

*Serenity Farm*



*Equine Sanctuary*

**Volunteer  
Handbook**

## Serenity Farm Equine Sanctuary Volunteer Handbook

Welcome to Serenity Farm Equine Sanctuary. Together we can help ensure that equine live a quality life. We can provide an exciting learning environment for equine people of all skill levels. It would be impossible for us to do our work without you, SFES Volunteers!

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### Background

Serenity Farm Equine Sanctuary (SFES) is a Virginia Non-Stock Corporation with approved 501C3 approval. We incorporated on May 27, 2016, and filed for non-profit status with the IRS on May 31, 2016. We have a 7-member Board of Directors. We are an accredited Sanctuary, accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) a worldwide organization. While there are many organizations in the state that are involved in equine rescue, there is a critical need that has come to our attention while assisting Virginia Rescue Organizations. Virginia Rescues are taxed to the point of breaking.

The mission of Serenity Farm is to prevent equine neglect, abuse, abandonment where we can and rehabilitate and find loving, forever homes for neglected or abused equines. We educate the public on the beauty and value of rescued horses. We give purpose to the lives of neglected or abused equines through interaction with humans, including emotionally or physically challenged individuals. We provide equine interaction to individuals with emotional or physical challenges. We welcome all volunteers including adults and school-age with disabilities. We provide horsemanship instruction for our volunteers. We coordinate with agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia and by providing current and future equine owners and other relevant groups with information and resources.



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### Who can volunteer?

Anyone can volunteer. You will need parent permission (written) if you are under 18. We will utilize your help no matter what your skill level. Many people come to us with great experience and others, just want to learn about horses.

### When can you volunteer?

We prefer a regular schedule, at your convenience. Please communicate with us and we'll make it work if we can. We recommend 2-3 hour shifts, if possible but are happy to have your help for an hour. Review the types of volunteer activities in this handbook and let us know what fits you. We are available for volunteers most days. We love the help of volunteers for SFES events. Events are posted on our Facebook page and on our information board.

Volunteer hours are Saturday through Wednesday from 9am to 12pm and 4pm to 6pm. We close on Thursdays and Fridays. If you don't have a regular schedule, please text to tell us you plan to come to avoid a schedule conflict.

Long Term Volunteers receive a gate code but if you're just completing required hours, we'll let you in each time to come. Just push the ring doorbell.

### Our promise to you.

We will do our best to provide opportunities to make a difference to the life of equine(s).

We will always be cognizant of your safety.

We will treat you like a member of the family.

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## Log SHEET

Some volunteers need to record your hours. You might need a log sheet if you're doing Community Service for a school requirement or a Court requirement.

You will use a clipboard with a log sheet from us or from your organization.



## INFORMATION



A volunteer information board is posted in the Volunteer Room. Please take a minute to check it. Upcoming events are posted there and on our facebook page.

Email and Text are our primary means of communication.

- Email – [serenityfarmequinesanctuary@gmail.org](mailto:serenityfarmequinesanctuary@gmail.org)
- Text – (540)842-1756

*Don't forget to like us on Facebook.*

<https://serenity.horse>

Please review our website for information regarding all SFES policies, sponsors, adoption...

We ask all volunteers to read our Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

## **DRESS CODE**

We're pretty flexible at SFES but we do have recommendations and requirements:

1. We recommend Long pants to protect legs (required to ride)
2. We require closed shoes or boots. (Must be heeled for riding) Waterproof is often needed at the farm. No flipflops or crocks.
3. No dangling jewelry or untucked scarves. (safety issue)
4. No ear buds or ear phones. (safety issue)

In all cases, use your best judgment and common sense. If you're not sure, ask. Keep in mind your safety, the safety of riders and the safety of horses. It can (and does) get muddy here so it is helpful to have a pair of water-resistant muck or paddock boots.

## **Levels**

Volunteers come to us with different levels of experience. Some have none and that's alright. Together, let's determine what your level of experience is by reviewing our Levels Structure. Please remember that horses at SFES are different than very broke, very settled horses. If you've had lessons, you may be surprised at the difference but we'll help you adjust and learn and excel!

To help us monitor your experience and learning, we have developed the following system. Together we can talk about where you are in your horsemanship.

## SERENITY FARM EQUINE SANCTUARY

### LEVELS STRUCTURE

#### Trail Boss Volunteer (Level 5)

Trains, Rides without supervision  
Mastered emergency dismount and one-rein stop.  
Can ride a buck.  
Approved to train volunteers

#### Wrangler Volunteer (Level 4)

Goes into pasture to Grooms/Tacks horses/picks  
Can groundwork or ride in round pen with supervision  
Leads horse in and out of round pen competently  
Supervise feed cycle/farm sit including meds  
Can move horses hind away during leading and gate entry

#### Tenderfoot Volunteer (Level 3)

Goes into Pasture to Groom Can Groom  
Assists Supported Volunteers (mentor)  
Beginning level grasswalks and leading with supervision  
Understands equine behavior (psychology/emotionality)  
Can move around an equine safely and

#### Greenhorn Volunteer (Level 2)

Can go into pasture with escort  
Groom with support  
Can Assist more experienced volunteer  
Learn about horses  
Look for one that pulls your heart

Prospect  
(a visitor, needs ) (rev 1/2024)



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The hardest thing about learning horses is taking the time it takes to learn each step of the way. You cannot train if you haven't learned how they move and think. You cannot learn how they move and think without spending time with them. Our goals are as follows:

1. Help you progress and learn as much as you want to learn.
2. Ensure that the horse maintains his training and is not confused or develops bad habits.
3. Safety for all; volunteer and horse.
4. It takes time, please do not try to train a horse before you train yourself.

Learning is never cumulative, it is a movement of knowing which has no beginning and no end.

Bruce Lee

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**ROLES VOLUNTEERS MIGHT SERVE** Your activities will be based on your skill level although we're happy to help you learn any role you are interested in)

### Farm Assistant:

Farm Assistants work hand in hand with SFES owners on typical farm chores. Volunteers will always have input before working on projects. We expect volunteers to let us know what they're comfortable doing. We want this to work for you. We'll show you how to do each chore and often work right beside you. You might:

- Clean up the barn, tack room or feed room
- Inspect and clean in-ground waterers
- Inspect fencing and gates
- Muck stalls
- Paint
- Fix fence
- Mow
- Harrow
- And many other fun and exciting chores



### Groomer:

- Wash horse
- Brush horses
- Comb mane
- Pick hooves
- Provide overall spa experience for our equine 😊

### Tacking and Grooming Rules

1. Only instructors and trained volunteers are to halter or bridle the horses
2. Tie horses with a with a quick release tie ring.
3. Always close the gate.
4. No more than 2 people in a stall at one time.
5. Do not tie a horse when reins are attached to bridle or headstall.
6. Do not clip, cut, or pull a horse's mane or tail.
7. Only pick feet if you've been trained.
8. Only use saddle identified for horse, tacked as SFES has trained.



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### Side walker: (Assist a rider in maintaining balance)

How to Side walk: *Different methods are used with individual riders depending on their needs. For example:*

- If there is one side walker.
  - 1) Place the arm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle.
  - 2) Hold the back of the riders boot or the riders pant cuff.
  - 3) Walk beside the rider to assist when needed.
- If there are two side walkers, the instructor will designate one person to verbally reinforce directions. Too much input can confuse a rider.
  - 1) Focus the rider's attention on the instructor.
  - 2) Limit personal conversation.
  - 3) Give the rider the support needed but not more than is necessary. 6. Don't rest your elbow on the horse's back. It will encourage speed and for the horse to move away from you.
  - 4) Stay at rider's side at all times. Do not pick up dropped toys.
  - 5) Side walkers should change sides one at a time and always in the center of the arena, under the instructors supervision.
  - 6) Check often to make sure your rider is still balanced and in the center of the horses back.
  - 7) Ask the leader to stop if rider is off center, inform instructor so they can shift the rider.

Mounting Procedures for Side Walker: (The leader is responsible for positioning the horse in the mounting ramp. Side walkers are responsible for staying with the rider until they are ready to mount. Side walkers who are trained in mounting procedures also assist the instructor in the ramp area to make sure the rider is mounted safely.)

- 1) The instructor will position a side walker on the offside.
- 2) Side walking begins at the mounting ramp and side walkers will use the thigh hold while exiting the mounting area.
- 3) The instructor may use several side walkers in the mounting area, depending on the needs of the rider
- 4) Side walkers who are not trained in mounting procedures are positioned in the arena.
- 5) Never put rider's feet in stirrups. Stirrups are always adjusted in the arena only, never at the ramp.

### Emergency Dismount Procedure for a Side Walker

- 1) In an emergency the horse handler brings the horse's head toward the rider to inhibit the horse's movement and keep the rider away from the hind feet.
- 2) The instructor or primary side walker frees the rider's foot from the stirrup while instructing the other side walker to do the same. The instructor or primary side walker then directs the other side walker to dismount the rider in a controlled fashion.
- 3) The primary side walker gives the rider back support, takes the trunk of the rider and pulls them off the horse and to the ground in a controlled fashion.

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**Rider:** We do need help keeping horses exercised. You will only ride with SFES staff present. More than likely, you'll ride side by side with SFES staff. Your safety is paramount. We will assess your skill level and provide opportunities that match with your experience. Again, YOU are responsible for letting us know if you are not comfortable. And, you MUST have a signed release on file.

**Trainer:** Many equine at SFES require training or retraining or even rehabilitation. Volunteers may assist according to their skill levels. ...or learn if interested.

- Lead Training
- Ground Work Training
- Under-saddle Training

**Non-Horse Volunteer Opportunities:** If you have experience in public relations (community outreach), grant writing, marketing or fundraising, we need your skills. Additionally, we need help spreading the word in the form of brochure creation, website design and marketing and other tools. We also need administrative assistance that includes making and returning phone calls, mailing letters, organizing and office cleaning.



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### SAFETY

We ask all riders, families, volunteers, staff, and guests to comply with all posted safety rules! Safety is our top priority.

1. NO Firearms allowed on property by any volunteer.
2. No smoking please. No Vapes. If you want to smoke, you will have to leave the property.
3. All persons riding horses must wear ASTM/SEI approved helmets.
4. No family pets. Please leave them at home.
5. No headphone or earbuds. These impact hearing.
6. Family and guests are requested to sit quietly on thebenches or in the lounge but are always welcome.
7. Please refrain from leaning or climbing on arena walls/gates.
8. If you want to feed treats, ask first, then proceed at your own risk but DO NOT take treats into a pasture.
9. The mistreatment, abuse, or verbal suggestions of abuse, of any person or of any animal will not be tolerated.
10. Cell phones should be in quiet mode.
11. Parents are responsible for the supervision of their children at all times.
12. Expectant mothers or infants are not able to volunteer, manage, or be around our equine partners for safety precautions.

### Basic Horse Safety Rules

#### Approaching the Horse

1. Have someone who already knows the horse well introduce you for the first time. The horse will be more comfortable in the presence of a familiar person, and you have the opportunity to ask questions about his mannerisms and quirks.
2. Approach your horse from the front, a little to one side, talking to them in a calm voice. It is important that he sees and hears you approach. If the horses hindquarters are toward you, approach it at an angle so it can see you. Speak to it and watch for its ears to flick in response. Place a hand firmly on the horse's neck or shoulder. As you approach its head, remember that most horses do not appreciate being patted on the face. REMEMBER: horses are creatures of reaction (fight or flight); so always let the horse know where you are. Never run up to or after a horse.
3. Never approach a horse from the rear. Even in the stall, they should turn to face you.
4. Pet a horse by placing a hand on its shoulder or neck, not on the nose or face. The horse's nose is a sensitive spot, and some horses can be head-shy. Also, horses cannot see your hand if you pat them on the nose; this can make them jerk their head upwards. Also, when petting a horse, the action you make with your hand should be a rubbing or soft scratching motion and never a slap- like or pat-like motion.

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The most similar action to a slap or pat-like motion to a horse is a kick or bite and most horses do not find this very pleasurable.

5. Whenever you are near a horse, your attention should be on the horse. Horses are prey animals, and may spook or start at unfamiliar objects, unexpected sounds or even a scent they pick up on a breeze. A startled horse may jump or move toward you suddenly and you need to be alert to avoid being stepped on or knocked down.
6. Watch Your Feet! Always be aware of where your feet are when working up close beside a horse. If a horse steps on your foot, do not try to pull your foot out from under the horse's foot. Rather, reposition the horse so that it removes its foot from yours.
7. Horses may kick, bite, strike and/or bolt if startled.
8. Please no running through the barn or screaming.
9. Do not try to pull or push a horse physically with your hands.
10. Parents/Adults please keep children under your supervision at all times.

### Leading Safely

1. Walk a bit in front of the horse's neck when leading. Most horses at the rescue have been trained to lead from both sides, but it is safest to lead from the left until you know this is the case.
2. Never hold the horse's halter with your hand when leading. Your hand could get stuck if the horse tosses his head, spooks or takes off running. Always use a lead rope when leading a horse.
3. Use a safe lead rope and both hands when leading. The excess rope should be folded (NEVER WRAPPED OR LOOPED) and held in the hand furthest from the horse.
4. Do not allow the lead to drag on the ground.
5. Use both hands: the right hand holds the lead rope (with 8-16" of rope between your hand and the catch). Fold the extra rope back and forth in your left hand. Never loop lead rope, or anything else attached to a horse, around any part of your body.
6. Your horse is stronger than you, so don't try to out-pull it. Most horses will respond to a few rhythmic tugs.
7. If the horse hangs back and refuses to move, turn left or right until he begins to move and then proceed forward.
8. If a horse rears, release the hand closest to the horse's head so that you won't be jerked off the ground. If the horse doesn't calm down RIGHT AWAY just let go of the lead rope. It is easier to catch a horse that takes off and it avoids someone getting injured trying to hold on. Please remember that if this happens to let go of the horse and seek assistance.

### Working around the Horse

1. Wear boots or solid, closed-toed shoes to protect your feet should you be stepped on.
2. The horse has several blind spots. Whenever you are near a horse, always make sure it knows where you are by speaking to it or keeping a hand on its body as you move around it.
3. The safest place to stand when working with a horse is close to its side near its shoulder.

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4. Never stand directly in front of or behind a horse, even when you are brushing its tail or forelock, because it may not be able to see you well.
5. When a horse is on crossties, never walk under its neck to get to the other side. A horse has a blind spot under his neck and will not know where you have gone when you disappear from its line of sight. When you appear suddenly on the other side of its head, it is likely to be startled.
6. To pass behind a horse, either walk far enough away that you are not in kicking range (at least 12ft.), or so close that you cannot receive a full blow should it kick. Most people opt for the latter, and if you do, be sure to keep your hand on its rump when walking behind it so that he will stay aware that you are there.
7. Unless you know the horse you're handling extremely well, do not make sudden movements or sudden loud noises around it. Some horses will become startled from sudden actions or noises and a startled horse is more likely to cause injury to you than a calm one.
8. Always let a horse know what you intend to do. For example, when picking up its feet, do not grab the foot hurriedly. Instead, run your hand down its leg, starting at its shoulder and down to its pastern, and the horse should pick up its foot for you.
9. Never leave a tied horse unattended. If the horse startles, it may injure itself trying to get loose.

### Releasing a Horse

1. When releasing a horse into a stall, always lead it completely through the door and turn it around to face the door before removing the halter.
2. When turning a horse out into pasture, always lead it completely into the pasture, turn it to face the gate and secure the gate before removing its halter.
3. Never leave a halter on a horse that is turned loose. A horse may paw at its halter or accidentally get it caught on a fence or other object, which can result in severe damage and even possible death should the horse panic while he is stuck. There are too many horror stories of horses breaking their necks due to panicking from getting their halter stuck on something, even when wearing so-called 'break-away' leather halters.

### Other

1. Make sure that all gates and doors are always closed and secured. If it is open, close it. If unsure double-check or ask.
2. Keep tack and equipment off the ground and in its proper place. Do not leave things where people or horses could damage or be hurt by them.
3. ALWAYS put things back from where you got it, if unsure ask someone.
4. Don't give treats to the horses unless you have permission. Some horses have health conditions that prohibit them from having sugar or other foods.
5. NEVER leave a horse tied and unattended.
6. No one is allowed to administer medications of any kind to horses without permission.
7. Please remember to clean up after any horse you may be working with.



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8. Other than helping to keep the horses clean, grooming gives volunteers the chance to look over their body for any cuts/swelling/etc. If there are cuts/swelling please inform us.

### Volunteer Etiquette:

1. Please let us know when you want to volunteer and confirm with us
2. Maintain your time commitment, if possible. We plan chores around your schedule.
3. Call or text, prior to your arrival time, if you are unable to come.
4. Please return things in their proper location.
5. If YOU have a concern... talk to us. Let us know.
6. Remember, you represent SFES.

*Although we hope we do not need to utilize this, we DO have a Dismissal Policy. Please be aware. We'll talk with you first. Remember, our goal is for you to succeed!!!!  
We need your help. THEY need your help.*

### RIDER/STAFF/VOLUNTEER AND /OR GUEST DISMISSAL POLICY

Conditions that may lead to dismissal:

- Failure to comply with any SFES Policy after counseling.
- Use of drugs or alcohol on the property
- Smoking on the property
- Disruptive or inappropriate behavior
- Horseplay
- Threat of violence or mistreatment of persons or animal
- Theft of property
- Behavior that spooks horses; being loud, running, darting around...

We are a family owned 501(c)3, nonprofit corporation. We depend on donations to help us support our mission. Donations can be made via our website or our Facebook page.

<https://serenity.horse>

## SERENITY FARM EQUINE SANCTUARY