalyst for developing life-changing bonds of trust. When working with a Veteran, the rescued horse has a job and is also forging new threads of trust.

The Center also hosted a Summer Institute Day for South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation. Teens with varying disabilities from local high schools visited the Center, watched veterinary, farrier and training demonstrations to help them determine their desire for future employment in a horse farm environment.

During the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years, the Center served as a host facility for local Equine Special Olympics, promoting leadership skills and helping to build confidence of several intellectually disabled individuals.

More recently, Wild Hearts has provided opportunities for Clemson University Play Therapy students, worked with families under South Carolina Continuum of Care programs, offered community service opportunities to South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, provides an alternative experience for students of the Tamasee DAR School and is currently working to educate students at Westminster High School regarding the development and operations of an equine therapy center.

Additionally, relationships have been formed with Upstate Warrior Solution, South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Clemson University Veteran’s Association in support of local veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.



### **YOUR ROLE ON THE WILD HEARTS TEAM**

At Wild Hearts, providing a safe environment for our clients, as well as maintaining safety for staff and volunteers is paramount to our success. Above all, please treat all clients with dignity and respect, and all horses with gentle kindness.

### **Volunteer Qualifications**

Prior experience working with horses and/or people with disabilities is helpful, but not required. All volunteers need to have the desire to learn safety procedures and follow policies set by Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc. Volunteer opportunities include:

- Facilitation Assistant
- Horse Care
- Farm Maintenance Work
- Administrative Support

#### ***Facilitation Session Volunteers***

Therapy session volunteers must be at least 14 years old. All therapy session volunteers need to have some degree of physical fitness to be able to walk and/or jog for a 50-minute session. Some of the sessions may take place on a trail, which will require walking up and down hills, through the grass and in the woods. Volunteers are on foot, not horseback. Requirements for volunteers include completing a minimum of 10 hours of training prior to being assigned to a client session, as well as attendance in at least one volunteer workshop per year.

#### ***Horse Care Volunteers***

Prior experience working with horses using Natural Horsemanship methods is great, but also not a requirement. Having the desire to learn how to be a partner with our horses is critical. Horse care volunteers must be at least 10 years of age, with adult supervision until age 18. Tasks include fetching, grooming and exercising horses, pampering horses, cleaning tack, keeping the barn and tack room clean and tidy. Requirements for horse care volunteers include 5 hours of mentoring from Jessica.

#### ***Farm Maintenance Volunteers***

No horse experience is necessary, but this can be a very physical job. Tasks include mowing, trimming, filling water troughs, baling and stacking hay, building and mending fences. These tasks may be performed in inclement weather.

#### ***Administrative Volunteers***

No horse experience is necessary to assist with the development of policy/procedure, marketing or sales activities, or finance support. Strong organizational skills are preferred.

## **Requirements and Expectations**

Wild Hearts understands your service to its clients is voluntary. That being said, you are the face of Wild Hearts and heavily relied upon to communicate our philosophies. As such, certain requirements and expectations are outlined below.

Wild Hearts facilitators are trained and/or certified in several different modalities. These modalities include:

- Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA)
- Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH)
- Natural Lifemanship: A Trauma Focused Therapy

These modalities are internationally recognized, require a large financial commitment, as well as annual training and recertification. Wild Hearts facilitators are happy to guide volunteers on how to effectively assist.

### ***Training Requirements***

All volunteers will be required to view a safety video, read and understand this handbook, and attend regularly scheduled training sessions. Existing volunteers should plan to attend at least one workshop each year. New volunteers will be required to shadow experienced volunteers for a minimum of ten hours, or until the facilitator and new volunteer both feel they are ready to assist without direct supervision.

### ***Volunteer Cancellations***

Please remember it is very important to inform the scheduler AS SOON AS POSSIBLE if you are unable to make the session(s) for which are scheduled to volunteer. If we do not have the time to replace you, the client you are partnered with may not be able to participate.

### ***Professional Conduct***

Volunteers are required to be polite and respectful to our clients, staff, fellow volunteers and horses at all times. Use appropriate language. We love that our volunteers have become friends and often like to catch up with each other. We just ask that you have social conversations either before or after therapy sessions. Conversations during therapy sessions should be kept to a minimum, involve the client and be “G” rated.

Following the guidance provided by the EAGALA:

- Different clients have different needs /let facilitator take the lead.
- Facilitators lead the session while volunteers assist.
- Be sure to focus on The Power of the Pause.
- No need to fill in for the client. Stay quiet and let client respond.
- If you feel the need to talk, ask yourself why.

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Wild Hearts also endeavors to follow International standards of professionalism and safety set forth by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH) in all equine assisted activities and therapies

Under no circumstances are volunteers permitted to assist any client in the restroom. Only the client's parent or care provider is permitted to assist the client. NO EXCEPTIONS.

Please remember to silence your cell phone and refrain from answering your cell phone during a session. Do not take your attention off the client to do anything with phones, clothing, shoes, gloves or the like. Remember that you are an ambassador of our program and that your behavior is a reflection of Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc.

### ***Attire***

Always dress neat and tidy, wearing sensible, comfortable clothing and closed-toe shoes only (tennis shoes are fine). No sandals, flipflops or midriffs; shorts allowed at appropriate length. Be prepared for the elements with appropriate outer wear and/or sunscreen. Bring water and a snack if need be.

### **Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities**

There are several areas of volunteer opportunities. Working with clients, working with horses, helping with farm maintenance or assisting with administrative support are just a few. Please remember to perform only those tasks for which you are trained and assigned to (e.g., horse leader, sidewalker, horse care, etc.)

### ***Assisting with Sessions – General Information***

1. Be punctual, early is preferred. Arrive for sessions 15-30 minutes prior to start time.
2. Keep cell phone on silent and please refrain from answering it during a session.
3. Check with the instructor regarding session plan and session goals.
4. Get to know the horses.
5. Make sure you know the client's name.
6. When you meet a person with a disability, be yourself. Treat him/her with dignity and respect.
7. Use tactful vocabulary; refrain from using words like "normal" or "retarded".
8. Be aware of your surroundings and be mentally present during the session.
9. When speaking to the client, talk TO the client, not ABOUT the client.
10. Report signs of fatigue, discomfort or unusual behavior to Facilitator.
11. As a volunteer, you are there to assist. Allow the facilitator to take the lead and follow that lead. Sometimes, that means keeping comments to ourselves. Silence allows the clients to think and process.

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12. Lend a hand if safety is an issue; otherwise, let the clients try and succeed or falter. Doing things for them will not help their confidence or growth.
13. Be tactful with questions.
14. Know what to do in case of emergency. Stay calm and follow Facilitator lead.
15. Know general procedures for handling body fluids, injuries and first aid.

### ***Working with Horses and Clients***

Our horses are the cornerstone of our programs. Please handle their minds, bodies and spirits with the utmost of care and consideration.

1. Please take time to read the book, “Horses Never Lie” or “Considering the Horse”, by Mark Rashid. To gain a deeper understanding, please take time to view Mark Rashid’s video on “Journey to Softness” or read the corresponding book.
2. Your calm and centered energy is the most important element of this program. Horses sense and feel everything around them, from boisterous actions such as running or yelling to something as subtle as when we blink or breathe.
3. As a result, the overall volume must be low.
4. Be sure to allow the Facilitator to do the majority of communicating with the client, while maintaining a quiet spirit, sometimes allowing silence for clients to process.
5. Main Points to Consider
  - a. Quiet Spirit – horses are like autistic people, easily overloaded with stimuli
  - b. Controlled Energy – horses feel every bit of our energy
  - c. Light Hands and Soft Center – horses feel tension through the lead line
  - d. Clear Intention – be clear in your mind and communicate it

### ***Assisting with Client Sessions – Detailed Information***

In addition to the facilitator, there are usually one or two volunteers in each session. After completion of the required training hours, you may be assigned to assist with client sessions. This may be either as a leader of the horse or a sidewalker.

#### **Leaders – Focus on Horse**

1. Know your horse and know your client.
2. Always ask facilitator if you need to accompany client to pasture.
3. Provide assistance only if client asks for it or if situation calls for safety intervention.
4. Leaders and clients should lead an unmounted horse with 2-3’ of float in the rope and maintain an arm’s length boundary.
5. Monitor client while they groom horse. Assist only if asked.
6. Be sure to place yourself on the same side as the client for better monitoring.

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7. Lead the horse to the mounting block or platform and hold for mounting while sidewalkers assist the client.
8. Lead a mounted horse with 1'-3' of float, depending on horse and your relationship with that horse, as well as rider/horse relationship and capability.
9. When leading a horse, focus on the horse, paying complete attention to the horse. Use your thoughts to guide the horse and aids to help as needed. If there is a distraction, maintain focus on the horse.
10. Be sure to maintain a mental connection, praising and thanking the horse periodically.
11. Hold horse for client to dismount.
12. Monitor client untacking and grooming.
13. Walk back to pasture with horse and client. Thank your horse.
14. Be sure to hang halter on the fence rail and close the gate.
15. Above all, never jerk or drag a horse.

### **Sidewalkers – Focus on safety of the client**

1. Gather grooming tools and helmet, if client can't do it on their own.
2. Gather bareback pad, girth and secondary underpad
3. Place items in the designated work area (e.g., front of barn, round pen, arena)
4. Locate mounting blocks and make sure they are in the designated work area
5. Allow facilitator or leader to guide client in grooming tasks
6. Quietly assist client with mounting the horse
7. Walk next to rider (not at the horse's shoulder or flank, but at the thigh of the rider)
8. Depending on the rider, sidewalkers may need to place a hand on the rider's thigh or hold on to a special belt placed on the rider.
  - a. Listen and follow directions from facilitator
  - b. Please refrain from instructing client-all instruction comes from the Facilitator
  - c. Focus solely on maintaining the safety of the client
  - d. Help client keep their legs off of barrel of horse (legs of client should swing freely)
9. Listen to Facilitator coach client through the dismount process and help with physical safety
10. Put grooming equipment and tack back where you found it.

### **Safety Guidelines**

1. Before entering the facility, each prospective volunteer must first watch a safety video and acknowledge that they have read this handbook.
2. Upon entrance to the property all participants, guests, friends, relatives and visitors must sign the release of liability form.
3. There is NO smoking ANYWHERE on the property.
4. Boots or hard toed shoes are recommended. No open-toed shoes allowed.
5. Fire extinguishers can be found in the tack room of the barn and over in the hay barn.

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6. Please be sure to respect the horse, listen to the horse, and properly care for the physical and mental well-being of the horse.
7. Our horses are trained in Natural Horsemanship. Be sure to lead with float in the rope.
8. Pet...not pat.
9. Make yourself known to horses before approaching them. Approach the horse at their shoulder.
10. Stand at the shoulder to place the halter on the horse.
11. Hold lead ropes so as not to create a loop around your arm or hand.
12. When entering a pasture, be sure all horses are cleared from the gate area. Gates are to be opened and closed immediately after passing through. No gate is to be left unattended for any reason.
13. Do not feed treats to horses.
14. Be mindful of your surroundings at all times.
15. If you notice a potential safety hazard, alert the facilitator.
16. Be prepared for weather conditions such as extreme heat or cold. Dress appropriately for weather.
17. Stayed focused on the task at hand. This is particularly important when working with the horses. Listen to instructions and advice from the instructor/leader.
18. Fences on the farm are electrified. Do not touch the fencing. Do not attempt to pass through the fencing. Do not pet or feed the horses near the fencing.
19. Participants of any age must wear an ASTM-approved helmet when riding.
20. When assisting a rider, the girth must be checked for security three times- once prior to the rider mounting, five minutes after mounting, and each hour therein.
21. The rider may not be strapped to the saddle at any time during the ride.
22. When assisting with mounting at the platform, walk around to enter the arena from the gate. Do not jump off the platform next to the horse and rider.
23. Two individuals may not ride together on one horse (riding double).
24. Horses should be treated in a calm, respectful manner. Sudden or aggressive movements may trigger an adverse response by the horse. If you feel uncomfortable with a horse at any time, stop what you are doing and alert the team of your concerns.
25. Do not climb on or operate any machinery.

### **Courtesies**

1. Please enter through the gates and park along the driveway, allowing at least 3 spaces on the gravel for homeowner vehicles.
2. If you use a halter from a pasture, put it back where you found it.
3. Curl up hoses after use and disconnect from hydrant in freezing weather.
4. Hoppin' Horse Farm and Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Center are located at a private residence. Please respect the privacy of the residents.
5. Home bathroom available for use with permission. Please knock before entering.
6. Homeowner private time is between 8pm and 8am, as well as noon to 1pm.

### **UNDERSTANDING NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP**

While there are a handful of general therapy organizations in the area, Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc. has a unique approach, rooted in natural horsemanship and specialized training of rescue horses, thereby providing a good environment for the horses as well. Our horses are instrumental in creating equine-assisted activities for children and adults.

Natural Horsemanship is a philosophy of working with horses based on the horse's natural instincts and methods of communication, with the understanding that horses do not learn through fear or pain, but rather from pressure and the release of pressure and trust and relationship.

It is a common misconception that Natural Horsemanship equals “wimpy” permissive horsemanship, where the ‘relationship’ is prized above all else. This is not the case. Natural horsemanship trainers must use firm but fair force when necessary to ensure the safety of the rider or handler, as well as the horse. We simply do not use fear or pain to motivate the animal, nor do we attempt to force the animal into submission.

There are countless “schools” or theories of natural horsemanship but the following ideas are common to most of them:

- Horses are social herd animals, evolved for social interaction and the ability to escape predators. The horse has a highly developed communication system practiced primarily through body language. It is possible for humans to learn to use body language to communicate with the horse. Horses use ear position, head position, speed of movement, threatening gestures, showing of teeth and swinging of hips, and many other gestures to communicate. They are quick to escalate a behavior if early warnings are not heeded. Similarly, in natural horsemanship, the handler or trainer uses body language along with other forms of gentle pressure with increasing escalation to get the horse to respond. Horses are quick to form a relationship of respect with humans who treat them in this fashion; “firm but fair” is a motto.
- Most natural horsemanship practitioners agree that teaching through pain and fear do not result in the type of relationship that benefits both horse and handler. The object is for the horse to be calm and feel safe throughout the training process. A horse that feels calm and safe with his handler is quick to bond with that person, and the results can be remarkable.
- The human must be knowledgeable of the horse's natural instincts and communication system and use this knowledge in his/her work with the horse.

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- Most Natural Horsemanship approaches emphasize the use of groundwork to establish boundaries and set up communication with the horse. This can include leading exercises, long reining and liberty work.
- Like many other forms of horse training, operant conditioning through pressure and release are core concepts. The basic technique is to apply a pressure of some kind to the horse as a “cue” for an action and then release the pressure as soon as the horse responds, either by doing what was asked for, or by doing something that could be understood as a step toward the requested action, a “try”. Timing is everything, as the horse learns not from the pressure itself, but rather from the release of that pressure. These techniques are based on the principle of reinforcement, rather than physical force, which most Natural Horsemanship practitioners avoid using whenever possible.
- However, a cue of any sort is secondary to thought. Our thought process about what we need from our horses is the first form of communication to our horse. We simply ask with our minds and energy. If the request isn’t understood by the horse, we then begin to softly apply cues, with the pressure and release technique to achieve the desired result.
- As with all successful animal training methods, there is an emphasis on timing, feel and consistency from the handler.
- Natural horsemanship has become very popular in the past two decades and there are many books, videos, tapes, and websites available to interested equestrians. This philosophy has capitalized on the use of behavioral reinforcement to replace inhumane practices used in some methods of training, the goal of which is a calmer, happier and more willing partner in the horse.
- At Wild Hearts, we follow the methodologies of Mark Rashid, an internationally recognized trainer. Our goal is to use halters/lead ropes and legs only as aids after we’ve first spoken to the horse through thought and feel.

In summary, Natural Horsemanship avoids fear- and pain-based training methods. While natural and gentle methods of training have been around for millennia, dating to the advocacy of gentle methods by Xenophon in Ancient Greece, there have also been any number of techniques over the years that attempted to train a horse by breaking the horse’s spirit, often forcing it to fight back and then be dominated or defeated. Natural Horsemanship advocates point out that by removing fear an individual gains trust from the horse. By not scaring and hurting the horse, the horse learns to work with people in a partnership verses as an adversary.



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## **PERSONNEL HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM**

**Please print this page, sign and return to Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc.**

I am in receipt of the Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center, Inc. personnel handbook. I understand and agree that it is my responsibility to read, abide by, and familiarize myself with the policies and procedures listed in the handbook. I further understand that the company has the right to change and/or revise the handbook at any time for any reason.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**WHETC, Inc. Witness Printed Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**WHETC, Inc. Witness Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**