Horse Boy Playdate Volunteer Information Sheet

*Under Colorado Law, an equine professional is not liable for an injury to or the death of a participant in equine activities resulting from the inherent risks of equine activities, pursuant to section 13-21-119, Colorado Revised Statutes.****\****

About Smiling Goat Ranch

Smiling Goat Ranch helps children and families with Autism to heal sensory dysfunctions and to gain direct communication. We work with horses and nature based environments using methods evolved by trial and error over the past seven years.

Horse Boy Method was pioneered by Rupert Isaacson, his autistic son Rowan and their Quarter Horse Mare Betsy. In 2007 Rupert, his wife Kristin and Rowan rode across Mongolia together – a journey that became the book and film “The Horse Boy”.

Since that journey the Horse Boy Foundation has helped hundreds of families in Central Texas, North America and in Europe to find the same incredible results in terms of sensory healing and direct communication with the exterior world, through horses and nature based environments.

### The Horse Boy[M](http://www.m-restaurantgroup.com/capitalm/home.html)ethod

Provide the right environment

First we provide an environment in which autism families (and those with related neuro-psychiatric conditions) can find respite from man-made and industrial stimuli – which are known triggers for chronic episodes, seizures and tantrums. Once the child (or young adult) has relaxed into this environment we then introduce the horse. We take as long as the child needs before we introduce the horse. We are not here to teach the children to ride (although if they emerge as a rider we of course encourage them) but instead are here to gain communication. Remember negative communication IS still communication – therefore when a child says no we ALWAYS respect their wishes.

Sensory work for the whole family

We start with sensory work in which the child lies body to body with the horse in various positions that calm the nervous system. This is something we also try and offer the parents and siblings of the child on a fairly regular basis as it is a great way of helping them relax – and the more relaxed they are the more they can help their child. Then we begin the ridden work. During your time with us we will try and offer you the chance to experience sensory work on the horse. We strongly suggest that you give it a try as it will allow you to experience what the child is experiencing when they are on the horse.

Back-riding

In Horse Boy Method we ride in the same saddle with the child sitting in front of us and use a mixture of the horse’s rhythms and rapid response prompting to gain communication. Our horses are specially trained to do this safely at the walk, trot and canter. We often find the best results are achieved at the canter – something about the rhythm of the horse encourages communication.

If you develop a particular bond with a child they may wish to back-ride with you. This will involve you getting up on the horse behind them and riding in the saddle together. Unless you have been approved as a back-rider by Rupert or Iliane we will either lead or long-line you whilst you are doing this (no matter how much horse experience you have and whether or not you have back-ridden before.

Communication to perspective-taking to academics

From here we then begin to teach perspective taking skills, rule based games and academics – from the very basic to really advanced stuff such as fractions, science, geography and general math. Children with autism often display deficits in all three of the above areas and we strongly believe this is in part due to inappropriate teaching methods. Children with autism learn best once their sensory dysfunctions have been taking care of in a natural, pressure free environment whilst they are moving. That is why the back of a horse is an ideal place to learn. We do not actively teach the kids but instead include them in games and exercises that we are doing without expecting anything back. In general we find that it doesn’t take long for them to pick up on the concepts that we are modeling.

Location

Smiling Goat Ranch, an affiliate of Horse Boy, is located at 271 Willow Lane in Carbondale, CO. Play dates will take place or at the Carbondale Rodeo Arena at the entrance to Willow Lane.

Volunteer Orientation & Training

On your first visit you will be asked to come 30 minutes to an hour before the first playdate starts in order to allow time for us to get your paperwork filled out and to give you a tour of the ranch. Please do not be late – if you are we may not be able to allow you to help with the playdate that day.

We do offer trainings in Horse Boy Method. If you are interested in attending a training please let us know. Please note that you will not be allowed to back-ride with a child (no matter how much riding experience you have or whether you have done so in another location before) unless you have first been approved by Sheryl.

What to bring/wear

Please make sure to wear closed toed shoes at all times whilst on the ranch. These are mandatory for all volunteers during a playdate and you will not be allowed to participate in the playdate if you are not wearing closed toed shoes. Please also bring water and a snack if you are planning for more than a couple of hours.

If a child chooses to ride with you, you are required and responsible for wearing a helmet at all times. We suggest you bring your own custom fit helmet. However we also have USEF approved safety helmets available to borrow.

Structure

Our playdates are designed to appear as unstructured as possible to the kids. We want them to delight in their new environment, explore and most importantly have fun. We never force a child to ride and never take them away from an activity they are enjoying to come see the horses. Instead we bring the horse to them. If a child is reluctant to ride or spend time with the horses we have a number of techniques we can use to encourage them. These include tricks (our horses smile, wave and bow) and fun activities such as painting the horses. We encourage the children to take whatever interests them up onto the horse with them and may place a favorite item or toy onto the horses back in order to ignite the child’s interest.

Please note though that some children, no matter what we try, just aren’t interested in the horses and these children will get more out of the playdates if we stop pressuring them to ride and allow them to enjoy whatever it is they are interested in.

Rules

Please read the attached playdate rules in full. You will be required to read and sign this in the presence of a Horse Boy staff member alongside our liability form during your orientation.

Violation of any of these rules will result in a warning. A second violation will result in us asking you not to come back.

Cancellations

When we plan a playdate we do so according to the number of confirmed volunteers that we have for that particular session/day. If you cancel at the last minute this will often leave us short staffed and unable to safely run the session/playdate. We therefore need time to replace you if you can’t make it one week so for this reason we require 72 hours notice of a cancellation.

## Disclaimer

The Horse Boy Method™ is not intended or offered as a cure for autism. Ameliorative effects may or may not occur. The method was found to be very useful with Rupert's son Rowan and with other children subsequently. We simply follow what worked for Rowan and others but there is no guarantee of outcome.

By participating in a Horse Boy Method session or training or applying them at home you accept full personal responsibility for any injury or death that can follow any equine activity. The Horse Boy Foundation or Smiling Goat Ranch accepts no liability.

You are responsible for yourselves and your children at all times.

Horse Boy Playdate Rules & Guidelines --Volunteers

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Before volunteering at a Horse Boy Playdate it is very important that you read and understand the following rules. For that reason we ask you to initial each rule to show that you have read and understood it and then sign at the end. If you have any questions please ask either Sheryl prior to signing.

1. Your playdate leader’s decision is final. If you dispute their decision then please bring it up once the family has left
2. At the start of each playdate make sure you check with your playdate leader as to your assigned role. Do not switch roles or volunteers without express permission from your playdate leader
3. Before you come:
	1. ABSOLUTELY NO PETS! Even if you have a very sweet easy dog, please don’t bring it(unless approved in writing by Sheryl and Sheryl only!)
	2. ABSOLUTELY NO OTHER KIDS! Please don’t bring your children. Kids under the age of 16 cannot be volunteers. Keeping everybody safe is our first priority and bringing other children will jeopardize everybody’s safety!
	3. Dress code: boots are mandatory! We suggest you wear jeans or other long pants. Shirts muse be worn at all times.
	4. Helmets: If a child wants you to be up with them in long lines (or you are an approved back-rider you are required to wear a helmet at all times while mounted!
4. No child is to be left unattended at ANY time during a playdate.
5. No family member is to be left unattended with ANY animal (small animals included) at any time
6. No family member to enter out of bounds areas without express permission from playdate leader. Inbound areas are visitor parking, covered arena, round pen, playscape & wood trails.
7. No horse is to be left unattended at ANY time
8. Staff/volunteers in charge of horse to be appointed by playdate leader for each playdate. If you have not been appointed to be in charge of a horse during a specific playdate you are not in charge even if you have been before
9. Do not allow family members on horse unless instructed by playdate leader
10. Sensory work – no less than 3 volunteers at any time. Horse must be held not tied to a tree or fence post.
11. Long-lining – no less than 3 volunteers at any time (one person long-lining, one person at horses head, one person side-walking). If child long lined with parent/sibling or other non-horse boy approved back-rider the same rules apply. Only person appointed to be in charge of horse allowed to long line. No other volunteers are allowed to long line. Family members as well as volunteers MUST wear helmets while being long lined.
12. Rule based games - only use horses appointed to rule based games, do not bring other horses that might be ridden into games. Do not run fast toward horses, do not hit/wave violently with swords or whips, do not throw stuff at horses.
13. Painting: one person at all times at head of horse; one person on each side of horse protecting child from hind hooves; NO painting horses heads; do not allow children under horse; no painting under belly; no walking under horse; children smaller than 3’ HAVE to be picked up at all times to paint

Please also read and initial the following rules. These are the rules for our parents and it is important that you know and understand these as well so you are able to immediately tell if a rule has been violated and notify your playdate leader. Permission for a rule to be violated can be granted by Sheryl and Sheryl alone. If a parent asks you then tell them to e-mail/call Sheryl. In the following list “YOU” stands for the parent.

1. *We require at least one adult per additional child under the age of 12 to attend each and every playdate (autistic or not) as well as for children on the spectrum over the age of 12. This adult must be physically fit enough to partake in ALL activities - including following the horse on a trail ride - and must stay within an arms reach of that child AT ALL TIMES*
2. *If for whatever reason on a certain week you are unable to bring one adult per additional child under the age of 12 then permission to still attend the playdate must be sought from Sheryl at least 72 hours in advance so we can arrange for additional volunteers/staff to cover the additional child and make sure they are safe. We reserve the right to ask you not to bring the additional children if we feel we do not have the staff/volunteers to ensure everyone's safety*
3. *We require at least 72 hours notice if you are planning to bring additional children to those that have already been approved to attend playdates with you (whether or not they are your own children and whether or not they are on the autism spectrum or not). We reserve the right to ask you not to bring the additional children if we feel we do not have the staff/volunteers to ensure everyone's safety*
4. *Please do not ever bring a minor**who is not your own with you to a playdate without first getting a liability waiver signed by that minor's parents or guardians. This rule stands whether or not you are intending for the minor**to ride or participate in any of the playdate activities. If you are approved to bring an additional minor**to a playdate who is not your own then we will provide you with a blank waiver to take home with you for the minor's parents or guardians to sign*
5. *You, your child and any other person you bring are required to wear closed toed footwear (preferably boots) around the horses at all times. Closed toed shoes are mandatory. Exceptions can be made if your child has sensory issues upon completion of an additional liability form*
6. *We suggest you bring your own helmet. Helmets are the safest when they are custom fit to your child. If you don’t bring a helmet, we will provide you with one, but it is your responsibility to ensure that they are worn at all times on the horse. Exceptions can be made if your child has sensory issues upon completion of an additional waiver.*
7. *Playdates are by confirmed appointment only. Please do not show up without an appointment. If you do arrive and there is nobody there please leave immediately. This is a working farm and we might have dangerous tools, equipment and horses that are not child safe around the house when we are not expecting children.*
8. *It is your responsibility to bring adequate food/water/changes of clothes with you to each and every playdate. Our volunteers are busy keeping your kids safe around the horses and do not necessarily have time to be running back and forth fetching water*

**Smiling Goat Ranch is a 501c that has helped hundreds of children and adults. From day one we made a vow never to let fees hinder healing; therefore, all of our program needs — including animal feed and care, supplies, and handlers — come from donations and grants. With a $120,000 annual budget, we are incredibly grateful to those who are in a position to join us with their support. To learn more please go to**[**smilinggoatranch.com**](http://smilinggoatranch.com)**and click Donate. Thank you in advance for helping us to continue our growing mission.**

1. *We require 48 hours notice of a cancellation. If you cancel more than three times, we reserve the right to cancel your scholarship and offer it to another family*
2. *We reserve the right to cancel a playdate, however to the best of our ability, will give at least 24 hours notice.*
3. *No pets are allowed on property unless authorized by Sheryl. This includes service dogs which will have to undergo an evaluation before being brought to a playdate. If you show up with an unapproved pet we reserve the right to ask you to leave.*
4. *All family members under 200lbs are invited to participate in horse activities. We do however reserve the right to decide case per case if family members are physically fit enough to participate in sensory work, long lining etc. Horse Boy staff will also decide case by case which family members can be long lined together and if your child is too large/heavy for back-riding and therefore should be long-lined. Family members over 200lbs are not able to participate in horse activities.*
5. *Parents to take Horse Boy Learning Online Seminar prior to approval of scholarship.*

I certify that I have read and understood the above rules and understand that violation of these rules may result in me being asked to leave.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_