**The Importance of Matching Equine and Rider**

* It is important to have the correct equine and rider combination so that the rider has the best possible chance to develop their skills. Completing an unmounted rider assessment will give key information about the rider’s ability and will enable joint goals to be set. Knowing the rider’s goals will help you to make decisions on the most suitable horse, your lesson planning and coaching techniques.
* Equine and rider combination is something that must be carefully monitored on a regular basis. Our weight chart guidelines and weight calculator can be found on the Equines in RDA section of the MyRDA website. These documents will help you to work out the maximum weight an equine could carry. This includes tack and is before taking into consideration the conformation, age and fitness of the equine. The conformation and way of going of the equine has a huge influence on the rider’s position. It is vital that the equine is warmed up for ten minutes before each session and is at least tracking up (where the hind feet step into the front foot steps).
* It is important you understand the rider’s medical condition and their ability in order to make mounting and dismounting as safe, efficient and effective as possible. Having this information also enables you to make a decision as to whether the rider can be safely accommodated at your group with the mounting facilities and equines you have available, or whether you may need to suggest another RDA group.
* The movement of the equine transmitted to the rider provides the therapeutic effect and therefore it must be active. The walk is the therapeutic pace as it is most similar to the movement of human walking.
* It is important to ensure the saddle is the correct size and fit for the equine and that it sits level on the equine’s back. When a headcollar is used under the bridle the noseband must be removed from the bridle to avoid undue pressure. If a bridle is used without a headcollar underneath, then a correctly sized coupling should be used to attach the lead rope to.
* In some cases, it may be more appropriate to use special tack. A pad secured with a webbing surcingle or a roller with handles may be suitable alternatives to a saddle for some riders. Adapted reins such as rainbow, loop or bar reins may be helpful depending on the rider.
* The body shape of the rider should also be considered as you may have three riders of the same weight but with very different body shapes. The age and the medical condition of the rider may also influence which equine you select.
* You should be clear on the RDA contraindications/precautions and also whether the rider’s condition is stable or likely to change. There may be periods when riding is a contraindication such as following surgery, but it will be possible to restart following medical approval.
* It is important to ensure the rider is central on the equine’s back, sitting upright with a neutral pelvis. This will help the rider to balance and makes it much easier for the equine to carry the rider. A neutral pelvis means that the rider is sitting with equal weight on their seat bones and their spine is in correct alignment with natural curves. A pelvis that is rotated backwards results in a rounded back and is called an “armchair” seat. A pelvis that is rotated forwards results in a hollow back and is called a “fork” seat.
* If a rider’s stirrups are too long this often causes a hollow back (fork seat) and stirrups that are too short will often cause the back to be rounded (armchair seat). Altering the length of the stirrups without changing the position of the pelvis does not solve the problem.
* You should be able to see the, well-known, rider ear/shoulder/hip/heel line when looking at the rider from either side. The rider should have level hips and shoulders when viewed from behind. This tells you that the rider is in balance.
* Your choice of activities and school movements should provide a “just right” challenge to enable the rider to achieve their goals with practice and motivation. Where possible, it is good to set SMART goals with the riders to provide focus.
* It is much easier for the rider to balance on smooth turns and straight lines. You can add in large circle work and serpentines for further challenge as progress is made.