



Getting Started

A Guide to Volunteering in RDA Sessions



Welcome and Thank You

For over 50 years, Riding for the Disabled Association has been providing opportunities for therapy, achievement and fun to people with disabilities.

Today over 25,600 riders and carriage drivers take part at our groups all over the UK, supported by people like you making up our dedicated team of 18,000 volunteers.

RDA UK is the national support network for the organisation and is comprised of 400 national, regional and county volunteers and 25 staff who provide support and services to RDA's member groups.

About RDA

-  RDA benefits the lives of 25,600 disabled children and adults all over the UK
-  Using activities like riding and carriage driving, we provide therapy, fitness, skills development and fun
-  RDA has almost 500 Centres around the UK
-  We deliver a measureable impact in life enhancing areas such as physical ability, communication, relationship building and confidence

“We all do it for the challenges; for the rewards of helping people achieve their goals and because we believe in what RDA does.”

Our Values

Our values outline the way in which we work together and the things we believe are important when delivering our services. Our values guide our behaviour and the decisions we make while we are volunteering.

-  RDA is a community of people who believe that it's what you can do that counts and who enable participants and volunteers to achieve their goals
-  RDA values the input of all people who are involved – participants, volunteers and paid staff
-  RDA ensures that development and achievement is recognised and celebrated across the organisation
-  RDA aims to deliver an excellent service and experience for all participants and volunteers
-  RDA recognises the central part that horses and ponies play in everything we do



What to Wear

Being around horses means there is a need to wear the right kind of clothing and footwear.

Good To Go

Comfortable strong shoes / boots

(If a horse stands on your foot it can cause a lot of damage, wearing strong sturdy shoes is important to mitigate this risk.)

A Coat which can be fastened

Gloves

Warm Clothes

Not Recommended

High heeled shoes, sandals, trainers

Loose or flowing clothing

Long scarves

Jewellery which may get caught

Group Information

Group name:

Group contact and their contact details:

Group's first aiders:

Group's Safeguarding Officer:

Groups Health and Safety Procedures:

The centres fire assembly points:

The centres toilets:



Understanding Horses

Horses and ponies are our most important volunteers and have many different personalities. Being confident in your interactions with horses at RDA is important.

- 🐾 You should approach a horse or pony towards the shoulder where they can see you. They may want to smell you to review the situation
- 🐾 Avoid approaching horses or ponies directly from the front or directly behind as they may not see you
- 🐾 Talking to the pony quietly as you approach and patting them on the shoulder or neck helps to show you are a friend and not a threat
- 🐾 Being consistent in your behaviour around horses will help you form good relationship with them
- 🐾 Before tacking a horse up it is important that it has been groomed in order to remove mud and dust from its coat. This is not just for presentation, but to ensure the tack fits comfortably without rubbing. A mentor within your group will be able to show you the best way to do this.

“I came to RDA for the horses, but it has taught me so much about people, about respect and about fairness.”



Preparing Horses for RDA

During your volunteering, you may be involved in helping to prepare a horse for an RDA session.

Tying up a Horse

Horses must be tied up with a quick release knot before tacking up.



Feed the tail end of the rope through the safety string loop



Pass the tail end over the rope and around to form a loop.



Fold the tail end and insert the doubled-up end through the loop.



Tighten the knot so that it is snug. To release, simply pull on the rope end.

Bridle

- It is safer for the horse to be tied up before tacking it up, but while putting the bridle on it is safest to untie the quick release knot leaving the rope sitting in the string loop.
- Make sure that the noseband and the throatlash is undone before you start.
- At RDA it is often the case the horses will wear both a bridle and a headcollar. Where this is the case the headcollar should be fitted under the bridle, and the bridle must not have a noseband.
- Stand beside the horse's neck and gently put the bit into their mouth while holding the bridle over the horse's nose.
- The bit should sit level in the mouth and have a couple of wrinkles either side.
- Take the top of the bridle and gently push the horse's ears through so the top of the bridle sits behind their ears and the browband across their brow. After this pull their forelock out from under the browband.
- The next stage is to fasten the throatlash. To check it is at the correct length you should allow for a fist between the horse's throat and the throatlash.
- There are many different kinds of reins used at RDA. For riders who are learning how to steer their horse, reins can be attached to head collar, to prevent harming the horse's mouth. For riders who have developed their skills in this area the reins can be attached to the bit.



Saddle

To ensure that riders are safe and that horses are comfortable it is important that a saddle is both well-fitting and positioned correctly on the horses back. It is important that when tacking up you take time to ensure the saddle is positioned correctly.

- 🌿 Saddle cloths and numnahs should be used to minimise the saddle slipping and will help keep the underside of the saddle clean. The numnah should be fitted first.
- 🌿 Next, place the saddle on the horses back, over the withers and then slide it backwards into its natural resting place. The saddle should sit just behind the withers and there should be four fingers from under the pommel to the withers. At this stage make sure the numnah is pulled up to the gullet. This will ensure there is not undue pressure on the horse's withers or spine.
- 🌿 The girth is a vital piece of tack that attaches the saddle to the horse and helps maintain its position. There are a wide range of girths designed to suit a range of different saddles.
- 🌿 Most saddles have three girth straps. The girth should be fitted either on the first and second strap, or first and third strap. The girth should never be fitted onto the second and third strap.
- 🌿 Double check girths are tight enough before the rider mounts. A correctly fastened girth should rest approximately one hand's width behind the horse's elbows. You should then check the girth again once the rider is mounted.
- 🌿 Stirrups hold the foot of the rider and are attached to the saddle by a strap known as a stirrup leather.
- 🌿 Some riders at RDA will use stirrups with toe caps which provide extra support
- 🌿 There may be times where stirrups are not used. If this is the case they should either be run up, crossed over or removed altogether.
- 🌿 Some riders may use a balance strap, this should be fitted onto the D rings of the saddle.





“Since I have been volunteering with RDA it has opened my eyes to how everything can and should be”

Untacking

- 🐾 Before untacking you should tie the horse up using a quick release knot.
- 🐾 The first step is to remove the saddle. To do this undo the girth on the left hand side. After freeing the girth lay it over the saddle.
- 🐾 You can now gently lift the saddle from the horses back and put this safely to the side.
- 🐾 The next step is to remove the bridle. Once again, untie the quick release knot and let the rope lie in a loop of string.
- 🐾 Begin by unbuckling the noseband (if used) and throatlash and then gently ease the bridle off the horse, ensuring that the bit does not bang the horses teeth.
- 🐾 Tack can now be cleaned, especially the bit which must be cleaned after each session, before being put away.

Leading

Leading horses and ponies is a key role. The leader is responsible for helping to direct the horse during an RDA session.

Warming Up a Horse

It is important to lead the horse without a rider prior to the session to warm it up. This allows you to spend some time getting to know the horse, to talk to the horse, loosen the horse up and check that it is sound. It is also another chance to check that all tack is correctly fitted, particularly that the bridle and girth are fastened.

Looking for Lameness

Lameness means that a horse has an abnormal gait. When trotting up before an RDA session it is important to look for signs of discomfort. This might include movements such as a limp on one or more legs, or it might be more subtle such as being heavy in your hand, not wanting to go forwards or it may also be that the horse prefers one rein to the other.

Other signs of discomfort might include a horse opening their mouth, twisting their head, swishing their tail or constantly putting their ears back.

If you have any concerns that a horse may not be sound you should inform the coach responsible for the session.



The 3 Stages of Leading

Leading at Stage 1 (Leader has control of the horse)

This method of leading is used when the rider has minimum control of the horse and is often used with a rider that requires two side walkers and a leader. The leader has control of the horse and follows the commands of the rider and coach, with minimum input from the side walkers. The leader is placed between the shoulder and head of the horse with enough contact on the lead rope to keep control at all times. This method of leading should be practised by the leader whilst warming up before the session starts.

Leading at Stage 2 (Control of the horse is shared between leader and rider)

At this stage of leading, the rider is now at a level where they should be working to control the horse in walk or trot and practicing working independently. The leader is positioned at the horse's shoulder but with a lighter contact than used at Stage 1, allowing the rider to direct the horse. There may be a need for one side walker but usually at this level the rider works with just a leader. This leading procedure should be practiced in the warm up session before the lesson starts in walk and trot. It is of paramount importance this is achieved during the warm up to ensure the suitability of horse and to check the leader is competent to lead.

Leading at Stage 3 (Rider has control of the horse)

The leader at this stage is positioned beside the rider's leg and allows the rider to control the horse. The leader's role is to ensure the rider is applying the correct aids with input from the coach, before the rider comes off the lead rein. The leader is just there in case an incorrect aid is given to the horse and also acts as a confidence-giver to a rider that is ready for the transition of moving from being led to riding independently.



Leading Technique

When leading a horse at RDA, begin by attaching the lead rein to the bit via a coupling. This will give you control of the horses in a similar way to using the reins.

Whilst holding the lead rope it is advisable to wear gloves to protect your hands. Hold the rope below the clip and the other hand taking up the looped length of rope to stop it dragging on the floor. Be sure not to wrap the loop around your hand.

When leading you should usually walk beside the horse, level with their shoulder. If you are working as part of a team with a sidewalker who is on your side you will find you need to walk a little further forward, beside the horses head.

When walking off ask the horse to walk on and walk off in a straight line. You may be asked to encourage an active walk from the horse as this is more beneficial for some riders.

When leading, try to keep the horse's movements as smooth as possible, avoiding sudden turns or stops. If you are about to change pace be sure that the rider and those in your team are ready.

As the leader you are in control of the pace of the horse, including when you need to stop. Make sure you keep a safe distance from those in front of you, this is usually at least a horse's length; this will allow you time to stop safely if any problems arise.

“With a smiling face and steadying hands on each side of me, we moved off confidently at a walk. The comforting and well-remembered movement of the horse beneath me was absolute bliss”

Sidewalking

Sidewalkers help many RDA riders to get the most out of their session, providing varying levels of support.. They are also on hand should a rider become unbalanced.

New or nervous riders often take confidence in friendly sidewalkers, who are attentive and able to offer smiling faces and words of encouragement..

Sidewalkers should be positioned in line with the rider's leg, around 1 metre away from the horse. They may need to support a rider's ankle in order to keep their lower leg in line with their hip and shoulder, this helps support the alignment of their upper body.

In some sessions, sidewalkers may find themselves reinforcing messages from the coach, encouraging participants in exercises and helping riders feel at ease. There may also times where it is appropriate for side walkers to be quiet and minimise the sensory input for participants, allowing them to focus on the words of their coach.

In order to determine the best kind of support for participants you may need to spend some time talking to the coach delivering the session as well as the participant themselves. In some cases where communication can be challenging you may benefit from speaking to those who support the participant to understand their needs and gain some hints on how to support effective communication.



Mounting and Dismounting

The coach works with the riders to understand the most suitable method for getting on the horse. This may include using different kinds of mounting equipment.

Mounting Block

Mounting blocks are the most common way RDA riders will mount their horse. They come in a range of sizes and heights. Some mounting blocks have a wide top that will allow a coach and a rider to work together whilst mounting.

Hydraulic Platform

A hydraulic platform can be lowered or raised to the optimum height for riders and their horse. This can be particularly useful for wheelchair users who may benefit from a sitting transfer from their wheelchair.

Hoist

A hoist may be useful for riders who are unable to stand. Hoists have different types of supporting aids available including different sized slings to support the rider whilst they mount.

Ramp

Ramps are useful for riders who use wheelchairs or walking aids and allow them to reach the correct height for mounting. Participants using ramps should be able to weight bear when transferring onto their horse.



Roles When Mounting

Equine Leader

The equine leader will bring the horse to the mounting block ensuring they have stopped in a suitable position. If the position is not quite right the horse may need to be brought around again. While the rider is mounting, they are responsible for controlling the horse.

Nearside Helper

This person is usually the coach or the leader of the mounting team and is responsible for supporting the rider at the mounting block. They will make sure the rider and the whole team knows when mounting will start and will check the riders position once they have mounted.

Offside Helper

This role will provide support and ensure the mounting rider is able to balance. They may support with guiding a rider's foot into the stirrup. Many volunteers assisting on the offside will stand on a mounting block.

“RDA is a constant reminder of the quality of life
and the importance of sharing it”

Roles when Dismounting

Equine Leader

The equine leader is responsible for controlling the horse both when moving into the designated dismounting area and while the rider is getting off the horse.

Nearside Helper

This person is usually the coach or the leader of the dismounting team. They will ensure the rider is ready to get off the horse, this may involve asking a rider to let go of the reins and to take their feet out of their stirrups. They will support the rider in leaning forwards and swinging their leg over the horses back as well as providing support as they move towards the ground.

Offside Helper

This role will help the rider to ensure their foot is out of the stirrups and will help guide their leg over the horse as they dismount.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding refers to the proactive approach to keeping children, young people and adults at risk safe from harm. RDA places the highest priority on safety and enjoyment, and recognises that it has a duty of care to those taking part as well as promoting their welfare by taking all reasonable steps to ensure risks of harm are minimised.

As an RDA volunteer, we ask that

- You place the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk as paramount, understanding that everyone involved with RDA has the right to protection from abuse.
- Report all concerns and allegations of poor practice or abuse to your Group Safeguarding Officer

To report a concern

RDA National Office call 01926 492915

Alternatively, call the NSPCC 24 hour safeguarding line on 0808 800 5000

If you think someone is at immediate risk of abuse or harm, contact either the police or social services.



The Bigger Picture

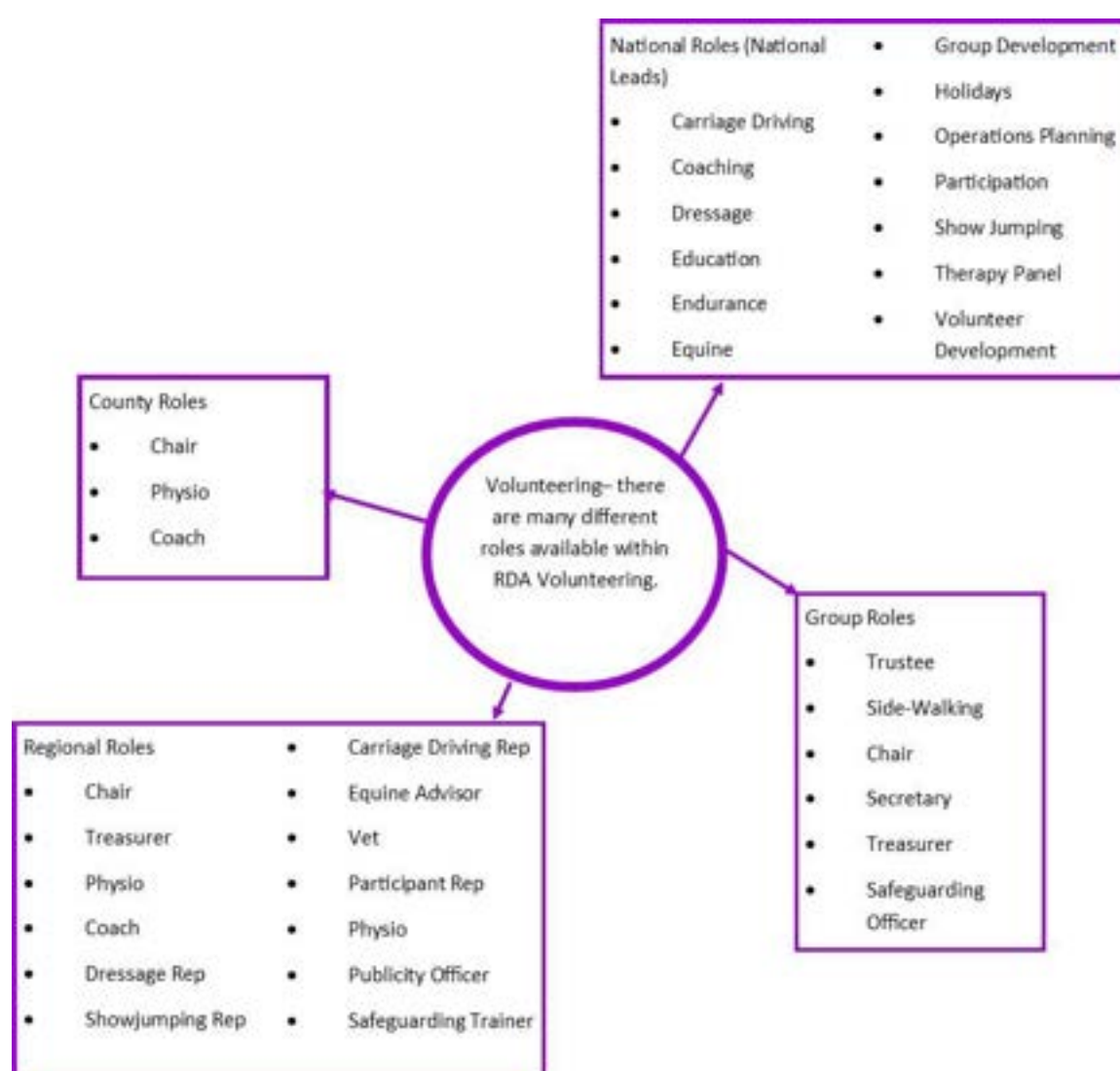
The RDA Group you are attending forms part of a membership of almost 500 groups. These groups are split up into counties and then regions dependant on their location.

Groups have trustee and group roles, these are people who are involved in the running and decision making for that particular Group. There are a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 11. Speak to your Group about how to get involved with different roles and trustee positions.

As well as group volunteers there are volunteers at county, regional and national level, they are known as RDA UK Volunteers.

Anybody can become an RDA UK volunteer and it is a great opportunity to work with like minded people who also want to get more involved with RDA behind the scenes.

The Volunteer Pathway





Further Information

Want to Learn More?

There are various free online e-learning modules available to all volunteers located on www.rda-learning.org.uk including Disability Awareness, Equine Knowledge and Autism Awareness. They may help you build up your skills as a new RDA volunteer and can count towards your progression to become a coach if that is something you have considered.

Thank You

Thank you for the time you give to RDA. With your help we provide therapy, fitness, skills development and opportunities for achievement for our participants. We hope you have an excellent experience whilst volunteering.

“It has taught me so much and that’s why I love volunteering with RDA.”

Training Log

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