



# PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

2027 EDITION

## PARTICIPANT COMMITMENT

Come ready to learn, participate safely, respect people and horses, communicate honestly, take responsibility for your choices, and help create an environment where real horses, real relationships, and real growth can flourish.

*“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” • 1 Corinthians 10:31*



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## Welcome to Mentoring with Horses

*What you can expect from us—and what we ask from you.*

Welcome to Mentoring with Horses LLC (MWH). You have been accepted into an MWH program because we believe the experience can be meaningful, challenging, enjoyable, and growth-producing. MWH is a Christ-centered equine-assisted mentoring organization in Greeneville, Tennessee. We combine horses, Christian values, Scripture, intentional mentoring, and experiential learning to help participants grow in wisdom, confidence, relational health, and practical life skills.

Our work is relationship-first. Horses are not props, participants are not projects, and we are not here to “fix” anyone. Both horses and participants deserve patience, dignity, respect, healthy boundaries, and thoughtful care. You will sometimes be invited to try something unfamiliar, reflect on what happened, listen to others, practice a skill, or make a different choice. You are not expected to be perfect; you are expected to participate honestly, respectfully, and safely. We want you to be your authentic self—and if you’re not, the horses will find you out! 😊

### ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook explains general expectations for participants in Mentoring with Horses (MWH) program offerings, particularly including Discipleship with Horses (DWH) and Serenity Horse Encounters (SHE). It is provided as a supplement to—*does not replace*—your enrollment application, releases/waivers, program-specific instructions, emergency procedures, payment arrangements, or directions from the MWH leader in charge. MWH may revise procedures when safety, horse welfare, insurance, weather, staffing, or program needs require it.

With appreciation,

**Victor & Helen Mathis**

Mentoring with Horses LLC



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## Our Foundation

*Why MWH exists and what makes the experience distinctive.*

### Mission

To help young people grow in wisdom, confidence, relational health, and practical life skills by combining Christian discipleship, intentional mentoring, and experiential learning with horses.

### Core Promise

MWH does not simply put people around horses. We intentionally leverage horse-human interaction as a context for mentoring, reflection, Scripture, relational learning, and practical skill development.

- CHRIST-CENTERED — Biblical truth, prayer, grace, service, and the example of Jesus shape our program culture.
- RELATIONSHIP-FIRST — Authentic, healthy connection matters—with participants, families, mentors, volunteers, and horses.
- SAFETY-MINDED — Physical and emotional safety guide decisions, even when an activity must change or stop.
- HORSE-RESPECTING — A horse's behavior is information. Welfare, suitability, workload, rest, space, and choice matter.
- PARTICIPANT-DIGNIFYING — You will be treated with respect and encouraged toward appropriate independence and responsibility.
- TEACHABLE & ACCOUNTABLE — Growth includes listening, trying, reflecting, accepting correction, and taking responsibility.

### OUR BRAND MESSAGE

Real horses. Real relationships. Real growth. MWH helps young people discover biblical and relational truths through meaningful experiences with horses—and carry those lessons into everyday life.



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## Your Program

*DWH and SHE share MWH values, but they are different experiences.*

### Discipleship with Horses (DWH)

DWH is MWH's flagship 20-session biblically based youth mentoring program, ordinarily consisting of 10 weekly sessions in the Spring and 10 weekly sessions in the Fall. Sessions combine a Scripture/theme, a guided horse experience, reflection, life application, and closing. Themes may include communication, trust, boundaries, leadership, empathy, emotional awareness, resilience, cooperation, wisdom, responsibility, and healthier relationships.

### Serenity Horse Encounters (SHE)

SHE is a fixed 90-minute introductory experience centered on safe, guided, relational interaction with horses. Activities include meeting the herd, grooming for relationship and connection, leading, obstacle activities, reflection, Q&A, and an appropriately supervised faith/trust activity when offered.

#### IMPORTANT PROGRAM BOUNDARY

MWH programs are mentoring and experiential-learning experiences. They are not psychotherapy, medical treatment, professional counseling, or riding lessons. If you need help beyond MWH's role, talk with a parent/guardian (when applicable), MWH leadership, or an appropriate qualified professional.



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## What MWH Expects From You

*Participation is a privilege that carries responsibility.*

- Treat other participants, parents/guardians, MWH leaders, volunteers, visitors, property, and horses with dignity and respect.
- Follow safety directions promptly—even if you do not fully understand the reason at the moment. Ask questions when the situation is safe.
- Remain in assigned program areas and interact with horses only as directed.
- Use appropriate language and behavior. Bullying, harassment, threats, fighting, intimidation, sexualized behavior, deliberate disruption, or cruelty are not acceptable.
- Do not arrive or participate under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, illegal drugs, or other impairing substances.
- Do not bring weapons, tobacco/vaping products, alcohol, illegal drugs, pets, or unapproved guests into program activities.
- Be honest about concerns, fears, injuries, illness, medication timing relevant to participation, or changes that could affect safety.
- Respect privacy. Do not repeat another participant's personal story or private information outside the program.
- Accept appropriate correction without arguing, retaliating, or intentionally repeating unsafe behavior.
- Help care for the environment by returning equipment as directed and leaving program areas orderly.

### ACCOUNTABILITY IS PART OF MENTORING

MWH may redirect an activity, require a break, contact a parent/guardian, create a behavior/safety plan, modify participation, suspend a participant, or end enrollment when necessary for safety, horse welfare, conduct, program fit, or operational needs.



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## Horse & Facility Safety

*Horses are sensitive, powerful animals. Calm attention matters.*

- Do not enter a pasture, paddock, stall, arena, or other horse enclosure unless MWH has invited or authorized you to enter.
- Do not catch, halter, lead, tie, groom, feed, mount, or otherwise handle a horse except as directed and supervised.
- Approach calmly where the horse can see and hear you. No running, shouting, chasing, rough play, sudden movements, or crowding around horses.
- Maintain the spacing MWH instructs. Never stand directly behind a horse or place yourself where you could be pinned between a horse and a fixed object.
- Never wrap a lead rope around your hand, wrist, arm, or body.
- Do not sit, kneel, or lie on the ground close to a horse.
- Do not hand-feed treats or change feed, supplements, medication, tack, gates, latches, or equipment unless specifically directed.
- Pay attention to ears, eyes, posture, breathing, movement, tension, avoidance, fatigue, or other changes in the horse. Tell the MWH leader when you notice something.
- Respect a horse that needs space or a break. No activity is more important than the welfare of a participant or horse.
- Keep phones silent and put away during active horse activities unless MWH authorizes their use.

### WHEN IN DOUBT

Stop, create space, and ask the MWH leader. Never try to prove bravery by continuing an activity that feels unsafe.



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## Participation, Choice & Challenge

*Growth can be uncomfortable; coercion is not the goal.*

MWH may invite you to stretch beyond your usual comfort zone while still respecting safety and appropriate personal boundaries. A participant may ask questions, express fear or discomfort, or request a pause. MWH may adapt an activity when appropriate. At the same time, choosing to remain enrolled means making a good-faith effort to participate in the approved program rather than repeatedly refusing ordinary, safe program expectations.

- Listen to the complete instruction before beginning.
- Try the activity at the level MWH approves for you.
- Ask for clarification rather than guessing.
- Use words to communicate discomfort, fear, confusion, or frustration.
- Do not pressure another participant to disclose, perform, pray, speak, touch a horse, or take a risk.
- Celebrate effort and learning rather than comparing yourself with others.
- Allow other participants processing time and space to have their own experience.

### YOUR VOICE MATTERS

You may report safety concerns, boundary concerns, mistreatment, or other problems to MWH leadership. Good-faith concerns are taken seriously.



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## Christ-Centered Participation

*Faith is integral to MWH and is expressed with humility and care.*

MWH intentionally incorporates Christian values, Scripture, prayer, reflection, discipleship principles, and discussion of the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. Participants are not required to claim a particular level of faith, but participants and families are expected to understand and respect the Christian nature of the program.

- Participate respectfully in Scripture, prayer, reflection, and faith-based discussion.
- You may ask sincere questions and express uncertainty respectfully.
- Do not mock, shame, pressure, manipulate, or harass another person regarding faith.
- Do not use another participant's spiritual comments or personal disclosures as gossip.
- MWH leaders may redirect theological debates or private matters that are not appropriate for the group setting.

### THE GOAL

We want biblical truth to be lived as well as spoken—through honesty, compassion, healthy boundaries, responsibility, forgiveness, courage, wisdom, and respect for people and horses.



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## Attendance, Arrival & Pickup

*Consistency protects both the group and the program.*

### General expectations

- Arrive on time and ready to participate. Do not enter restricted horse/program areas before the scheduled start without permission.
- If you expect to be absent or late, notify MWH as soon as reasonably possible using the designated contact method.
- Late arrival may reduce or prevent participation when joining would be unsafe, disruptive, or inconsistent with the planned activity.
- Minor participants must follow MWH's current check-in, pickup, and authorized-release procedure.
- A shortened session caused by participant late arrival or early departure does not ordinarily qualify for a refund.

### DWH attendance requirement

Because DWH depends on continuity, small-group capacity, mentor preparation, and horse/staff scheduling, a participant who misses two scheduled DWH sessions in a row without a prior exemption approved by MWH, or three sessions for any reason within a Spring or Fall season, will be automatically dropped from the current DWH enrollment. Return or re-enrollment is subject to MWH approval and available capacity. Fees already charged or paid for participant-caused missed sessions are not automatically refundable.

#### ASK BEFORE THE SECOND UNEXCUSED OR THIRD SEASONAL ABSENCE

When circumstances permit, request an exemption before the second consecutive missed DWH session. Communication matters.



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## Weather, Cancellation & Fees

*Safety and horse welfare take priority over completing a scheduled session.*

MWH programs are substantially outdoor and horse-dependent. MWH may cancel, delay, shorten, relocate, or modify a session when conditions make the planned activity unsafe or impractical.

- Severe or threatening weather, including thunderstorms/lightning, heavy rain, high winds, extreme heat or cold, ice/snow, or unsafe travel conditions.
- Unsafe arena/property conditions, saturated or slippery footing, storm damage, power/facility problems, or other hazards.
- Horse illness, injury, behavior, or welfare concerns.
- Staffing/volunteer shortages, instructor illness/emergency, or other circumstances that prevent safe operation.

### If MWH cancels a paid session

MWH will ordinarily offer a makeup/rescheduled session or credit. If MWH cannot provide a reasonable makeup or credit, any session fee actually paid for that MWH-cancelled session will be refunded. Scholarship or sponsor-funded amounts are not paid to the participant as cash refunds.

### If the participant/client cancels or does not attend

Unless MWH approved an exception in advance, participant/client cancellations and no-shows are non-refundable, and the session fee remains due or is forfeited because program time, horse, staffing, and capacity were reserved. MWH may, at its discretion, approve a makeup, credit, or exemption for documented emergencies, illness, or other circumstances.



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## Attire & What to Bring

*Dress for horses, weather, movement, and uneven outdoor surfaces.*

- Closed-toe, secure footwear suitable for horses and uneven outdoor surfaces is required for horse activities; sturdy boots are strongly preferred where appropriate.
- Wear practical, modest clothing that permits safe movement. Long pants are recommended.
- Avoid dangling jewelry, loose scarves, unsecured accessories, or clothing that can snag on equipment.
- Weather-appropriate layering, sun protection, and hydration are the responsibility of the participants. Outdoor activity can be physically demanding in heat and humidity. Bring water or follow MWH hydration instructions.
- Do not bring valuables you cannot keep secured. MWH is not responsible for ordinary loss or damage to personal property except as required by law.
- Follow any additional protective equipment instructions provided by MWH for a specific activity.



## Privacy, Phones, Photos & Social Media

*Protecting one another's dignity continues after the session ends.*

- Do not photograph, video, live stream, or audio-record participants, volunteers, staff, or program activities unless MWH specifically authorizes it.
- Do not post another participant's name, image, story, personal struggle, health/ability information, prayer request, schedule, or private disclosure online.
- Do not tag or identify other participants without appropriate permission.
- Keep phones silent and put away during active sessions unless an MWH leader authorizes their use.
- No participant cell phones are allowed in the sessions, particularly when engaging with the horses!
- Do not use participant contact information for personal, commercial, political, fundraising, or non-MWH purposes.
- Media permission, when requested, is handled separately. Enrollment alone does not grant MWH or participants unrestricted permission to use another person's image or story.

### PRIVACY HAS A SAFETY EXCEPTION

If someone may be in danger, tells you about abuse or neglect, threatens self-harm or harm to others, or shares another serious safety concern, tell the MWH leader promptly. Do not promise absolute secrecy.



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## Communication & Healthy Boundaries

*Warm relationships work best when expectations are clear.*

- Use MWH-designated channels for scheduling, cancellations, logistics, and participant-related communication.
- Minor participants should not create secret or private communication relationships with MWH volunteers or leaders.
- Do not ask volunteers for private rides, money, gifts, medication, off-site meetings, or special favors outside MWH procedures.
- Do not pursue romantic, sexual, exploitative, or otherwise inappropriate relationships within the MWH program environment.
- Do not pressure another participant to reveal personal, family, health, spiritual, or emotional information.
- Tell MWH leadership if an interaction, message, request, touch, joke, or relationship makes you uncomfortable or seems inappropriate.



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## Emergencies & Incidents

*In an emergency, calm cooperation is more helpful than independent action.*

1. STOP — Stop what you are doing when directed and create space.
2. FOLLOW LEADERSHIP — Listen to the designated MWH leader and follow instructions promptly.
3. PROTECT YOURSELF — Do not enter a dangerous situation or attempt horse handling beyond your training.
4. CALL FOR HELP — Call 911 if directed, or immediately if there is obvious imminent danger and no responsible leader is able to act.
5. KEEP ACCESS CLEAR — Do not block gates, driveways, emergency routes, or responders.
6. REPORT FACTS — Tell the MWH leader what you actually saw, heard, or experienced.
7. DO NOT POST — Never photograph, livestream, gossip about, or post an incident on social media.

### Report injuries and near misses

A near miss is an event that could reasonably have caused injury or harm even though it did not. Tell MWH about falls, kicks, bites, loose horses, equipment problems, unsafe behavior, health events, severe emotional distress, threats, facility hazards, and horse welfare concerns.



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## Concerns, Conflict & Corrective Action

*Healthy programs address problems early and respectfully.*

If you have a concern about safety, another participant, a volunteer, a horse, a program decision, or how you were treated, tell the MWH leader or another appropriate MWH representative. Parents/guardians of minors are encouraged to communicate concerns directly with MWH.

### MWH responses may include:

- Clarifying expectations or giving a verbal reminder.
- Pausing or modifying an activity.
- Separating participants or changing group/horse assignments.
- Contacting a parent/guardian or responsible adult.
- Developing a behavior, attendance, or safety plan.
- Requiring additional information or clearance when safe participation is uncertain.
- Suspending participation while a concern is reviewed.
- Ending current enrollment when conduct, safety, horse welfare, attendance, program fit, or operational needs require it.

### Examples of conduct that may lead to immediate removal from an activity include:

- Violence, credible threats, severe bullying/harassment, sexual misconduct, cruelty to a horse, deliberate dangerous behavior, possession/use of prohibited substances or weapons, or refusal to follow an urgent safety instruction.
- Repeated conduct problems after reasonable redirection, or behavior that materially prevents the group from operating safely and effectively.

### **FAIRNESS DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN IDENTICAL TREATMENT**

MWH may consider age, circumstances, safety, disability-related needs, prior behavior, severity, and program capacity when deciding an appropriate response.



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## Participant Quick Reference

*Ten essentials to remember every time you come to MWH.*

|    |                         |                                                                                           |
|----|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | <b>ARRIVE READY</b>     | Be on time, dressed safely, and prepared to participate.                                  |
| 2  | <b>LISTEN FIRST</b>     | Know the instructions before beginning an activity.                                       |
| 3  | <b>RESPECT HORSES</b>   | Calm body, safe spacing, no handling or feeding unless directed.                          |
| 4  | <b>RESPECT PEOPLE</b>   | No bullying, humiliation, threats, harassment, gossip, or cruelty.                        |
| 5  | <b>SPEAK UP EARLY</b>   | Tell MWH about fear, illness, injury, unsafe conditions, boundary concerns, or confusion. |
| 6  | <b>PROTECT PRIVACY</b>  | Another participant's story is not yours to share.                                        |
| 7  | <b>OWN YOUR CHOICES</b> | Accept correction, repair mistakes, and make a better next choice.                        |
| 8  | <b>STAY ENGAGED</b>     | DWH especially depends on consistent attendance and participation.                        |
| 9  | <b>STOP IF UNSAFE</b>   | No activity is more important than a person or horse.                                     |
| 10 | <b>GROW WITH GRACE</b>  | Practice courage, humility, patience, truth, responsibility, and respect.                 |

### MWH CONTACT

Victor and Helen Mathis

Mentoring with Horses LLC • Greeneville, Tennessee

Call/Text: (423) 268-4126 • Email: [MentoringWithHorses@gmail.com](mailto:MentoringWithHorses@gmail.com) • Website: [MentoringWithHorses.com](http://MentoringWithHorses.com)

For emergencies, call 911 when appropriate.



## Participant Handbook Acknowledgment

*Please sign after reviewing the handbook and any required orientation.*

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the Mentoring with Horses LLC Participant Handbook. I understand that MWH activities involve inherent risks associated with horses, outdoor facilities, animals, equipment, weather, uneven surfaces, and physical activity, and that I am responsible for following MWH safety rules and the directions of the MWH leader in charge.

I understand the attendance, late-arrival, weather/cancellation, participant-cancellation/no-show, and fee provisions described in this handbook, including the DWH rule that two consecutive scheduled DWH sessions missed without a prior MWH-approved exemption, or three sessions for any reason within a Spring or Fall season, result in automatic drop from the current enrollment.

I agree to treat people and horses respectfully, protect participant privacy, follow healthy boundaries, communicate relevant safety information, and conduct myself consistently with MWH's Christ-centered program environment. I understand that MWH may modify, pause, suspend, or end participation when appropriate for safety, horse welfare, conduct, attendance, program fit, or operational needs.

I understand that this handbook is a general guide and does not replace signed releases/waivers, emergency authorizations, payment agreements, program-specific instructions, or other enrollment documents.

Participant Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name (if participant is a minor): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

MWH Representative: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS MAY BE REQUIRED

Depending on the program and participant, MWH may require releases/waivers, emergency medical authorization, health/safety information, media permission, payment/scholarship documentation, or other forms required by MWH or its insurer.



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## Appendix • Participant Orientation Checklist

*For participant/family orientation and MWH records.*

| ORIENTATION ITEM                                                   | DATE | INITIALS |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| Mission / Christ-centered program culture                          |      |          |
| Program format: DWH, SHE, or other:                                |      |          |
| Participant conduct and accountability                             |      |          |
| Horse approach, spacing, restricted areas & handling rules         |      |          |
| Facility orientation, gates, arena, equipment & hazards            |      |          |
| Attire, hydration, weather & cancellation                          |      |          |
| Attendance / late arrival / DWH two-absence rule                   |      |          |
| Privacy, phones, photography & social media                        |      |          |
| Healthy boundaries and how to report concerns                      |      |          |
| Emergency plan, 911 access & evacuation                            |      |          |
| Program-specific fee / scholarship arrangement                     |      |          |
| Questions answered / special participation considerations reviewed |      |          |

Program / Cohort: \_\_\_\_\_

Restrictions / Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

MWH Representative: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature (if required): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_