

# WORKING WITH VETERANS

Military service and training, which is some of the finest in the world, has given veterans an unparalleled team and leadership experience and expectations for training. It is important to acknowledge this experience and those expectations, as well as the impact of mental, emotional and physical disabilities when working with veterans. Here are some recommendations that take those considerations into account.

## GENERAL TIPS

- Start the enrollment and medical clearance paperwork as early as possible. Remember, not all participants will have access to a printer, fax machine, scanner or transportation.
- Schedule an initial interview so center staff and the participants can get to know each other.
- Give participants a tour of the facility and introduce them to the horses.
- Go over the rules very early on; veterans are used to rules.
- Have a veteran on staff or as a volunteer.

## VOLUNTEERS

- Use experienced volunteers, and try to keep the same volunteer and horse team together for each veteran.
- Provide specialty training for volunteers and use PATH Intl. resources.
- Recognize the volunteers' essential role in developing and maintaining connection with veterans.
- Explain possible triggers (sights, sounds or odors that prompt veterans to relive events) and how to watch for them.
- Explain the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

## LESSON PLANNING AND INSTRUCTION

- Develop a realistic curriculum, and use detailed lesson plans so the program can be understood by others and replicated.
- Show progression from lesson to lesson.
- Build a sound foundation, starting with the known before introducing new material.
- Use task analysis; participants are used to this from their military training.
- Train to an objective standard not time, as participants vary in their processing speed.
- Do not rush the slower participants who may need more time to learn material and/or practice skills.
- Teach to all learning modalities.
- Use a whiteboard in the classroom and the arena.



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## VETERANS

- Be consistent in all you do; veterans do not like surprises.
- Give clear, concise directions.
- Review each lesson beforehand and review/debrief afterwards.
- Ask participants and volunteers for feedback on the lesson.
- Be patient, as it is not always easy for veterans to get started.
- Schedule make-up lessons since veterans may have VA and/or doctor's appointments.
- Ask for lots of advance notice in case of a schedule conflict so they can make up the lesson.
- Always send out lesson reminders via texts and email, and call if the veteran does not respond.
- Be persistent in following up with return calls/emails/text.
- Allow time to socialize and provide snacks and drinks to make veterans comfortable.
- Allow for frequent breaks as veterans may have chronic pain.
- Don't discount a veteran's ability based on age. Age is only related to safety concerns not ability to learn or try new experiences.
- Be aware of the veteran's era of deployment.
- Wait for veterans to talk or share their experiences but don't expect them to share.
- Be genuine and sincere in creating a safe haven for veterans to take risks.