

NEW YORK STATE 4-H HORSE PROGRAM

CLOVERBUD PROCEDURE – Recommendations for children ages 5-8 working with equines.

Each county must ultimately decide if they have the resources to support programs for the cloverbud age group. For basic information about working with cloverbuds, refer to the New York State 4-H Cloverbud Leader Handbook.

SAFETY: Safety is always a concern in any program that involves youth. It is of particular concern when working with 4-H cloverbuds (children developmentally in the kindergarten to third grade level). When working with this audience and equines, it must be remembered that the **safety of the youth is the primary concern and objective**. The developmental levels of cloverbuds may limit their ability to work safely in some project areas. Care must be taken not just with equines, but with any club activity that may include large animals, large equipment, certain outdoor activities (games and athletic activities, water activities, etc.) or other situations where the safety of the youth could be an issue.

SUPERVISION IN CLUB SETTINGS: A 1:1 adult to youth ratio is recommended when working with large animals or other situations where safety of youth would be an issue. New York State requires that a minimum of two adults be present at all 4-H meetings and activities. This offers protection for youth and adults and also leaves one adult to deal with incidents that might arise.

WHEN RIDING EQUINES: Cloverbuds may ride in:

- **leadline**
- **longe line** (refer to specific policy on longe line activities below)
- **walk/trot or walk/jog**

situations, when they have adequately demonstrated the “**on ground skills**” necessary to work safely with equines and show respect for the equine. Mastering the “**on the ground skills**” will help minimize the potential risk to cloverbuds involved in the horse program. Some examples of “**on the ground skills**” are safely and cautiously leading, grooming, and moving around the animal. The adult/s making the decision to allow the child to ride must use their good judgment.

“ON THE GROUND SKILLS” EVALUATION: An “**On the Ground Skills**” evaluation form is **attached**, and is to be used as a guide to help evaluate the readiness of a child to ride a horse. The

evaluation should be made by a qualified adult with equestrian knowledge; this may be a club leader, co-leader, riding instructor, evaluation team or other county designated individuals.

A child may not be evaluated by their own parent or guardian. The sheet should be signed or initialed and dated. The sheet should be filled out and **kept with club records**. If for some reason the skill level of the child decreases (i.e. fear) and riding privilege for this youth needs to be denied; please make record of this on the “On the Grounds Skills” evaluation form, date and sign/initial. Riding privilege may be reinstated when the child is ready. Also make record, date and sign/initial.

PLEASE NOTE:

1. **The use of an approved helmet and proper equestrian footwear (with a distinguishable heel) are required at all times when mounted, when sitting in a cart, or handling a horse in a riding arena (whether on the ground, mounted or seated in a cart).**
2. **Special care should be taken to help ensure that the horse or pony is of appropriate size, disposition and level of training for the ability level of the child.**
3. **Competent supervision, in a controlled environment, should be easily accessible to the child at all times when they are mounted.**

LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT WITH EQUINES:

Lead Line and Longe Line – This level would generally be appropriate for the kindergarten and first grade child (five and six year olds or developmental equivalent).

Walk/Trot or Walk/Jog – This level would generally be appropriate for the second and third grade child (seven and eight year olds or developmental equivalent).

Ground Rail – Any “over fences” activities would NOT generally be appropriate for cloverbuds, with the exception of “ground rail” activities/classes. Youth should only ride “ground rail” activities/classes after the child has mastered equitation skills and rides in control and in a balanced position on the “flat”. The child must understand and be able to ride in a “two point” position. Ground rail activities/classes are not cross rail activities/classes. Make sure that those working with this audience know the difference. This level would generally be appropriate for the second and third grade child (seven and eight year olds or developmental equivalent).

Driving – **Not** appropriate for cloverbuds, except to be a passenger in a cart with a knowledgeable **adult who is over 18 years of age**. Driving horses requires much hand and eye

coordination, quick reflexes, keen judgment and decision making skills. For these reasons, the actual driving of horses for this audience would be inappropriate in the 4-H program.

The following are NOT appropriate for the cloverbuds in the 4-H Program:

- **Showmanship at Halter**
- **Cantering and Loping**
- **Drill/Parade**
- **Draft Equines**
- **Bareback**
- **Trail Riding**

Trail Class –cloverbuds riding at the walk/trot or walk/jog level may participate in simple trail classes, with simple obstacles, and not more than a total of 4 obstacles – REMEMBER that walk/trot or walk/jog riders do not back their horses; walk/trot or walk/jog riders in trail class must have a side walker (18 years or over) to assist only when necessary for the safety of the child and/or the horse. Trail Class is NOT appropriate for longe line and/or lead line levels.

“RIDING LEVELS” EVALUATION:

- It is recommended that each county association utilize the **“NYS 4-H Horse Program Riding Level Evaluation Form,”** for any youth, including cloverbuds, **that will be riding a horse in “CCE/4-H sponsored” programs and events;** such as clinics, exhibitions, or shows. The riding level evaluation will not be required for club activities. Due to the fact that county programs vary, each county may need to make some changes in the form.
- It is recommended that a **three person committee** be established to perform the **riding level evaluation** of the youth.
- **It is recommended that the committee consist of 3 individuals with suitable horse and riding experience to perform the evaluation.**
- It is suggested that this committee consist of a 4-H leader, a parent of a 4-H youth and an instructor when possible; other possible combinations to be determined by the county Cornell Cooperative Extension Association or educator.
- **A child may not be evaluated by their own parent or guardian.**
- **Parental or guardian permission** should be documented in writing by signature and date on the form. The form should be **dated by the evaluation committee.**
- **Evaluators’ names or initials should be listed on the form.**

- **“Riding Level Evaluation Forms” should be handed into the CCE/4-H office; reviewed, signed and accepted by a CCE Educator and kept on file in the CCE/4-H office.**

The riding level evaluation process can be utilized to handle the exceptional cloverbud (i.e. – a First Grade child that demonstrates the skills and ability to safely ride at the Walk/Trot or Walk/Jog level). Remember that cloverbuds may only ride in Lead Line, Longe Line or Walk/Trot or Walk/Jog situations.

“EXHIBITION ONLY”:

If cloverbuds are in a “show” situation, it should be called **“Exhibition Only”**. The **youth should not be ranked or placed**, not even by the Danish system. All youth should get the same ribbon or prize and all should be **praised highly for their accomplishment**. There are wonderful rainbow colored ribbons or non-traditional colored ribbons that can be used for cloverbud “exhibition” events or classes.

RIDING RING: It is recommended that any riding activity involving 4-H cloverbuds be done in a **“controlled environment”**. To ensure safety, a “controlled environment” should include a **“contained riding area”** away from other “non-cloverbud” riders and distractions. Anything that would distract the child or scare the horse should be considered when determining where to hold mounted activities with cloverbuds. **“Contained”** means that there should be some type of **safe barrier** if a horse gets loose. A fenced riding arena or indoor riding arena would be the ideal. Fencing should be safe for horse and rider. Arenas need not be expensive, just safe.

All mounted riding should be in a **“contained” designated riding area**, riding ring, or arena. The **size** of this **designated area** should be small enough that the adults working with the youth can assist a child quickly, but big enough that more than one horse/child rider and any side walkers can work in a safety zone far enough away that other horse/rider combinations are out of harm’s way (kicking, biting, bumping into, etc.).

If cloverbuds are riding in an **“Exhibition Only”** class or situation, where **more than one horse/rider combination will be in that arena**, it is recommended:

1. **No other riders, than Cloverbud riders**, should be in the ring when a Cloverbud activity is taking place.
2. **Not more than 10 Cloverbud riders** should be **in the ring at one time**. Split any groups or classes that have more than 10 riders into groups of 10 or less.

3. **At least 4 knowledgeable adult “spotters”** should be strategically placed on the corners with easy access to the youth. More spotters could be placed on straight line areas of the arena if needed.
4. **Split arenas that are too large** into smaller areas for the activity by placing plastic barrels or ground rails to visibly designate the “contained” area.

LONGE LINE ACTIVITIES: The longe line can be a wonderful and safe way to work with cloverbuds while mounted. However, there should **never be more than one child** in the designated riding area on a longe line **at one time**. It is also recommended that there are **no other riders** in the designated riding area while a Cloverbud child is being taught on a longe line. It is desirable to have one adult on the longe line and also one **spotter** in designated riding area to help if needed.

Longe line activities should be limited to teaching only. **Cloverbuds should not participate in “Exhibition Only” longe line classes.** “Exhibition Only” classes for cloverbuds should be lead line, walk/trot or walk/jog only.

REMEMBER that working with this age group takes:

- time
- patience
- and a positive attitude.

Working with cloverbuds should be a **“delightful experience, one that you will cherish for a lifetime”** (1). If you have questions contact your county Cornell Cooperative Extension office. It is better to wait and ask questions, than to have a child get hurt or discouraged!

GOOD LUCK, HAVE FUN AND BE CAREFUL!!