

## General Precaution

It is important to state that in general the horses in the SHHRC program are well-behaved and are trained and conditioned for circumstances that may occur during sessions, as are the horse handlers that assist. However, they are still horses, with the nature and innate responses of a horse.

It is the very nature of the horse that makes him useful in therapeutic riding, equine-assisted therapy and other equestrian applications. He is, as dictated by nature, a prey animal and as such is inclined to take cues from an identified leader whether horse or human and be of a docile nature in most circumstances. An exception to this general rule occurs when the horse experiences fear or pain as the horse understands it. It is those situations which may initiate an innate “flight response.” As large prey animals, nature has provided the horse with one defense against a threat, the ability to run from it. As a result, if the horse is put in a situation where he feels fear or pain, he may react with a “flight response” and may place not only the rider in jeopardy, but may also endanger any people or horses in close proximity as well.

Please be assured that while there are elements of risk involved in equine-assisted activities, SHHRC takes every precaution to ensure the safety of all participants. The staff are knowledgeable and experienced. SHHRC encourages and facilitates their professional development and continuing education. SHHRC volunteers must participate in a formal training before participating and they receive constant regular instruction and feedback from instructors and therapists. The horses are evaluated before being accepted into the program and are trained. They also receive regular schooling which sharpens their training and they are evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that they remain appropriate for the program. These elements are indicative of SHHRC’s diligence to ensure that activities take place in an environment of maximum safety and control. However, it is important that all program participants have an understanding of the nature of the horse and the risks that are inherent in equine-assisted activities.

SHHRC staff uses their knowledge of horse behavior and the behaviors unique to SHHRC’s own equine population as well as the criteria listed below to determine whether an individual is appropriate for participation in SHHRC programs.