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## Abstract

Nearly one in four active and retired military exhibit stress responses ranging from depression to post-traumatic stress. Each branch of the military has developed resiliency programs to increase psychosocial support and the ability to bounce back from stressors. Current research has shown clinically significant benefits from therapeutic horse activities with military personnel, veterans and family members through networking and community involvement. Utah State University Extension has developed a therapeutic equine program called *Ride Utah!* that targets military personnel and a guest. *Ride Utah!* is hosted locally by Extension, community, and military leaders. Participants in *Ride Utah!* experience a one, 2-hour mountain trail ride, share a family-style lunch, and participate in a professionally moderated group discussion surrounding military family issues. *Ride Utah!* allows individuals and families living in both urban and rural areas the opportunity to experience the therapeutic benefits offered by equine activities and nature. The preliminary results from the participant-completed Conner-Davidson Resiliency Scale's demonstrate that *Ride Utah!* is harnessing Utah's natural beauty and resources into a successful program that is improving veteran health and strengthening communities. This publication contains an in-depth review of *Ride Utah!* and includes a step by step fashion on how to replicate the program.

## Introduction

A recent Army study to assess risk and resilience in service members (Lafleur, 2015), showed that 25 percent of our military have experienced some level of mental health issues from depression to PTSD. Each military branch has developed resiliency programs to increase psychosocial support and the ability to bounce back from stressors. The U.S. Air Force's Comprehensive Airmen Fitness Program, much like the other service's programs, is an integrated approach that "encompasses many cross-functional education activities and programs such as mental and physical wellness, social activities, family, peer and mentor support, and spiritual health" (Lafleur, 2015). Current research has shown clinically significant benefits from therapeutic equine activities with military personnel, veterans, and family members. A new approach to therapeutic treatment services utilizing horses in the treatment option with military personnel and veterans has suggested clinical benefits for this specific population (LaFleur, 2015). Research also indicates that therapeutic equine activities are effective for the treatment of relational adjustment issues with couples (Russell-Martin, 2006).

Utah, statistically speaking, has a significant demographic of military personnel. There are currently 170,000 active military and veterans living in Utah. Cache County and rural counties have limited services and resources available to the veteran population. *Ride Utah!* is filling a need in rural areas.

Utah is a uniquely beautiful state. There is a special make-up of natural beauty comprising national forests, national parks, state parks, as well as private and BLM lands. Opportunities for camping, hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding are never very far away.

Utah State University Extension is unique in structure and function. As a partnership of federal, state, and local governments, the Extension system, with its network of county offices and land-grant university, is in a position to deliver educational programs at the grassroots level throughout the State of Utah. USU Extension's stated goal is "To improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities in every corner of Utah." With its university faculty and

staff serving the state in every county, the county Extension offices are truly equipped to be the forefront of this goal. This integration of teaching, research, and public service enables the Extension system to respond to critical and emerging issues with research-based, unbiased information.

## Objectives

### Objectives of the Program

- Develop relationships and partnerships with local military units, local veteran's groups, and military chaplains.
- Establish networking that will help military personnel know and understand what military support groups are available.
- Develop and deliver a program that will make it possible for county Extension faculty to work within their own communities to establish their own military trail rides.

### Objectives of the Ride

- Provide participants opportunities for physical activity in an outdoor environment.
- Provide participants the opportunity to explore life lessons from an experiential activity.
- Provide participants the opportunity for socializing with members of the military community.

### Associated Activities

- Conduct a safe recreational equine trail ride for military personnel and a guest.
- Hold a group discussion led by a licensed professional. Topics might include marriage and family relationships, adapting to civilian life, or other issues as deemed important by attending professional.
- Provide a trailside meal for participants.

## Guide

This guide can be used to replicate the rides provided by *Ride Utah!*. Equine trail rides can be difficult to coordinate and offer. Here are our suggestions to make the ride safe, enjoyable, and repeatable. It takes a group of people to put together a ride, one person alone cannot do it. The day of the ride will be much smoother if preparation is done beforehand and the roles of those putting on the event are understood. The following three designees are vital to the success of your ride.

- Event Coordinator
- Ride Supervisor
- Group Discussion Facilitator

## Event Coordinator

Someone must lead out. This individual must have a clear goal in mind and have leadership skills capable of performing the tasks required. Designate this individual as the “event coordinator.” This person does not have to be the USU faculty in charge of the office. The event coordinator position can be delegated to summer interns, county horse council volunteers, as well as office staff. This person helps with communication between all participants and keeps everything running smoothly. There will always be quick decisions that need to be made, where to hold the ride, who will provide the meal, etc. Give the event coordinator the authority to make those decisions and provide them with support. Supporting them includes taking assignments, following through on that assignment, then reporting back in a timely fashion on the progress of the assignment. Below is a list of the different jobs/assignments that need to be accomplished.

### Setting Ride Goals and Rules

- Set the scope of your ride. A clear idea of what you are trying to accomplish must be set. Who are you trying to reach and what limitations are you going to set? The scope of the ride is to focus on strengthening relationships between military personnel and their support system. The hope is to reach as many military personnel as possible. You can do family rides or limit them to only adults. Set the scope of your ride before you begin and stick to it.
- Limit the number of participant riders on the ride to 10. Including ride supervisor, volunteers, and participants, do not exceed a total rider count of 15. Too many riders become difficult to manage and also make horses more nervous. We have had rides with 25-30 riders and it is extremely difficult for the ride supervisor to maintain proper vigilance. Smaller numbers also offer a more personal experience for the participants.
- Only one guest per military person. Many individuals wanted to bring their entire family of four to six riders in all. This would be a great activity to strengthen entire families and be very worthwhile, however, for safety reasons we limited total number of participant riders to 10. By allowing one family to occupy all the slots available for the ride, fewer military personnel would be able to sign up.
- No children under the age of 12. One of the goals of the ride is to encourage adults to step out of their comfort zone. With the inclusion of younger children, it would detract from the experience for the very people we were focusing on—military personnel.
- No pregnant women. For safety reasons, no pregnant women were allowed to participate on the ride.
- We set a weight limit for riders of 250 lbs. We felt that this was the maximum a horse would reasonably be able to carry for a 2-hour ride.

### Advertising

In order to ride, participants must know about the ride. Advertising can be frustrating and difficult. This has been the largest limiting factor for our rides in rural areas of Utah. Some avenues are more effective in reaching out to our military personnel. Listed are some of the ways we found most effective.

- County calendars and county offices

- Family support services through National Guard
- Facebook groups for local veteran associations
- National Guard email lists
- Veterans Affairs email lists
- Workforce Services
- On campus groups for veterans and active military
- Hill Air Force Base wives' groups

The places you advertise also dictate who signs up and the commitment level they have. When signing up via social media, we have noticed a lower commitment for actually attending the ride. When individuals have signed up via National Guard mailing lists and Family Support Services, they are much more likely to attend the ride.

### **Training**

- First Aid and CPR Training. Accidents and emergencies can happen at any time. Being trained in first aid and CPR is crucial. Ages of participants have ranged from 12 to 80 years. Make sure that individuals leading the ride, event coordinator and ride supervisor, are trained and certified by proper associations. Automated external defibrillator (AED) training may be of benefit as well. \*Protocol for USU Equine Teaching Center for Head Injury in appendix
- First aid training for horses. This includes treating minor wounds, bandaging, and possibly euthanizing a horse. Ride supervisors must be trained in these areas. Training can be obtained from USU campus specialists or local veterinarians.
- Military etiquette. Understanding military etiquette can be very beneficial to the success of your ride. Knowing what is acceptable to say or ask and what is not acceptable to say or ask can help everyone feel comfortable and respected. Training can be obtained from campus organizations (i.e. USU Veterans Resource Office), local veterans groups, the VA, and National Guard Family Services.

### **Donations**

Putting on a trail ride can be expensive. From renting horses, providing a meal, paying interns, and travel costs, the bills can add up quickly. Expenses alone may be the largest limiting factor for the number of military personnel benefitting from trail rides. However, giving back to our military can be very rewarding. Do not be afraid to ask for and allow people or businesses to donate time, horses, food, gas, and other resources to the ride. Giving back to our military personnel, shows appreciation for the sacrifice and service the military provides. Many of our expenses can be lowered or cut entirely just by asking. This allows more of our military personnel to experience the benefits of our trail rides. Donations to *Ride Utah!* have included:

- Trailer
- Horses
- Tack
- Expertise
- Time
- Money

- Meals
- Helmets

### **Registration and Communication**

Registering participants for the ride is challenging. If an event is free for individuals, then commitment for the event is low. It is easy to sign up for the event, reserve a spot, and then either cancel the night before or just not show up. Do not be surprised to have individuals sign up for an event and then not show up. Requiring individuals to have “buy in”, meaning they have to give something in order to register, prevents a lot of the no shows or flakey participation. Suggestions include:

- Purchasing a ticket with the purchase amount refunded after the ride.
- Gathering contact information at the time of registration (email and cell phone required).
- Maintaining an alternate participant list in the event of a cancellation.
- Frequent communication via text, email, and phone calls with participants who signed up.
- Requiring confirmation of attendance via call or text a few days before the event or the individual is dropped and alternates called.
- Informational emails/texts sent a few days before and the day before to ensure everyone is aware of important logistics (i.e. when and where to meet).

Online registration is convenient, easy, and not too expensive. Eventbrite is the resource that has been used so far. However, there may be other effective methods.

The personal touch of having to register via a phone call has a lot of merit. First of all, it requires them to talk to an individual and commit to coming, thereby increasing buy in. Second, you can require a phone number at the time of registration. Being personable and getting to know people before the ride adds to the effectiveness of the ride. Learn their names and try to remember them. However, registering via phone calls can be time consuming. It is also hard to say “I am sorry; we are full for this ride.”

Communicating with participants often helps. Sometimes the signup occurs months in advance of the actual ride. Weekly emails leading up to the event keeps it on the forefront of their memory and helps prevent them from forgetting. Provide them with the location of the ride as soon as it is set so participants can research the area and become excited. Make sure that you have confirmation of attendance about one week prior to the event. Email or calling works well.

#### **Forms:**

Assign one individual to be responsible for the paper work the day of the ride. The ride supervisor will be busy with horses and getting people on. The event coordinator will make sure everyone is there and happy. If left to those two to do it, the paperwork may be forgotten. Samples of all the paper work are available in the appendix.

- Registration Form. A pre-ride registration form will allow you to get necessary information. These forms can be emailed prior to the event. Have participants fill it out before the ride and bring it with them. This can save time on the day of the ride.

- **Photo Release Form.** Getting a signed photo release form is important. As an Extension organization we may want to share pictures of our activities with others. We need to gain permission from participants before we do. Respect the participant's right to say no. There can be varying reasons as to why they may not want their picture published. USU may decide to use the pictures years from now, so keep the photo release form on file indefinitely.
- **Liability Waiver Form.** Utah Code Ann. #78-27b-102 (2001) states that it is presumed that participants in equine or livestock activities are aware of and understand that there are inherent risks associated with these activities. Thus, an equine activity sponsor, equine professional, livestock activity sponsor, or livestock professional is not liable for an injury to or the death of a participant due to the inherent risks associated with these activities. The section also requires an equine professional to give notice to participants of the limitation of liability, either by the posting of a sign or by the execution of a written release. It is requisite that all participants sign a liability waiver before participating. The USU risk management group and USU attorneys have examined the enclosed liability waiver and photo release and have found them acceptable. We have been advised to scan the liability waiver into a computer and email it to risk management for storage. Helmets should be available and participants should be encouraged to use them. Participants under 18 years of age should be required to wear helmets.
- **Post Event Evaluation Form.** Receiving feedback on the event helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of the ride. Each participant should be encouraged to offer feedback so the ride can be as beneficial as possible. A sample form is included in the appendix, but you are encouraged to modify or create your own. Make it as applicable and specific as possible to your ride. Recognize your weakness and build on them for the next event.

## **Meal**

An important part of trail riding is making sure everyone is fed. Everyone wants to eat an authentic camp meal. Eating a good meal may be the most remembered highlight of the event. However, the meal can be one of the largest expenses of the ride as well. Suggestions for the meal include:

- Donations from catering businesses
- Box lunches
- Hiring local Dutch Oven caterers
- Donations from local groceries stores
- Donations from local restaurants
- Enlisting the help of volunteers

## Ride Supervisor

An individual who is experienced in taking people on trail rides should be selected and designated as the ride supervisor. This individual is responsible for the safety of the horses and the riders. The ride supervisor is in charge during the ride. For safety reasons each participant and volunteer must agree to listen to and adhere to instructions from the ride supervisor. This is not optional. Many accidents can and will be avoided by this one rule. At least two additional experienced riders are also selected and help the ride supervisor in his or her responsibilities. More additional experienced riders may be needed depending on the size of the group.

### Responsibilities include:

- Know the trail that is being used. (see below)
- Select horses appropriate for rider's abilities. (see below)
- Ensure that the tack being used is in good working order and appropriate for trail riding.
- Inspect all horses and tack prior to participants getting on.
- Match participants to horses and tack.
  - Size of participant
  - Riding experience of participant
- Take charge of the ride.
- Mount participants and adjust saddles.
- Periodically check saddles, riders, and horses for problems.
- Take charge of any emergencies that arise.

### Horse and Tack Selection

- Horses must be proven, trustworthy trail horses. This is vital.
- Horses must get along well with the other horses. Aggressive behavior toward other horses can lead to injury of horses and people.
- Horses must have footwear appropriate for terrain. Most trails in Utah require shoes due to rocks.
- Saddles must be fit properly and have sufficient padding. This should be addressed prior to the day of the ride to prevent problems.
- Bridles must fit and be appropriate for horse and rider, for example, roping reins generally are too short for inexperienced riders.
- Horses must have appropriate conditioning for the trail they will be on. Horses that have not been properly conditioned may experience exercise-induced illness that can be dangerous to the horse and the rider.
- Selection of horses must account for different sizes of riders. Set a weight limit of 250 pounds for the riders.

### **Finding the Right Horse**

Finding enough appropriate horses is one of the biggest challenges. For safety reasons, it is also one of the most important decisions. The participants are putting their trust in us to provide them with a safe experience. A horse that is not experienced and trail wise will put the riders at unnecessary risk for injury. Also, horses that are good in an arena are not always good on a trail and vice versa. The same is true about riders, just because a person has ridden in an

arena, he or she may not be experienced on trail rides. It is vital that horses selected for the ride must be experienced trail horses. The ride supervisor must know that the horses being used are safe and experienced on trail rides. Here are some suggestions for selecting horses.

- Stallions should not be used.
- Ask 4-H groups to donate horses for the ride.
- Contact local outfitters to donate horses for the ride. Giving back to our military can be rewarding. Asking and allowing others to donate is a way for them to give back.
- Rent horses from local outfitters. This can be the largest expense of the ride.
- Contact local branch of Back Country Horsemen.
- Contact local ranchers.

Fighting among horses is natural and common when bringing horses together from different groups. A hierarchy or pecking order must be established each time. Biting, kicking and aggressive behavior is natural, but dangerous to horses and participants. To avoid this problem, try to get horses already familiar with each other. Try to find a supplier that can provide enough horses for all participants. If you do need to mix different groups here are some suggestion:

- Carefully match riders that want to stay together to horses that want to stay together.
- Do not accept horses that are prone to aggressive behavior; i.e., kicking and biting.
- Instruct riders about spatial awareness with horses and how to maintain a proper distance between horses.

### **Participant Riding Experience Level**

It may be difficult to know the riding level of each person attending the ride. Most of the military personnel have little-to-no experience horseback riding. A pre-registration form may be helpful in gaining that information. Assume that the majority of the participants have little-to-no experience with horses. Some suggestions include:

- Prior to the ride, instruct participants on proper attire. Long pants and close toed shoes should be required. They may want to bring a jacket, sun protection, and insect repellent.
- Ensure that helmets are available to all participants and require participants 18 and younger wear them.
- Make sure the horses chosen are appropriate for the skill of the rider.
- Provide a “get to know the horse” time in a local arena before the trail riding event.
- Schedule enough time before the ride so people have a safe place to get comfortable with the assigned horse. Tell the rider the horse’s name, how old it is, whether it is a gelding or a mare. Making it personal allows the rider to connect more and have a more enriching experience.
- Offer basic horse riding instruction.

### **Trail Selection and Ride Location**

Prior to taking the group out on the trail, it is important to know the trail is cleared and in appropriate condition. Trees may fall, trails wash out, or trails may not be open for use. Trail conditions can change at any time and care should be taken to gain first-hand knowledge of

these conditions prior to the ride. Here are a few suggestions for determining if the trail is ready and what can be done if it is not.

- Ride should be 2-3 hours in length. More than that for a novice rider can be painful.
- Contact the local National Forest Ranger station and determine if the desired trail is open.
- Gain first-hand knowledge of the trail condition no more than 10 days prior to the ride.
  - This may be accomplished by riding the trail personally.
  - Talk to someone who has been on the trail just prior to the ride.
- If the trail is not ready, coordinate with the local National Forest Ranger Station about clearing the trail.
  - National Forest employees are hired to clear trails.
  - Remember that there are lots of trails and few employees so they may not have had time to get to that particular trail. Personal experience has shown they are willing to help and work with you to have the best experience possible. ○ You may be able to help by signing up as a volunteer and working with the local ranger station in clearing trails. There is an official volunteer program for the National Forest Service. It is important to go through the paper work process of volunteering to ensure safety and that rules are followed.
  - Many of our trails are in “Wilderness Area” that prohibits the use of chainsaws.
- Make sure parking is available for participant and volunteers vehicles.
  - Horse trailers take a lot of room to turn around. ○ Ensure that there is a designated area for horses that has enough space available for the number of horses.

## Using 4-H youth and volunteers:

Knowing that one person cannot complete all necessary needs for a ride it is a good idea to reach out to your local 4-H youth and volunteers for help. There are multiple reasons why we have used this group in the past.

1. A lot of 4-H youth have horses that work great for the ride
2. 4-H youth can help participants get familiar with the horse and comfortable in the saddle
3. While participants are on the ride, 4-H youth will spend time preparing the meal and then serve the meal when participants return.
4. The event is a service project for the youth. 4-H youth have the chance to serve our Veterans. They spend one on one time with the participants and have the opportunity to have meaningful conversations.
5. The event gives the 4-H youth leadership opportunities as they teach the participants about their horse as well as teach basic horsemanship skills to the participants to insure they will have a safe and enjoyable ride.
6. 4-H volunteers are looking for projects like this for their clubs. The adults have been key in mentoring the youth in their responsibilities. The adult volunteers have enjoyed the time they get to spend talking with and getting to know the veterans.

Working alongside your 4-H groups to put a ride together will lighten your load. It allows you to take the ride to a new level as you provide the youth with this amazing opportunity. We have also seen success with youth serving the Veterans. The Veterans are humbled by the kind acts of service being given by a generation of youth.

Both adults and youth that have participated in the veteran trail ride have walked away saying “this is my favorite event”. The youth include in their 4-H stories the event and share how much of a positive experience it is to serve our Veterans. They see joy and importance in giving back to our Military personal.

Below are two quotes given by 4-H about their experience.

“I think my favorite project by far was the Veteran’s Trail Ride. It was such an amazing experience to be able to give back to some of the people who have given so much to us. Just to see their smiles when they got off the horse at the end made it all well worth it”.

“I had the incredible opportunity to allow veterans to go on a two-and-hour trail ride on my horse. While the veterans and their spouses rode on the trail, the 4-H youth and leaders prepared a meal for their arrival. That was an unforgettable experience because of the time I got to spend learning more about these veterans and about the other youth in the county. To be able to give a part of myself and my life to the people who have fought for our freedom brings me the greatest happiness”.

# Group Discussion Guidelines

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The purpose of the group discussion component of the program is to gain insights into, and appreciation for, life events through reflection and discussion centered around the events of the ride. This is not intended to be a therapy session. It is intended to expand the benefit of the ride (experiential component) into the participant's everyday life. The benefit of experiential activity is that inherent within the activity are principles that can be extrapolated and applied to one's life situation. However, that application is not always readily apparent. It is the role of the group facilitator to make the underlying principles plain and open and facilitate the process of group members identifying applications for their own lives.

The following are suggestions for the Group Discussion Facilitator:

1. **Actively participate in the ride.** Introduce yourself to all of the participants and interact with them as frequently as possible during the ride. Get to know their stories, where they have served (or gone with a spouse who served), life situation, etc. Share details about yourself. It is not necessary to have a background in the military, or a strong connection. Be yourself.
2. **Observe as you go.** Pay attention to dynamics going on between riders, between riders and their horses, and the emotional expressions made by participants.
3. **Be self-aware.** Observe your own reactions to the ride, interactions, and process. These may give some hints to how others are experiencing the moment.
4. **Consider Self-Disclosure.** A level of self-disclosure helps to make this process go smoothly. Discussing your own fears, observations, thoughts, etc., in this setting helps to normalize the discussion and reduce the power differential.
5. **Listen more than talk.** You might mention an event that happened on the ride, then ask questions that facilitate their discussion. Small didactic moments to teach a principle are helpful, but should be followed quickly by questions to engage the group members. This is where knowing their names and a little about them is helpful, as you can call on people by name and tie details from their lives into the discussion. (E.g. "Don, you mentioned that you have lived in big cities your whole life. Was this ride a new experience for you?")
6. **Prepare and be ready to let go.** It is helpful to have thoughts and ideas ready beforehand. For example, if you have no knowledge of Mindfulness it is difficult to discuss that principle. Some common themes that may be relevant to the participants' lives include adjusting to new things, reducing anxiety, dealing with hard things, building strong family relationships, building trust, and living in the moment. Having thoughts and ideas on those things before the discussion group will be helpful. However, be ready to adjust on the fly to meet the flow of the discussion and the observations from the trail.

7. **Relax and have fun.** The reality is that this is a very enjoyable experience, and the people are great. Immerse yourself in the process, and trust the group to add to the discussion.

## Day of the Ride

### Timing

If the preparation is done correctly, the day of the ride is much easier. Give yourself plenty of time to travel to the ride location. Saddling and tacking horses takes time. Remember, being punctual is important for military personnel. Make sure you have enough help before the day of the ride.

### Horses

Much of the saddling and tacking can take place at home, and horses can be trailered to the ride location with saddles on. Make sure horses have free access to water before the ride so they do not become dehydrated. Remember, higher temperatures can cause dehydration so water should be available for riders as needed and horses if possible throughout the ride. Horses should be fed prior to the ride as well.

### Sample Schedule

9:30 a.m. - Meet at ride location, fill out necessary paperwork, get on a horse and become familiar with participants.

10 a.m. -Begin the trail ride.

Noon-12:30 p.m. - Conclude trail ride and begin lunch.

1 or 1:30 p.m. - Conclude lunch and begin group discussion.

2 p.m. - Conclude group discussion, fill out event evaluation forms, and go home.

We started the year with our rides starting at 12:00 noon. However, we found that starting earlier at 10 a.m. has some benefits. It is cooler, you have a more natural time for lunch, and you can be done by 2 p.m., allowing individuals to return home in a timely manner. Do not try to rush the experience, let the day unfold on its own. If the event is rushed, the military personnel feel the strain and do not get much from the experience. When rushing, it is easy to forget important safety factors as well. Be punctual and respect everyone's time, but do not fit too much in a short window of time. Make sure participants are also aware of the schedule.

To reach more individuals, consider scheduling two rides.

### Sample Schedule for two rides

9:30 a.m. - meet with participants for the first ride at the ride location, fill out necessary paperwork, get on a horse and become familiar with participants.

10 a.m. - Begin the first trail ride.

Noon - 12:30 p.m. - Conclude the first ride.

12:30 p.m. - Have participants for first and second ride meet and eat lunch together.

1 p.m. - Conclude lunch and begin group discussion with participants.

1:30 p.m. - Allow participants from the first ride to leave. Fill out necessary forms with riders for the second ride.

2 p.m. - Begin the ride for the second group.

4 p.m. - Conclude rides and fill out evaluation forms.

This does not, however, allow the second group the opportunity to have a wrap-up discussion. It also puts everyone home a little later.

### **Ride**

The ride supervisor must be constantly aware and watch for problems that can arise before they happen. These problems can include horses that don't get along, riders who want to be close to each other, horses that need closer attention, riders who want to put on and take off articles of clothing, getting snacks or water out of saddle bags, adjusting cinches and stirrups, and so forth. One individual cannot do it all, so other qualified individuals must be asked or assigned to assist as needed. Remember, constant vigilance. This ride is not about the horse, it is not about the ride supervisor or the other helpers, it is about the participant and their experience. If changes need to be made mid-way through the ride, make the changes and ensure everyone is safe. Take a break mid-way through the ride. Allow everyone to get off and move around. If there are bathroom facilities available that is a good place to stop. When the ride is over, allow the horse handlers to take care of the horses and let the participants and event coordinators get to lunch.

### **Lunch**

Lunch is the most enjoyable part of anyone's day, except the cook's. Make sure the individuals preparing the meal are aware of the schedule and location. Check in with them that morning to make sure everyone is on the same page. Respect their time as well, if you can give them a heads up as to when you expect to be done riding it will help. Help them to serve a good meal by being on time and considerate.

### **Group Discussion**

This is where the life changing can happen. It is important that the group discussion facilitator participate on the ride as well. Allow the facilitator the latitude to determine the discussion topic. This may change during the ride, depending on conversations and participant's experiences. The facilitator is able to tie in the trail ride experience to real, everyday life challenges. Learning occurs here. Topics have included but are not limited to: marriage and family relationships, the five love languages, building trust, mindfulness, and awareness of surroundings. Remember that the discussion is completely voluntary.

### **Closing**

When the discussion is over, most people would like to leave. It is appropriate to have information available about local support groups or hotlines for anyone should they feel a need. Have them fill out an evaluation form for feedback and to show impact. Let them leave on their own time. Networking and relationships can form on a more personal basis at this time. One of our rides had a young man who had just enlisted and was leaving for basic

training the next week. A group of active military and veterans stayed behind to give him advice on what to expect. Another time a representative from the VA was able to listen to concerns a veteran had and helped answer questions for him. These small conversations can have lasting impacts.

## Program Evaluation

Demonstrating impact is vital to our program. *Ride Utah!* utilized the Conner-Davidson Resilience Scale and program evaluation questionnaires. Individuals were asked to voluntarily participate in a survey to help determine if the activity increased resiliency (resiliency being defined as the ability to cope with stressors in life). The survey consists of 10 statements in which participants rate themselves on a scale of 0-4, before and after the ride. Results from the Conner-Davidson Resiliency Scale Survey are listed in Table 2. Out of a possible 40 points, the average for the pre-ride was 30.5 and the average for the post-ride was 34.2, showing an average increase of 3.7 points. A two-tail T Test gave a p-value of the mean of 0.002, indicating that the difference in the pre and post survey scores is significant.

**Table 2**

	Pre-ride Score	Post-ride Score	Difference
<b>Mean</b>	30.5	34.2	3.7
<b>Min</b>	16	18	-4
<b>Max</b>	40	40	22
<b>T Test P=</b>			0.002
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	7.2	5.6	4.9

Program evaluation questionnaires were also utilized following lunch and the group discussion to evaluate the event in its entirety. A total of 70 evaluations were completed. The average scores on a scale of 1 - 5 (1 being poor and 5 being exceptional) are as follows:

**Table 3**

	Mean	Min	Max
Overall rating of the ride	4.96	3	5
Overall rating of the meal	4.82	3	5
Overall rating of the group discussion	4.74	1	5
Overall rating of advertising	4.34	1	5

The scores for the overall ratings are positive, indicating the program was very well received. The lowest rating was for the group discussions. This may be a result of the counselor not connecting with the group, or participants being reluctant to share personal feelings in a group setting. The advertising evolved over the summer. Initially social media was utilized, however participants contacted in this way lacked commitment. When military support groups became involved in advertising, individual participation increase significantly and included a waiting list.

If time and resources would have allowed, enough individuals were interested to fill two more rides.

Participant's and counselor's comments indicate a stronger sense of community resulting from the rides. One counselor stated that individuals going through an "experience" together strengthens and bonds them. The trail ride provides an opportunity for individuals to create contacts, begin new friendships, and strengthen existing relationships.

## References

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## **Protocols for USU Equine Teaching Center if a rider hits his/her head due to a fall**

- Call 911 if the rider loses consciousness for any period of time (10 seconds, 1 minute, etc.) as a result of the fall.
- If the rider is wearing a helmet, do not remove the helmet. If the rider wishes to remove it, he or she may do so unassisted.

Emergency personnel are the professionals who should determine the need for further evaluation. If emergency services are called and the rider refuses treatment when they arrive, no fees are charged according to Logan dispatch. This takes the liability away from the USU staff and rests on the student/rider themselves.

What to ask a rider immediately after hitting their head due to a fall, even if he or she does not appear to look symptomatic – (dizzy, confused, out of balance, etc).

- What is your name?
- What horse were you riding?
- What day is it?

What happens if the rider falls, does not hit head and answers all the questions correctly and appears to be physically fine?

- The rider can continue with the class if they wish.

What happens if the rider misses questions and appears confused?

- The rider should be observed for 15 minutes.

What happens if symptom(s) continue after 15 minutes?

- The rider *should not* be left alone.
- The rider should be transported for medical evaluation.

What happens if symptom(s) appear to worsen in those 15 minutes? (For example, the rider gets a headache or becomes dizzy, nauseated, confused, etc.)

Call 911- The rider should be transported to a medical facility for evaluation. Remember, the rider does not have to lose consciousness to sustain a concussion.

**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY EQUINE OR LIVESTOCK ACTIVITIES RELEASE AGREEMENT (FOR MINORS)**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in consideration for the opportunity to participate in the following equine or livestock activity: \_\_\_\_\_ <INSERT NAME AND LOCATION OF ACTIVITY> (the "Activity"), on behalf of myself, my heirs, assigns, personal representative, and estate, hereby agree as follows:

**ACCEPTANCE OF RISKS AND RESPONSIBILITY:** I acknowledge that the Activity is not without Inherent Risks. Inherent Risks means those dangers or conditions which are an integral part of equine or livestock activities, which may include: (a) the propensity of the animal to behave in ways that may result in injury, harm, or death to persons on or around them; (b) the unpredictability of the animal's reaction to outside stimulation such as sounds, sudden movement, and unfamiliar objects, persons, or other animals; (c) collisions with other animals or objects; or (d) the potential of a participant to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to injury to the participant or others, such as failing to maintain control over the animal or not acting within his or her ability. See Utah Code 78B-4-201(5). I also acknowledge that loss or damage to property or injury, illness, or death to myself or others may result from (a) the negligent acts of Activity participants or organizers (including Utah State University, its agents, officers, employees, devisees and assigns and the Board of Regents of the State of Utah (hereafter collectively, "USU")) and (b) the elements that contribute to the unique character of the Activity. I voluntarily accept the Inherent Risks and other risks and dangers described above or otherwise associated with the Activity. I agree that I will be personally liable for any damages that occur as a result of my participation in the Activity, including my actions or the actions of any animals under my stewardship or control. During my participation in the Activity, I agree to adhere to appropriate safety standards to ensure the safety of myself, others, animals, and associated property.

**RELEASE:** I hereby voluntarily release and forever discharge USU from any and all liability, claims, demands, attorney fees, actions, or rights of action which are related to, arise out of, or are in any way connected with my participation in the Activity, including specifically, but not limited to, the negligent acts or omissions of USU for any and all bodily injury, death, illness, disability, or damage to myself or to my property. I agree that USU is not liable for Inherent Risks, negligent acts, or any other liability that may arise in connection with my participation in the Activity.

**INDEMNIFICATION:** I hereby agree to hold harmless and indemnify USU against any and all losses, liabilities, or claims arising out of or connected to my participation in the Activity. The indemnification obligations outlined herein extend to any and all costs and expenses, including attorney fees, incurred by USU in connection with any such loss, liability, or claim.

**GOVERNING LAW AND JURISDICTION:** The laws of the state of Utah shall govern the validity, construction, and enforceability of this Agreement, without giving effect to its conflict of laws principles. All suits, action, claims and causes of action relating to the validity, construction and enforcement of this Agreement.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF EFFECT OF THIS AGREEMENT:** I understand and acknowledge that by signing this Agreement, I am agreeing to be bound by its terms and conditions. I acknowledge that by this Agreement, I have freely and voluntarily (a) given up certain legal rights and/or possible claims that I might otherwise assert or maintain against USU, including specifically, but not limited to, rights arising from or claims for the negligent acts or omissions of USU; and (b) assumed responsibility and legal liability for the claims or other legal demands, including defense costs, which may be asserted by third parties against me as a result of my participation in this Activity. MY SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT I HAVE READ THIS ENTIRE AGREEMENT, UNDERSTAND THAT IT AFFECTS MY LEGAL RIGHTS, AND UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAIVES MY RIGHT TO SUE USU.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age

**FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN OF MINOR (under 18):** I, as parent/guardian of the above indicated participant, do hereby consent and agree to the terms and conditions of the Agreement as set forth above. I specifically agree to release, indemnify, and hold harmless USU from any and all losses, liabilities, or claims brought by, on, or in behalf of the participant incident to his/her participation in the Activity, EVEN IF SUCH CLAIMS OR LIABILITES ARISE FROM USU'S NEGLIGENCE.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent or Guardian (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

***Ride Utah!***  
**Participant Evaluation**

**Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5; 1 being do not agree, 3 being agree and 5 being exceptional.**

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. The ride was enjoyable and worth the time.                        | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I felt safe during the ride.                                      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. The ride guide and staff were knowledgeable and professional.     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. The location of the ride was a good choice.                       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. The dinner was favorable and appropriate.                         | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. The setting was appropriate.                                      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. The group discussion was helpful.                                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I would participate again or recommend this activity to a friend. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Rate the following areas on a scale of 1 to 5; 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional**

- |                     |           |
|---------------------|-----------|
| 1. Ride             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Food             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Group Discussion | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Advertising      | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Additional Comments:

# USU EQUINE

# Ride Utah! Registration Form

E X P E R I E N C E

435-535-5140

Karl Hoopes

(Please Print)

Today's date:								
<b>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION</b>								
Last name:		First:		<input type="checkbox"/> Mr. <input type="checkbox"/> Mrs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Miss <input type="checkbox"/> Ms.	Relationship to guest (if any).		
Street address:		City:		State:		Birth date:	Age:	Sex:
P.O. box:						/ /		<input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> F
Military Service ____ Current    ____ Former    ____ None				Zip code:		Phone no.:		
Branch of military _____						( )		
-Weight Limit Set at 250 pounds. -Pregnant women will not be able to ride.		Email: _____			Height ___ft ___in			
		Phone number _____			Weight _____			
Riding level. (please circle one)		Briefly describe past riding experience above.				To the best of my knowledge, I do not have any existing medical conditions that will prevent me from participating in a trail ride.		
Beginner								
Intermediate								
Advanced								
How did you hear about our program? (please check one box):								
<input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Friend <input type="checkbox"/> Flyer								
Signature of Participant _____								
Date _____								

<b>IN CASE OF EMERGENCY</b>				
Name of local friend or relative:		Relationship to Participant:	Home phone no.:	Work phone no.:
			( )	( )
Patient/Guardian signature _____				Date _____

# Photo Release Form

I hereby grant Utah State University permission to use my likeness captured in any photographs related to my participation in Utah State University classes or other Utah State University activities.

I understand and agree that these materials, taken in association with various student projects, will not be returned to me in any manner whatsoever.

I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or related to the use of the photographic images.

I hereby hold harmless and release and forever discharge Utah State University from all claims, demands, and causes of action which I, my heirs, representatives, executors, administrators, or any other persons acting on my behalf or on behalf of my estate have or may have by reason of this authorization.

I am 18 years of age and am competent to contract in my own name. I have read this release before signing below and I fully understand the contents, meaning, and impact of this release.

---

(Signature) (Date)

---

(Printed Name) (Date)

If the person signing is under age 18, there must be consent by a parent or guardian, as follows:

I hereby certify that I am the parent or guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, named above, and do hereby give my consent without reservation to the foregoing on behalf of this person.

---

(Parent/Guardian's Signature) (Date)

---

(Parent/Guardian's Printed Name)