6 Riders – 1 Lesson

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING GROUP THERAPEUTIC/ADAPTIVE RIDING LESSONS

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WHY THIS TOPIC

- Effective group lesson management is essential for Instructors- PATH Criteria
- Group lessons have unique challenges, but also unique benefits! Let's talk about them!
- Let's expand the conversation! Many presentations discuss smaller group lessons

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THE GROUP LESSON FRAMEWORK

Volunteer Management
Having the right volunteers in the right role!

Equine Management
Every decision regarding the horses matter!

Lesson Planning & Managing Different Skill Levels
Balancing individual support with group cohesion.

Arena Management
Be thoughtful about your space!

Safety & Risk Management
The best safety tools are preparation and prevention.

3

DISCLAIMER

Every program is different! The number of horses, volunteers, and riding space are all essential pieces of your puzzle!

There is no "one size fits all" formula for teaching group lessons!

My goal- to share ideas and provide tools to inspire you to think creatively about group lessons!

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WHILE WE CHAT!

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Think of your favorite group lesson activity!
(Games, warm-ups, skill practice, etc.)
Favorite group lesson teaching tip?

Let's share ideas at the end of the presentation!

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VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT
SETTING YOUR TEAMS UP FOR SUCCESS

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VOLUNTEERS ARE MORE THAN JUST HELPERS!
THEY ARE CO-TEACHERS, SAFETY MONITORS, CHEERLEADERS, AND CONFIDENCE-BUILDERS!

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VOLUNTEER TRAINING & CONTINUING EDUCATION

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Build a Strong Foundation!

- Comprehensive initial training is a must!
  - Cover things that will help you in these larger group lessons!
    - Adaptations to be prepared for, how to handle downtime, arena etiquette, how to communicate effectively, etc.
  - Utilize online and in-person training

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VOLUNTEER TRAINING & CONTINUING EDUCATION

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Continuing Education

- Training videos
- Informational Articles
- Hands on Volunteer Workshops
- Volunteer Mentorship

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EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER COORDINATION

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Match Volunteers Thoughtfully

- Pair based on rider needs, goals, and volunteer skill
  - Know your volunteer strengths, skills, and personalities!
    - Are they skilled at redirecting behavior? Are they tall and strong for side walking? Are they a skilled horse handler?
    - A rider needing social interactions will need a more talkative and expressive volunteer.
  - Assign consistent teams to help build trust and efficiency!

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EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER COORDINATION

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Pre-Lesson Huddle

- Review lesson goals and safety reminders
- Discuss adjustments in support levels
- Can be done quickly in the barn or during safety checks
- Individually or as a group!

"When riding the pattern today, I want you to take more of a passive leading position so we can see if Max is ready for independent riding!"

"I really want to focus on Alex's hand position today, so please help me give some reminders about that during class."

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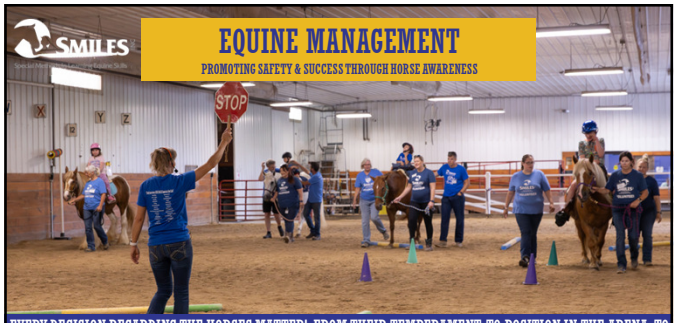
EQUINE MANAGEMENT

PROMOTING SAFETY & SUCCESS THROUGH HORSE AWARENESS



EVERY DECISION REGARDING THE HORSES MATTER! FROM THEIR TEMPERAMENT, TO POSITION IN THE ARENA, TO HOW WELL VOLUNTEERS UNDERSTAND HORSE BEHAVIOR, IT ALL PLAYS INTO A SUCCESSFUL LESSON.

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LESSON HORSES IN THERAPEUTIC RIDING

Key Qualities of Group Lesson Horses

- Tolerant of distractions, close spacing, rider variability
- Calm and confident around multiple horses
- Patient with frequent stopping, starting, changing pace

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LESSON HORSES IN THERAPEUTIC RIDING

Know your Herd: The Key to Successful Lessons

- Know which horses are more dominant or reactive in group settings.
- Avoid pairing horses who show tension or competition.
  - Participate with daily horse chores!
- Use the horse's natural movement/speed strategically!
  - EX. Avoid having the slow horse lead the class through an activity (unless you are practicing a slow walk!)
- Teach volunteers to read horse behavior and notice early signs of agitation.

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LESSON PLANNING – BUILDING THE LESSON

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Structure with Flexibility

- Keep a consistent routine
- Focus on one main skill per lesson (e.g. steering, transitions)
  - Consider a secondary or reinforcing skill (e.g. posture, hand position)

Warm-Up → Skill Focus → Application/ Game → Cool Down

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LESSON PLANNING – BUILDING THE LESSON

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UTILIZE A MOUNTING WARM-UP

- Simple activities that volunteers can do with riders
- Can be skill-related, questions/answers, riding patterns, exercises, etc.
- These should be activities that riders/volunteers are familiar with.

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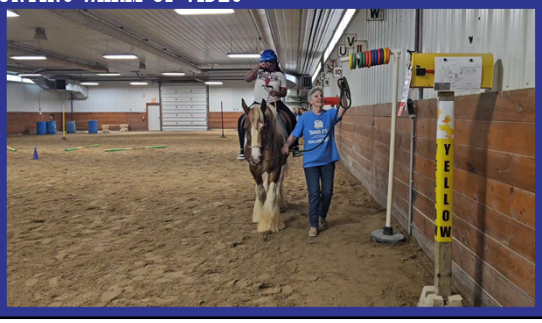
MOUNTING WARM-UP VIDEO



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LESSON PLANNING – CREATING ADAPTATIONS

CREATE ADAPTATIONS FOR SKILLS & ACTIVITIES

- Ensure that EVERY RIDER, regardless of ability, can participate safely and meaningfully in all lesson skills and activities!
- Think through riders you serve – nonverbal, physical disabilities, visual impairments, deaf/hard of hearing – and how you might teach them!

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LESSON PLANNING – SKILL ADAPTATIONS

EXAMPLE:

- When teaching riders to walk, have multiple ways for them to accomplish this!
  - Verbally say "walk-on"
  - Cue for non-verbal riders (tap the horse's neck)
  - Encourage riders to cluck
  - Slight forward release of the reins
  - Gentle squeeze of the horse's side with their heels
  - Rock forward slightly in the saddle
  - Have a visual sign for walk-on (ASL, pointing)

Instructor Tip!

- Make sure horse handlers and side-walkers know the rider's specific cue.

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WALK-ON ADAPTATION

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WALK-ON ADAPTATION

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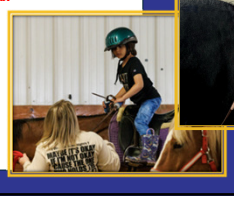
LESSON PLANNING – SKILL ADAPTATIONS

2-point!

- Think about the benefits of a 2-point in a therapeutic/ adaptive riding class.
  - Core engagement
  - Improve balance
  - Body awareness
  - Confidence building



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LESSON PLANNING – SKILL ADAPTATIONS

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2-Point Adaptations

- Use the horse's neck/mane for balance; add neck strap, grab strap, or use the pommel of the saddle
- "Mini" 2-point- lifting just slightly out of the saddle
- Upper body 2-point
- Provide extra physical support from side walkers
- Practice at halt first

Instructor Tips!

- Use inclusive language
- Train volunteers to support inclusivity

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2-POINT VIDEO

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LESSON PLANNING – ACTIVITY ADAPTATIONS

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Think: What does success look like for all riders?

- Verbal / Non-Verbal Directions
- Adaptations for Physical Limitations
- Adaptions for Hearing/Visual Impairments
- Visual Markers
- Cognitive Processing
- Success Criteria

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LESSON PLANNING – ACTIVITY ADAPTATIONS

LESSON ACTIVITIES ADAPTATIONS

- Lesson activity directs riders to ride to a specific color cone in the arena and halt or circle.
  - What if riders are visually impaired or have color blindness?
    - Adaptations: Have volunteer count down from 3 as they are approaching the cone or if color blind, place a sign/ball on top of the cone (remember your volunteers may be color blind!)

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LESSON PLANNING – ACTIVITY ADAPTATIONS

LESSON ACTIVITIES ADAPTATIONS

- Lesson activity directs riders to halt/walk-on to music.
  - What if riders are hearing impaired or have auditory processing delays?
    - Adaptations: Add in visual signals like a sign or have the volunteers give a gentle tap on the rider's leg when it's time to halt/walk-on.

▲ = halt

▲ = fast walk/speed up

▲ = slow walk/slow down

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MOUNTING WARM-UP ADAPTATION

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MANAGING DIFFERENT SKILL LEVELS

CREATE LAYERED ACTIVITIES FOR VARIED ABILITIES

- Design each activity with built in layers of difficulty.
  - Every rider can participate in the same activity, but with different challenge levels.
  - If you are new to lesson planning/teaching, write out different layers of difficulty or adaptations on your lesson plan!

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MANAGING DIFFERENT SKILL LEVELS

Example: Zig Zag Shape – lesson activity on steering, using reins and body to communicate with the horse.

- Rider 1: Steers through with hands on hips to build core strength and introduce concept of left and right
- Riders 2 & 3: Steer while the volunteers passively lead so they can focus on their rein cues
- Riders 4 & 5: Volunteers unclip while riders practice precise turns
- Rider 6: Takes the lead, guiding the class through while volunteers call out "right" or "left" and they have to follow with their eyes

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MANAGING DIFFERENT SKILL LEVELS

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MANAGING DIFFERENT SKILL LEVELS

CREATE LESSON STATIONS

- Stations can be done on the rail to help with spacing.
- Allows you to bring riders in for individualized instruction.
- Can be horse related, skill related, goal related, themed, etc.

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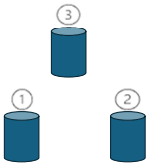
MANAGING DIFFERENT SKILL LEVELS

Example: Barrel Racing Week! Lesson plan includes time for individual practice and themed stations on the rail.

- Station 1: Roping Cattle (tossing rings onto a fake steer)
- Station 2: Speed Transitions on the rail
- Station 3: Finding matching colored bandanas - tie to saddle, wrist, halter, etc.
- Station 4: Learning to use grooming tools
- Station 5: "Flag Rider" Ride a lap waving the American flag



* Remember to train your volunteers for these types of activities! *

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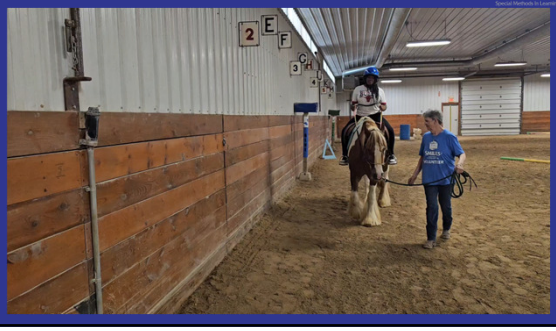
STATION EXAMPLE VIDEO



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STATION EXAMPLE VIDEO

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FEEL GOOD REEL!

Demonstrating:
- Social Skills
- Various levels of volunteer support
- Physical & Motor Skills
- Sportsmanship
- Teamwork

- Sequencing
- Turn-Taking
- Horsemanship Skills
- Focus
- Pattern Recall
- Confidence Building
- AND MORE!

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MANAGING DIFFERENT SKILL LEVELS

Teaching with Purpose!
- Deepen your understanding of how certain skills and activities work towards rider goals.
- Every activity should have a clear purpose and benefit for each rider
- Instructors should be able to explain both the "fun" and the "function"

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MANAGING DIFFERENT SKILL LEVELS

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Example – Ride the Colors Activity:

Lesson activity instructs riders to pick a card, which shows a 4-cone pattern on it. Riders must ride to the cones in the order shown, and circle around each one.

Front of Card

Back of Card
Blue
Green
Yellow
Red

What are some benefits of this activity?

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RIDE THE COLORS: ONE ACTIVITY – MANY BENEFITS

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PHYSICAL BENEFITS

Steering Skills – Using reins and body effectively
Posture Control – Maintaining and upright, balanced seat while changing direction
Coordination – Synchronizing hand and seat aids for accurate turns
Core Strength – Engaging trunk muscles for control through direction changes
Fine/Gross Motor Skills – Engaging large muscle groups, finger dexterity, and hand strength on reins

COGNITIVE BENEFITS

Memory & Recall – Remembering the cone sequence and order
Planning & Sequencing – Strategizing the most effective route
Following Directions – Executing a multi-step task
Problem Solving – Adjusting the path if off course
Attention & Focus – Staying on task from start to finish
Spatial Awareness – Understanding where the cones are in relation to self and horse

VERBAL BENEFITS

Communication – Verbally repeating or recalling the pattern
Receptive Language – Understanding and processing instructions
Social Interactions – Responding to volunteer/instructor cues, asking for help if needed

EMOTIONAL/SOCIAL BENEFITS

Confidence Building – Completing a challenging, multi-step task
Independence – Taking ownership of the ride and decision-making
Patience/Impulse Control – Waiting for turn, thinking before acting
Enjoyment & Motivation – Turning riding skills into a game for increased participation

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TIPS FOR SUCCESS!

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- ☑ Teach to what is in front of you!
- ☑ Have a toolbox of activities – pivot when needed
  - LOW PREP ACTIVITIES (rail patterns, horsemanship patterns, drill team/partner activities, relay races)
- ☑ Avoid long pauses- uses transitions as teachable moments
- ☑ Set the bar high, but support all levels
- ☑ Foster peer understanding
- ☑ Bring the energy! Your enthusiasm sets the tone!

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ARENA MANAGEMENT

THIS IS A TEACHABLE SKILL – FOR INSTRUCTORS, RIDERS, AND VOLUNTEERS!

SIX HORSES IN THE ARENA CAN SOUND LIKE CHAOS, BUT WITH THE RIGHT STRUCTURE, IT BECOMES AN ORGANIZED, EFFECTIVE LESSON!

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ARENA MANAGEMENT

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TEACH ARENA ETIQUETTE

- Begin each session with an etiquette review (good for everyone!)
  - How to pass
  - How to navigate traffic with multiple horses
  - What to do if you are getting too close
  - Where to go for adjustments
- Volunteers are responsible for safely monitoring/guiding when riders need support.
  - Train volunteers in groups and teach arena etiquette at training!

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ARENA MANAGEMENT

360° OBSERVATION

- Position yourself with maximum visibility and accessibility.
- Move around the arena if able to engage riders and stay reachable.
- Change directions frequently to observe riders and volunteers from all angles.

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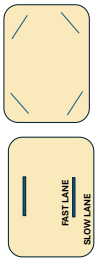
ARENA MANAGEMENT



FLOW & FUNCTION

- Have all riders move the same direction.
- Use cones or ground poles when needed to define lanes- TEACH how to use space.
- Space out starts/halts, obstacle use – have a plan for those waiting.
- Create multiple practice areas - 2 lines of cones versus 1 line
- Keep horses moving as much as possible – too much standing increases behavior risks and traffic jams.

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SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT

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SAFETY TRAINING

- Regularly train staff, volunteers, and riders on emergency procedures!
  - Volunteer Training
  - Volunteer Continuing Ed – Workshop
  - Emergency Procedures Lesson Component
  - Emergency Response Guide in Volunteer and Participant Paperwork

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SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT

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SCENE SAFETY

- Tack, equipment, arena checks
- Always stay alert – scan and adjust!
- Identify early signs of risk- horse body language, distracted volunteers, anxious riders.
- Empower volunteers to speak up!
  - Identify early signs of risk
  - Reinforces that safety is a group effort

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SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT

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ADAPTABILITY = GOOD RISK MANAGEMENT!

- Be ready to adjust the plan without hesitation (switch horses, skip a game, etc.)
- Adaptability is a strength! Practice!!
  - Mentor Instructors – Practice mock scenarios with your mentees
  - New Instructors – Talk through "what if" scenarios and ASK QUESTIONS!
  - Review Occurrence Reports as a team

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TAKEAWAYS!

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Utilize & empower your volunteers!
- Thoroughly train & communicate!

Design inclusive, layered activities.
- Plan adaptations
- Aim high, but support all

Optimize arena use.
- Position intentionally
- Regularly review arena etiquette!

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TAKEAWAYS!
Adapt & stay flexible!
• Model resilience & creative problem solving
Celebrate progress & success.
• Recognize every rider's achievements
• Foster a supportive group dynamic
Teach with purpose!
• Learn to communicate the therapeutic & educational benefits of your lessons

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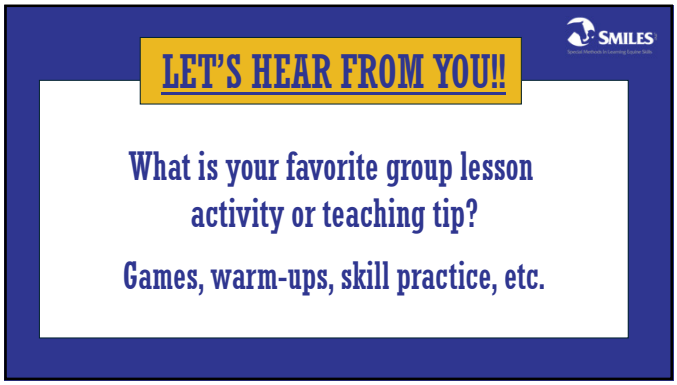
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LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!!
What is your favorite group lesson activity or teaching tip?
Games, warm-ups, skill practice, etc.

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THANK YOU!!!
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OBJECTIVES

1. Design inclusive and adaptable lesson plans for the diverse needs of multiple riders, ensuring safety, engagement, and individualized instruction.
2. Utilize best practices for volunteer and equine management, including assigning appropriate roles, selecting suitable horses, and coordinating with volunteers to support rider safety and lesson flow.
3. Apply effective arena management techniques to optimize space and maintain smooth traffic flow, allowing for a safe and efficient learning environment.

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CALL TO ACTION!!

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Take 1 thing you learned from this presentation - whether it's a lesson idea or a volunteer training tip, or a new way to manage your arena – and put it into practice this week!

Small changes create big wins for your riders, volunteers, and horses!

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LESSON PLANNING – CREATING ADAPTATIONS

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LESSON ACTIVITIES ADAPTATIONS

- Lesson activity requires riders to verbally communicate with their volunteer.
  - What if riders are nonverbal or have difficulty processing language?
  - Adaptations: Offer visual choice boards/picture symbols; allow eye gaze/pointing as responses; give extra processing time when needed!

Reminder:
This is why we pair up consistent teams!

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LESSON PLANNING – CREATING ADAPTATIONS

EXAMPLE:

- When teaching riders to WHOA, have multiple ways for them to accomplish this!
  - Verbally say "whoa"
  - Gently pull reins back towards hips
  - Side walkers can assist with pulling reins back with the rider
  - Utilize adaptive tack like reins with knots so riders know where to hold
  - Side walkers can tap the rider's leg for the halt cue

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Instructor Insight!

A well-placed horse is just as important as a well-placed volunteer!

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Instructor Insight!

Aim high and adapt so every rider experiences challenge and achievement at their own level.

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Instructor Insight!
Foster peer understanding! Everyone's goals are different and that's okay!
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Instructor Insight!
Always share abilities of your riders with your volunteer teams!
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