



Freedom Ride Inc

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Our Mission:

Freedom Ride is 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to enriching the lives and experiences of children and adults with disabilities in the Central Florida area through therapeutic horseback riding and related activities.

2019/2020 Student & Parent Handbook

Welcome to Freedom Ride, a non-profit 501c3 equine therapeutic riding program. We teach basic riding and horsemanship skills to riders ages 4 and up with special needs. At Freedom Ride, we are built on the conviction that we are not bound by our physical limitations. Our program is designed to benefit our riders physically, socially, and emotionally by using horses and volunteers who are trained to work with individuals of varying abilities.

The purpose of this handbook is to share our policies and procedures so that Freedom Ride can give you the most effective therapeutic riding lessons possible and make your experience with us the best it can be. By reading this handbook and being an active participant in your lessons you will get the most out of your therapeutic riding experience. We look forward to working with you.

Included on our website, www.freedomride.com, are the required rider registration forms necessary to begin your experience with Freedom Ride:

- Participant Registration Information/Photo Release/Authorization for Emergency Medical Treatment**
- Participant Liability Release Form**
- Riders Medical History and Physician's Release** - This 2-page form must be completed, signed and dated by the doctor. Rider height and weight MUST be completed or the form will be returned to you. Riders cannot receive their new rider evaluation or participate in any mounted activity without this form. Form MUST be updated annually.
- Rider Questionnaire**
- Statistical Survey** - Because our lesson fees cover only a small portion of the estimated operating cost for each rider, Freedom Ride relies heavily on private donations, as well as grant and foundation gifts. Many foundations fund programs according to specific guidelines and this statistical information affords us the ability to properly and appropriately apply for much needed funds. Your cooperation is much appreciated and all information is kept completely confidential, separate from your application and is never used to determine Freedom Ride program eligibility.

The rider forms must be updated annually. Please understand that this paperwork is necessary for Freedom Ride to remain in compliance with our accreditation standards and insurance requirements.

Program Information

New Rider Evaluation

A new rider evaluation is scheduled after receipt of completed participant registration forms, including the medical release that must be completed, signed and dated by your doctor. A new rider evaluation is a very important part of our program. It allows our certified instructors to determine a rider's base skill level, abilities, appropriate horse, volunteer needs and the most suitable lessons available on our schedule. It is only after we complete an evaluation that we can determine if there is a place on the schedule for the rider. There is a one-time \$65 evaluation fee.

Scheduling

Once an evaluation is complete, Freedom Ride will try to take scheduling preferences of the rider into account when placing riders into classes; however, we cannot guarantee the day and/or time that you prefer will be available. Riders at Freedom Ride are placed into the most appropriate class according to the rider's abilities and age.

If there is not an opening in a class that fits your ability and scheduling need, you will be placed on a waiting list. Freedom Ride will contact you during the session if a space becomes available, and you will also be on the mailing list for upcoming session registrations.

Therapeutic Riding Lessons

Lessons are taught by a PATH International certified therapeutic riding instructor and provide each rider a unique experience. We use a team of 1-3 volunteers per rider to assist during each lesson. Riders participate in tasks and games that encourage physical strengthening and cognitive improvement, while learning basic riding skills.

Instruction is tailored to fit each of our rider's specific needs and to help improve their levels of strength, balance, mobility and confidence during the riding experience. The emphasis is on developing riding skills in a safe environment that is both therapeutic and fun. Specific goals are set for each rider at the beginning of a session based upon input from the rider's parents, physician, and therapists.

Hippotherapy Program

The term Hippotherapy means treatment with the help of the horse. This is a specialized therapy service that requires the therapist to maintain a certification from the American Hippotherapy Association. Participants do not learn 'riding skills' while participating in this program, but work on the goals set out by an Occupational or Physical therapist, using the horse to assist in facilitating these goals. We currently work in conjunction with LifeSkills (OT).

Continued Participation in the Program

Ongoing assessments are done on the progress of riders. If a rider has been determined as not gaining benefit from riding therapy, he/she may be removed from a class and reassigned or removed from the program in order to make room for another rider who may be able to benefit from riding therapy. During these assessments we will also determine if a rider still requires our specialized services. If it is determined that a rider no longer requires our services, the rider will be promoted out of our program to allow for riders requiring it.

Billing and Payment Policy

Freedom Ride has taken great care in setting participant fees for our services. Our fees are very modest because we subsidize a portion of the cost of our therapeutic riding lessons through fundraising each year. Therapeutic riding is considered a “recreational” activity and NOT covered by insurance companies. The information below sets forth the billing and payment policies of Freedom Ride.

New Rider Evaluation Fee: There is a non-refundable fee of **\$65** required at the time of your new rider evaluation.

Therapeutic Riding Lessons:

- Group lesson (30-45 minutes, depending on rider level) \$35 per class
- Private lesson (30-45 minutes, at instructor’s discretion) \$50 per class

Hippotherapy Sessions:

- Private session with therapist 30 minutes \$40 per class

Lesson Fees and Billing:

Lesson fees are billed in advance for all scheduled riding lessons within each session and must be paid in full prior to the first class. Alternative payment options are available and must be discussed with Freedom Ride prior to the first class to avoid late charges. Payment will still be required for all absences, unexcused and excused. Absences due to a medical emergency or other medical procedure will be taken into consideration on a case by case basis.

Payments must be made prior to the first riding lesson. If payment has not been received a **\$10 late fee will be assessed**. Statements will be issued monthly for accounts with a balance due after 30 days. Unless you have a payment plan, a \$10 late fee will be assessed every 30 days that your account is overdue. You must contact our office regarding your account if you are not able to make your payment when it is due.

Checks and money orders should be made payable to Freedom Ride, Inc. Checks may be dropped off in the administrative office or mailed to Freedom Ride, 1905 Lee Road, Orlando, FL 32810. You may also pay by credit card in the administrative office or on our website www.freedomride.com by clicking on the Student Payments tab on the front page. *Please do not give payments to the instructors.*

Scholarships and Financial Aid Services:

Financial aid is available in the form of ‘riderships’ to those who may have difficulty paying for their riding lessons. An application must be completed prior to the first scheduled riding session and must include the first page of the most recent IRS income tax return, Schedule C or a copy of an SSI check. A sliding scale based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines will be used to determine the amount awarded for a lesson scholarship.

Account Balances:

Rider accounts that are over 30 days past due will result in the rider’s temporary removal from the program until payment is received in full. If you are having difficulty making payments, you can apply for financial aid. If you do not meet the eligibility criteria, then you can request a payment plan.

Please note: If you do not follow the terms of your payment plan, then the balance owed shall immediately become due in full and the participant will be prohibited from participating in the program until full payment is received.

Returned Checks:

Your account will be assessed a \$25 return check fee for each check that is returned to our office. The returned check fee shall be assessed by invoice, and that invoice shall be subject to a late fee if it is not paid within 30 days.

Policies & Procedures

Rider Limitations:

All Freedom Ride horses have height and weight carrying limits. These limits are in place to ensure the health and well being of our horses and for everyone's safety. Weight limitations may vary from rider to rider and will be at the discretion of the instructor. Horseback riding may not be a suitable recreational activity for certain individuals and therefore it is necessary for you to have your physician complete and sign the Physician Release/Rider Medical History Form. Should the physical condition of the rider change at any time, Freedom Ride is to be notified immediately and a new Physician Release form must be completed and filed with the office.

Children under 2 years are inappropriate for mounted activities because their structural and neurologic development is inadequate to organize the sensory input from the equine or to accommodate its movement. Children between the ages of 2 and 4 may be considered if they qualify for the hippotherapy program and an AHA certified therapist is available to provide this service. Children must be at least 4 years of age to participate in the Therapeutic Riding Program.

Certain conditions require additional precautions to be taken when on or around horses and **some conditions are contraindications to riding**. Most activities have some type of precautions and guidelines for participation and horse riding is no exception. For example: Individuals who have spinal curvatures that are unable to accommodate the movement of the horse, or those who lack neck and trunk control may not be suitable rider participants.

Clothing:

For both evaluations and lessons, riders should wear long pants such as riding breeches, jeans or leggings to prevent leg chafing. Girls may NOT wear skirts during their lesson at any time. Athletic shoes with a closed toe and heel are acceptable or boots with a rounded, closed toe and a small heel are the safest form of footwear.

It is recommended that riders learning advanced skills and participating in more independent activities wear paddock boots or tall boots. Riders should avoid wearing jewelry, long dangling necklaces and earrings will not be allowed during lesson activities. Safety helmets that meet ASTM-SEI requirements are to be worn by all riders and if necessary, will be provided.

Inclement Weather:

Please **do not** assume that classes will be canceled due to bad weather. Remember, this is Florida; it may be raining where you are, but clear at Freedom Ride. Please refer to our "Inclement Weather Policy" for more information

Attendance:

Riders/parents need to contact our office as soon as possible if they need to cancel their lesson. Any absence that Freedom Ride is not notified about 24hrs prior to class will be considered unexcused. Any participant having three unexcused absences in one session will be removed from the schedule for that session and their time slot will be replaced with another qualifying participant.

A student arriving more than fifteen minutes after class is schedule to begin, or if the arena gate is already closed and mounted activities have started, will not be able to participate in the lesson. If there are extenuating circumstances for your tardiness, it is the instructor's discretion if you will be allowed to participate in the lesson that day. Excessive tardiness will result in the rider being removed from the schedule for that session.

Rider Paperwork:

All rider paperwork must be up-to-date and the medical release form must be updated annually. No student will be allowed to ride without these forms properly completed, with original signatures, and turned in prior to class. Medical release forms must be completed in full with rider height, weight, diagnosis, doctor signature, and dated. Incomplete forms will be returned to you.

Freedom Ride No-Show and Cancellation Policies

- 1) Please arrive on time or a few minutes early for your scheduled lesson time. Getting helmets, clothing changes, and bathroom breaks need to be handled prior to your lesson start time. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late and the arena gate is closed, this means the lesson has already started, you will not be able to ride that day.
- 2) If you will be absent, please call the office at 407-293-0411 as soon as possible. If you get the voice mail, PLEASE leave a message. By letting us know that you will be absent, we can avoid having the horse ready and waiting for you and prepare accordingly with volunteers.
- 3) Payment for the session is expected regardless of absences and no-shows.
- 4) There will be NO Refunds for lessons missed or canceled by the participant or parent. Please note that illnesses not requiring hospitalization will be considered an absence.
- 5) Please notify Freedom Ride as soon as possible in the event of illnesses requiring hospitalization or other unforeseen emergencies.
- 6) If you will be out of town during the riding session, please speak with us at the beginning of the session. These absences will be considered advanced and you may or may not be expected to pay for these missed lessons. However, if you fail to inform us of this information in advance you will be charged.
- 7) Excessive absences (3 or more) or no-shows (more than 1) will disqualify the rider from the remainder of the session and the rider will be placed on the waiting list for the next available session.
- 8) Riders who are receiving scholarships and have more than 1 no-show will be subject to forfeiting the scholarship and becoming ineligible for future scholarships.
- 9) Occasionally Freedom Ride must cancel a class due to weather or other circumstances. Riders will receive a credit for classes canceled by Freedom Ride.
- 10) Due to our schedule, Freedom Ride does not provide individual make-up lessons in the event of absence or no-show.

PLEASE don't be a "No-show, No-call"- this results in:

Unnecessary tacking and untacking of our horses

Inefficient use of staff and volunteers

Excessive absences take up a time slot that could be used by another rider

Safety Rules and Barn Policies

1. All students who are not considered responsible for themselves should not be left unattended at any time and must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian until the student is escorted by the instructor or volunteer to their lesson.
2. A parent or adult guardian must be present during the entire riding lesson for all riders under the age of 21.
3. A parent or adult guardian must be present during the entire riding lesson for all non-verbal riders.
4. Freedom Ride reserves the right to extend the parental/guardian supervision policy to other riders as deemed necessary.
5. Riders and parents must wait at the gate, bleachers or picnic table until their lesson time. No rider or parent should be back in the barn while other lessons are being held or if the instructor is elsewhere.
6. During lessons, ONLY students and volunteers are allowed in the barn area – parents are asked to remain in the parking lot or watch from the bleachers.
7. A safety helmet must be worn at all times during their lesson. Freedom Ride has helmets available for use in our barn, or you may purchase your own at a local tack shop.
8. Riders, parents, visitors, volunteers and staff are REQUIRED to wear closed toe shoes when in the barn and around the horses at all times. Individuals that arrive on property without the proper foot attire will not be allowed in the barn area.
9. Remember this is Florida – Riders should be properly hydrated and protected from the elements. Cool wrap bands, sunglasses, jackets, etc. can be worn by the rider as long as they do not prevent lesson activities.
10. At Freedom Ride we DO NOT hand feed our horses. If a rider wishes to bring treats, they may give them to the horse in a bucket at the instructor's discretion and will be done within the time constraints of the rider's lesson.
11. There are no pets allowed on Freedom Ride property.
12. Any bleeding or open sores must be covered with a bandage, or the rider cannot attend that lesson.
13. Please be sure to advise the instructor of any medical changes such as recent seizures or illness that may affect their riding abilities.
14. Please refrain from coaching or speaking with your rider from the sidelines. It is important their focus remain on the instructor and assisting volunteers.
15. Please make sure that any visitors you bring (including siblings, other family and friends) are kept under your supervision. No climbing/sitting/standing on the fence, no shouting or loud voices, no running around the riding arena, barn or parking lot, etc.
16. Horses get scared of strange noises and sights. Children other than the student are welcome with adult supervision. Any visitors that are causing a safety hazard will be asked to leave the premises.
17. Our instructors are always available to answer any questions you have regarding you or your child's riding lessons. Please understand that they may not be available directly before or after the lesson, but can set up a day/time to address your thoughts.
18. All phones and other electronic devices on our premises must be put on *SILENT*. This is a distraction to our lessons and can potentially frighten the horses.
19. **ABSOLUTELY NO SMOKING ALLOWED AT THE FREEDOM RIDE FACILITY.**
20. Abusive behavior, lack of respect for instructors, volunteers, staff, and horses, or any violation of Freedom Ride rules will result in immediate dismissal from the property.

**Thank you for following our basic safety rules.
Safety is our number one priority!**

Freedom Ride Session Calendar *(subject to change)*

Session 1	January - May	(20 weeks)
Session 2	September - December	(14 weeks)

The staff and volunteers at Freedom Ride want to make your visits with us enjoyable, fun and rewarding. Please, give us feedback; let us know how we are doing and what we can do to improve you or your child's experiences with us.

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Please sign and detach this portion to return with your Rider Registration Forms - Thank You.

By signing below, I agree that I have read and understand the above written policies and procedures.

Rider name: _____ Date: _____
Please Print

Signature: _____ Print: _____
Rider, Parent or Legal Guardian

Please send me a Rider Scholarship Application

Comments:

