

Animals as Natural Therapy's Staff and Volunteer Personnel Policy:

The Culture of ANT

The **culture of ANT** is one that seeks to provide **sanctuary** for all creatures. The farm is to be a place of **mindfulness**, a mindfulness of how our behaviors, words and being affect others. Do we appreciate the culture we seek to maintain at ANT during program time, meeting with staff and volunteers, in the office, with all? Do we remember we are human and will at times speak out in anger or frustration but then need to apologize when we become aware of our behaviors? And do we remember forgiveness for the shortcomings of others?

ANT's Full Value Contract is an integral part of our culture and programs; we need to be aware of the **Full Value Contract at all times and in all circumstances.**

- #1. Keep myself and others emotionally and physically safe.
- #2. Give and receive respectful feedback
- #3. Work as a team

We seek to create a place of safety here at ANT, a haven for all humans and animals. We are very conscious of maintaining physical safety with Barn Safety Rules. Emotional safety is **very** important in our group process and a continuous challenge in our society. Our media does not promote emotional safety and boundary setting by people, the audience is trained to laugh when others are made fun of, and compassion and respect are often never role modeled.

ANT's philosophy both in horse handling and interpersonal connections is one of **partnership, not dominance**. We don't dominate our animals nor participants who come to ANT. The leaders don't dominate the followers—it is to be a mutually respectful dance. (*see Linda Kohanov's essay on Leadership at end of document) From an administrator at ARCH, a NARHA center:

"After offering 70,000 horse lessons, I have found that: Horses who are dominated have only one of two choices: They will either fight back or acquiesce and only give you their minimum. We must get their cooperation instead of dominating them."

I would add it is the same with people.

ANT also upholds the philosophy of **ALLOWING**. We may have a lesson planned for the day but the horse and participant determine where it will go and we follow. We allow the experiential learning to unfold. Horses are always teaching. So we are asked to STOP and take the time to get the lesson. It may be for the person you stand beside or for you. The mental health staff, director, and some seasoned volunteers/instructors are here to walk you through the challenges of "allowing" so feel free to talk to us about them.

Because most of our animals at the farm are prey animals, it is important we all do a **physical and emotional check in** when we enter the gate. If we are carrying "cougar

energy”: the horse especially will respond differently to us. And remember “Horses Never Lie” – if your horse won’t pick up its feet ask yourself or anyone around if you’ve assured their physical safety in a 20-foot circle. If so – next you may ask – where in my life am I afraid to lift my feet and take the next step?

As a volunteer with ANT you will be challenged to grow personally. You will have the privilege to care for animals who truly touch lives. They will touch yours and others. You may get to mentor youth- some fragile, some hardened- human beings all who need positive, encouraging, hope-filled, non-judgmental support every step of the way. But there is an art to be developed in mentoring. In **experiential education** the mentor tries their hardest to refrain from telling someone **how** to do something **right** but instead guides the participant through careful questioning to find the best solution within themselves.

If you volunteer with programs that have the benefit of our mental health therapists’ presence you will be involved in a **half hour debriefing** after participants leave. This is an important part of your training as a mentor. This debriefing serves at least 2 purposes: You are allowed to share your own “What, So What, Now What”, your own challenging experience and insight for the day. Secondly you can hone your mentoring skills with professionals beside you and get feedback on how to handle particular situations as well as support for working with a sometimes-challenging population. You might hear some painful stories, you might be confused how a youth can return to a home where parents are using drugs, or you might be bursting to share the awesome insight you’ve just witnessed with a youth or with yourself. This is your time to process, share and learn.

Anti-discrimination Policy

Animals as Natural Therapy and its volunteers and staff will not discriminate against anyone based on age, race, sex, religion, minority status, or sexual persuasion.

Sexual Harassment Policy

No harassment will be allowed in ANT operations by volunteers or staff. Harassment includes unwelcome advances, requests for favors, and other verbal or physical conduct or communication based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, marital status, partisan considerations, disability, or genetic information.

Role Model Behaviors of health

It is essential we are personally a **good role model** to others here at ANT who may be struggling and trying to figure out their place in society. This is of utmost importance. We must ask ourselves what are we role-modeling and what we want the future to look like? We still remember our own counselors from camps many years ago and ways we wanted to be like them! And we need to be resilient to take the feedback we agree to take.

Respect:

We all need to ask ourselves how much respect we are showing others. How respectful are we in our teasing? How patient are we with other volunteers and horses? Volunteers cannot allow disrespect for our horses. The last day of camp when campers prepare to paint something on their horse to honor them, we ask the camper “is this design showing respect for your horse?” Ask questions and get the kids thinking, to put themselves in another’s shoes.

Communication:

Do we talk behind the back of others or complain about someone to another instead of addressing the person personally that we are having a problem with? What are we role modeling? People (and horses for that matter) will not feel safe around you if you are not honest with them and work out your differences in a kind way. Also, no profanity is allowed at ANT.

Trust:

Are we trustworthy and watchfully keeping the horse safe from another horse? Are we watching for the emotional safety of others (horses and humans) as well as our own?

Rest/Sleep & Food/Sunscreen:

Do we role model taking good physical care of ourselves with enough sleep and food? This is especially important for day camp volunteers when it is day after day and week after week of being outside in a demanding environment.

Tobacco:

There will be no smoking or chewing by volunteers on ANT property or in sight of any clients. That means no smoking in sight on driveway or in parked cars as clients are coming and going in cars at any time. Chew and cigarettes are not to be in view of campers in purses, backpacks, or pockets as youth want to emulate their volunteers. If you smoke please wash hands and air out before being around campers or horses.

Program Distraction:

The environment created at ANT is to maximize our participants’ personal introspection and not to draw attention to oneself as staff or volunteers. The staff and volunteers, as facilitators of that introspection, are here to be unobtrusive by-standers in an observational mode, not bringing the focus of attention to ourselves.

It can be very distracting for ANT participants when staff or volunteers are wearing a noticeable amount of jewelry, excessive makeup, strong perfume or revealing clothing.

Piercings:

Facial and tongue piercings are discouraged, please only wear the least noticeable studs. This is to prevent injury to one’s face while in frequent close contact with the horses, as horses can inadvertently bang you with their heads and sometimes will playfully take

hold of an item, such as a zipper pull & pull it, which with facial jewelry would be harmful to the wearer. It is in the nature of chickens to peck at shiny objects and having shiny items on one's face makes it and your eyes more attractive and subject to exploration. Chickens are an integral part of our programs. There are a multitude of germs at a farm and new piercing sites could be subject to infection.

Perfumes & Fragrances:

Strong fragrances can bother the horses and co-workers as horses and many people are very sensitive to odors. So please refrain from perfumes when working with horses or attending meetings.

Clothing Guidelines:

When at the farm please wear sturdy shoes or boots around all animals. No open toed sandals or flip flops around camp. No dangling earrings or jewelry that could catch on horse or saddle parts. No distracting clothing: short shorts, low cut tops or clothing with your belly showing.

Contract Infractions and Volunteer Evaluation and Dismissal of Volunteers

If someone reports an ANT staff or volunteer is having difficulty abiding by the Full Value Contract and/or any of the above guidelines, the volunteer will meet with the Program Director and another senior ANT staff person to discuss and determine what solutions are appropriate. The employee/volunteer will be given up to three months to correct the situation unless there is reason for immediate dismissal, such as when an unsafe physical or emotional environment is being created. A volunteer may be asked to take a break and seek help in getting the support they need before returning, at which time another meeting is required with ANT staff to assess the person's progress in their ability to abide by the Full Value Contract.

ANT's philosophy of leadership:

The following is an excerpt on leadership from Linda Kohanov's book Way of the Horse. Linda writes of watching different horses in the herd taking leadership roles at various times, as we have seen our horses doing here. This paragraph reminds us of the human leadership dance we aim to do at ANT:

"Consensual leadership draws on the wisdom and sentience of the entire herd. It is, to a great extent, improvisational. Though I may be acknowledged as the official leader of Epona, I'm still in the business because I've gathered a group of people around me who can both lead and follow, who are knowledgeable yet willing to continue learning, whom I can trust to support me when I am feeling vulnerable and who can admit when they're feeling unsure. When we're uncertain or triggered by what's happening, we look to the person who seems the calmest and most centered in that situation. Sometimes when we're undecided about which road to take, we look to the most confident, invested, or enthusiastic person. When there's conflict, we agree to consult outside experts, yet sometimes even then the path is not clear. In these cases, I may have to follow my gut,

though I'm still dubious as to the exact right course of action.

Mostly, however, we all have to acknowledge that we don't know the one true right way, that authentic community itself is a work in progress. Some students and employees find this disconcerting, even frightening. Some are comforted by how human we seem, but we really have no choice in the matter.

Ultimately, we have a black Arabian stud on the property who is absolutely intolerant of incongruity. While many of our horses are more subtle, supportive, and patient with our shortcomings, he's always ready to challenge our egos if they get out of control. "

Thank you for opening your heart to our beloved ANT animals and to the people who come here seeking a non-judgmental place to learn about themselves and to possibly heal some of life's hurts. You will never be the same as you allow the magic to unfold you.