**REACH Behaviour Policy for Equine Therapy and Learning Centre**

At REACH, we are dedicated to fostering a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for both our students and clients. This policy applies to all students participating in therapy and equine learning programmes. We aim to ensure that everyone, including the animals, is treated with dignity and respect, promoting an atmosphere where individuals can grow and achieve their best.

**Core Beliefs and Objectives**

At REACH, we believe:

* Every pupil should be treated with dignity and respect within a safe and secure environment.
* We recognize that most behaviours, especially for those with autism spectrum conditions (AS), are forms of communication or responses to heightened anxiety or sensory dysregulation.
* Our goal is to help students develop socially acceptable behaviours, manage their sensory and emotional regulation, and reshape undesirable behaviours into positive ones.

We aim to help students:

* Develop an awareness of others and appropriate social behaviour.
* Build self-confidence, independence, and functional skills.
* Develop self-regulation strategies.
* Engage in activities beyond their special interests.
* Understand and engage in behaviours that are acceptable in both REACH and the wider community.

**General Behaviour Expectations**

**Respect for Animals:**

* Approach horses and other animals calmly and gently.
* Avoid sudden movements, loud noises, or any actions that could startle or stress the animals.
* Never shout, hit, or make aggressive gestures toward animals.
* Respect the individual needs of each horse, understanding that some may require more space or a slower approach.

**Respect for Others:**

* Treat clients, staff, and volunteers with kindness, patience, and respect.
* Maintain a positive attitude and refrain from disruptive behaviour, such as loud talking or inappropriate language.
* Follow all safety instructions from staff and instructors.

**Safety First:**

* Always wear appropriate clothing and footwear as directed (e.g., closed-toe shoes, helmets if required).
* Use tools and equipment (e.g., grooming tools, riding gear) only as instructed.

**Behavioural Boundaries**

**Physical Interaction:**

* Never attempt to physically control or restrain horses unless instructed by a trained staff member.
* All horse handling, such as grooming, leading, or tacking up, should be done with guidance from a qualified instructor.
* If you feel unsafe or unsure about your interaction with the animals, stop immediately and inform a staff member.

**Communication:**

* Use calm, clear, and respectful communication when interacting with staff, volunteers, and other clients.
* Raise any concerns or questions respectfully, allowing for open dialogue between participants and instructors.

**Conflict Resolution:**

* Disputes should be resolved respectfully and non-confrontationally. Inform a staff member if conflict arises for appropriate management.

**Equine Learning Guidelines**

**Engagement in Learning Activities:**

* Actively participate in all equine learning activities and follow your instructor’s guidance.
* Be open to learning about horse behaviour, body language, grooming techniques, and horse care responsibilities.

**Respect for the Learning Process:**

* Recognise that horses have individual temperaments and learning styles and adapt your approach accordingly.
* Be mindful of the horse’s physical and emotional state. If a horse is stressed, tired, or uninterested, work with your instructor to adjust the activity.

**Group Sessions Participation:**

* Arrive on time for scheduled sessions. Notify staff if unable to attend.
* In group sessions, respect others' time and opportunities to engage with the horses, fostering a positive group dynamic.

**Preventing and Addressing Negative Behaviours**

* **Positive Behaviour Support:** We promote positive behaviours by establishing clear expectations and routines and reinforcing good behaviour both verbally and non-verbally (e.g., praise, certificates).
* **Support for Self-Regulation:** We offer students support to self-regulate, including providing breaks when necessary and offering a “fresh face” approach when needed to de-escalate a situation.
* **Proportional Consequences:** Consequences are tailored to the individual’s needs and the nature of the incident. If a student’s behaviour is disruptive, we emphasise teaching positive behaviour rather than focusing on the negative.
* **Preventative Measures:** Negative behaviours are often minimised by managing the learning environment and recognising stressors in practices and surroundings that may impact students’ emotional regulation.

**Classroom Environment and Risk Assessments**

* **Structured Environment:** The learning environment is organised to provide clear cues for expected behaviour.
* **Individual Risk Assessments:** These are created and reviewed regularly, involving the multidisciplinary team and parents. They include strategies for managing specific behaviours and sensory issues.

**Recording and Monitoring Behaviour**

* **Incident Documentation:** All incidents, including accidents, injuries, and physical interventions, are recorded. Parents are informed immediately.
* **Monitoring:** Regular meetings are held to review and monitor student behaviours, ensuring consistency in managing their behaviour.

**Physical Intervention**

* **Last Resort:** Physical intervention is used only to prevent harm to the student, others, or property. It should be reasonable, necessary, and proportionate.
* **De-escalation First:** Staff will prioritise de-escalation techniques before resorting to physical intervention.
* **Reporting:** Any physical intervention is documented, and parents are informed immediately. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) ensures compliance with reporting procedures.

**Removal from the Centre**

* **Temporary or Permanent Removal:** In extreme cases, a student’s disruptive behaviour may require removal from the centre, either temporarily or permanently.
* **Criteria for Removal:** This includes risks to the welfare of others, significant damage to property, or severe disruption of learning.

**Consequences for Misconduct**

* **Immediate Action:** Clients failing to adhere to behavioural guidelines may be asked to leave the session temporarily or permanently, depending on the severity of the misconduct.
* **Progressive Measures:** Repeated incidents of disruptive or unsafe behaviour will result in a review by centre management. This may include exclusion from therapy sessions or equine learning activities, and a formal meeting with the participant, family, and staff to address ongoing issues.

**Appendices**

* **Appendix A – Rewards:** Staff should avoid overt rewards that may cause anxiety. A nurturing environment helps students understand that “good things” happen when they make positive choices.
* **Appendix B – Follow-ups and Consequences:** Describes strategies such as taking breaks, moving students to different environments, or informing parents through meetings and phone calls.
* **Appendix C – Physical Intervention:** Details the procedures for physical intervention, ensuring it is used only when necessary and proportionate.
* **Appendix D – Removal from the Centre:** Outlines the circumstances and process for the temporary or permanent removal of a student based on extreme behaviour.

By adhering to this policy, REACH ensures a safe, respectful, and supportive environment where all participants can thrive, grow, and engage in meaningful activities with both the animals and their peers.