



# HorseSense Riding Academy

## Lesson Program Guidelines

### Welcome to HorseSense Riding Academy!

We've prepared this set of guidelines to help you and your child get the full benefit of our lesson program. Be sure to ask us if you have any other questions about how and why we do what we do.

### Who we are and what we do

**Nikki** is the Guru of Instruction at HorseSense. She has been teaching non-stop for more than 6 years, and is certified as an instructor with a USPC H rating (the highest national unmounted rating available). She currently teaches most of our lesson programs, manages the riding schedule, co-directs our shows and day camps, helps supervise our Working Students, trains our lesson string and the occasional student's horse, and pitches in with the stable chores. If you have questions about your child's lesson program, she's the one to ask:

**Nikki Surrusco**    Barn: 706-636-2123    Home: 706-635-3249    Cell: 706-889-6453\*

**Dana** manages the barn and the grounds, balances the books, handles our marketing and public relations, teaches unmounted HorseSense clinics and the occasional riding lesson, co-directs our shows and day camps, and helps manage the horses. She served for way too many years as a Pony Club District Commissioner. In a former life, she designed corporate training programs and homeschooled her two children. If you have questions about fees or pretty much anything OTHER than the lesson schedule, she's your guy.

**Dana Surrusco**    Barn: 706-636-2123    Home: 706-635-3249    Cell: 706-889-6494\*

(\*Our cell phones don't always work in the mountains, so use them as a last resort. Sometimes they don't get turned on.)

### What we teach

We teach a classical English seat – which means that our program is based on dressage, and encompasses stadium jumping, cross-country, and mounted games. Our students show primarily in eventing and mounted games competitions. We also teach unmounted horsekeeping clinics. Both our mounted and our unmounted programs are based on United States Pony Club standards of safety and competence for horse and rider – but our professionally designed programs offer a system of progression through levels that is available to ALL of our students.

Our goal is to teach your child to be a knowledgeable, thinking rider, with respect for her horse and for herself.

### Group or private lessons?

Most students need to begin with private lessons, at least until they get to the point where it is safe for us to turn our back on them in the arena. Once a rider has control over the horse, then you have the option of continuing with private lessons, or Nikki will try to work the student into an available group lesson. Private lessons may be taken either once or twice a week, depending upon the rate of progression you want to see; group lessons are scheduled weekly or bi-weekly. The ideal arrangement is to expose your child to both private and group lessons, because each setting has its own skills and challenges. One obvious consideration: the more frequently your child rides, the faster she will progress.

### What to wear - and what not to wear - for riding

We have two basic requirements: helmets and boots. We can supply the helmet for the first few lessons, but you'll need to buy a properly fitted ASTM-SEI-approved riding helmet within the first few months. Ask us to help you find affordable models that expand to fit growing young heads.

We do require that students wear good sturdy boots with a defined heel (minimum of ½ inch) and a smooth sole (no heavy waffling). Initially, any well-fitting boots will do (including cowboy boots), but eventually you'll want to invest in a pair of real paddock or jodhpur boots.

Students don't necessarily need to be decked out in fancy riding clothes for lessons – in fact, we get so dirty that we recommend you save the nicer things for shows! Stretchy jeans or leggings are fine. When your child begins to post to the trot, you'll need to protect the inside of his legs with a pair of suede or leather half-chaps, preferably with jodhpurs or riding jeans. In cold weather, you'll need warm riding gloves – inexpensive knit gloves with a pebbled surface on the palms and fingertips are ideal. As with the helmet, we can usually let students borrow our half-chaps or gloves for a few lessons – but not indefinitely. If your child is ready for showing, ask us to help you select clothes that are a good value – and don't forget to check out our gently-used paddock boots box!

Otherwise, the dress code is pretty simple:

- don't wear clothing that is too loose or too tight
- don't wear dangling jewelry that could get caught – stud earrings and a watch are okay
- long hair should be tied back away from the face
- wear clothing appropriate for the weather – esp. those warm riding gloves in the winter!
- remember sunscreen
- don't wear anything that will embarrass anyone's mother

## Preparing for lessons

We start everyone out with a few introductory ground lessons to teach them how to safely work around horses, how to prepare for riding by grooming the horse, and how to tack up and untack. We expect all of our students (except Rising Riders) to do this quickly and efficiently. Please allow extra time for your child to prepare her pony BEFORE and AFTER her scheduled lesson time -- that means arriving 15-20 minutes early and staying 10-15 minutes after the lesson -- and be prepared to lend a hand if your child is a dawdler. Students should be in the arena and ready to ride promptly at their appointed time, or the cascading effect of tardiness will ruin Nikki's whole day.

After the first few introductory lessons, Nikki generally allows an hour of riding time per lesson. Sometimes in the course of a lesson Nikki will allow extra time to work through an exercise successfully – so if you need your child to be finished by a specific time, please let Nikki know in advance.

You can help your child perform his best during lessons if she is well-rested, well-fed, thoroughly hydrated and reasonably fit and healthy when she rides. A tired, hungry, dehydrated, out-of-shape kid on a horse is an accident waiting to happen! Remind her that riding is an athletic activity, and she should learn to think like an athlete.

## Scheduling

Nikki will work with you to determine a lesson schedule that works for everyone. Please keep these points in mind:

- We currently have 20+ students, which restricts our ability to change the schedule around -- but we'll try our best to accommodate any changes you need to make. We tend to have more flexibility in the spring and fall, when temperatures are moderate and there are more daylight hours in which to ride.
- It is important to arrive on time for your lessons. When you are late, often other people and horses are standing around waiting for you. Horses really don't like waiting! **Any student who is more than 10 minutes late without calling us ahead of time will lose her stirrups for the first half of the lesson. More than 20 minutes late and she rides the whole lesson without stirrups – ouch!**
- **We reserve the right to cancel the lesson after lateness exceeds 30 minutes. Barring sudden illness or emergency, if a student fails to arrive for a scheduled lesson without calling, payment for that lesson is still due in full.**
- If you must cancel a lesson, please call and let us know at least 24 hours ahead of time whenever possible, so that we can offer that place or that horse to someone else. We recommend leaving a message on both the barn voicemail and our home voicemail if you can't catch us in person.
- Repeated unannounced failures to show up for lessons will either increase your lesson fees by \$5 or will release you from that lesson slot, at our discretion.

## Horses

We have some wonderful horses in our lesson program; most belong to us, but we have a few mounts in our lesson string that we lease from our students. Each horse has a distinct personality and offers a unique set of joys and challenges for the aspiring rider. Nikki will carefully match your child with the horse that is best suited to your child's experience, temperament and ability. As your child becomes more proficient, we'll change mounts more frequently to present a fresh set of lessons. You can learn more about our horses on our website.

And yes, it's okay to bring treats like apples or carrots for your favorite horse – just be sure that we show you how to feed them safely! (i.e., we don't feed treats by hand to some horses, since they tend to get greedy and nippy!) No candy or other foodstuffs, please.

## Fees and payment options

Payment is due after each lesson, although some people prefer to pay ahead for lessons on a monthly basis. If you are one of those people, let us know.

We accept cash and checks as payment. [Checks should be payable to “HorseSense”](#). Please note that there is a \$25 returned check fee if your check is returned for any reason.

We can also accept electronic payments from your debit or credit card for lessons, camps, and other fees on our website, via PayPal’s secure connection. You don’t have to be a PayPal member to use the service.

Our fee schedule is pretty complicated, largely because we want to give you plenty of options. When you look over the attached schedule, you’ll notice two important things:

- Our lesson and day camp fees are relatively low, especially compared to fees customarily charged in the metro Atlanta area. We started our school with a commitment to keeping our fees as low as possible so that we can offer riding experiences to a broader section of our community. We appreciate that many of our parents work hard and make sacrifices to provide their children with riding lessons.
- When we *are* forced to raise our fees, we apply the new rates only to new students – we don’t raise fees for current students enrolled in a regular lesson schedule. It’s one way we can reward those students who consistently dedicate time and effort to their lessons. However, if you drop out of a regular lesson schedule, we reserve the right to reinstate you at the new rate.

## How to track your child’s progression

Contrary to popular opinion, the most effective way to learn about your child’s progress in lessons is NOT to ask “so, how did your riding lesson go today?”

The best way to follow your child’s progression as she learns to ride is to be an active participant: go sit in the arena and watch her lessons; ask questions about the things you don’t understand; be a cheerleader for your child’s accomplishments.

If you’re not able to have an active role in your child’s lessons, you can still keep track of what she’s learning if she is enrolled in our Learning Levels program. Nikki designed this system of tracking and evaluating her students’ progress for both mounted and unmounted instruction, so you have a checklist that shows what your child has learned and what she needs to learn to earn that next ribbon. You can download the Learning Levels information from our website.

At the very least, occasionally ask *us*, rather than your child, how the lessons are progressing!

## Our Rising Riders program

We accept a limited number of young riders, aged 5-7, into this special lesson program. These students ride only 15-30 minutes at a time, and will ride on a leadline until we see that they can safely ride independently. Since maturity levels vary widely at this age, we can only accept your child if he has the ability to focus and to follow instructions cheerfully and competently. You and your child both need to understand that even the most dedicated Rising Rider won’t be able to learn at the same rate as older, more physically mature kids who are able to steer and stop a 1200-lb. horse. The goal for this group, therefore, is to give them experience and confidence around horses while they’re waiting for their legs to grow!

## Our Working Student program

Our unique program for working students aged 12 and up is designed to create responsible, knowledgeable horse owners. We require potential working students to attend a series of [HorseSense](#) Horsekeeping Clinics, so that we can teach them the fundamentals of sound horse management. Then we assign students to a regular schedule of volunteer work at here at the farm: students clean stalls, haul hay, maintain pastures, feed and groom horses, clean tack and equipment, help with Rising Riders lessons, clean the tack and feed rooms, and learn the realities of horsekeeping. When possible, we reward our most dedicated working students with the most coveted job of all: exercising horses! We’ve found this to be an invaluable way for kids to prove to their parents that they are committed and responsible enough for horse ownership.

One caution, however: we don’t have time to offer a free day care service for children who lack the physical and emotional maturity to do hard work with minimal supervision. Please make sure your child understands the requirements of the program before applying.

## HorseSense Horsekeeping Clinics

It’s not enough, in our view, to be able to ride a horse: truly effective horsemanship requires that riders understand and attend to their horse’s basic needs. It means learning how horses are put together, what makes them behave in certain ways, and how to keep them happy and healthy. Horses are too often victims of “benign abuse” from well-meaning owners and riders. That’s why we think it’s important to offer horsekeeping instruction to both adults and children – even those that don’t currently own a horse.

Our 2-hour clinics are designed to teach the basics of horse management with a fun, hands-on approach. We teach:

- Safety Issues
- Horse ID: Breeds, Colors, Markings, Conformation and Gaits
- Grooming
- Tack
- Stable Management
- Feed and Nutrition
- Health and Hoof Care
- Travel Safety
- Longeing and Ground Training

With the exception of the Safety class which needs to be your first clinic for obvious reasons, these clinics may be taken in any order. If you miss one topic, you can just catch it the next time it is offered. There is no obligation to attend every class in the series. We also have an advanced series of clinics for more experienced horse folks -- same topics, but with a lot more detailed information.

Clinics are only \$15 per person. If you bring a friend, you can each attend for the Buddy Rate of 2/\$20. Advanced registration is required. Clinics are appropriate for anyone aged 8-108, regardless of their equine experience. Check our website or bulletin boards for the clinic schedule.

## Day camp and other fun activities

HorseSense Day Camp is a wildly popular part of our riding academy programming. We offer two Novice camps each summer for beginner and advanced beginner riders, ages 8-18, and several weekend specialty camps throughout the year: Mounted Games, Show Jumping, Dressage, Eventing, Quadrille and Ground Games. We also offer three half-day Rising Rider camps for younger kid, aged 6-7. Details and enrollment forms are posted on our website by March of every year. These camps fill up rapidly, so get your deposit in early to secure a place for your camper.

Let us know if you'd like to host your child's birthday party with us; we provide a safety lesson and a riding lesson, and picnic tables for the rest of your party. We can also design custom one-day camps for birthdays and special occasions. Ask us.

HorseSense hosts two big events each year that are open to all qualified students: we have an open schooling show in the fall, and some sort of major clinic or show each spring. Keep an eye on the barn information areas, and on our website, for dates and details. Shows are a great way for kids to show off what they've learned, so invite a cheering section.

Whenever we can squeeze it into the schedule, we like to get all of our boarders and students together for a big Barn Party. Everyone brings food to share for a potluck meal (we eat WELL at this barn!) and then we have some project that all of the kids have to do together, like cleaning manure from the pastures or de-cobwebbing the barn, that earns them a session of free riding. Barn Parties are open to family members, friends, and casual acquaintances.

In short, we have a lot of fun. That's the idea, right?

## Barn rules

Are posted at the front of the barn. Make sure that everyone in your family and each of your guests is familiar with these basic rules for civilized behavior around horses.

## Water and other desirable substances

Riding is a strenuous activity, and dehydration is a serious risk when it's hot. In the warmer months we maintain a cooler filled with ice water to help keep everyone hydrated – but we learned the hard way that we can't afford to provide the INCREDIBLE number of disposable cups that our students go through each week! So send your kid with a nice, eco-friendly personal water container of some kind. If she won't drink unflavored water, we recommend powdered or pre-packaged sports drinks, or juice, rather than sodas, which actually contribute to dehydration. We also recommend that you teach your child to drink plenty of water the DAY BEFORE their lesson; it's not really effective to wait until right before they go out to ride in the heat.

## Candy and other illegal substances

We don't allow wrapped candy at HorseSense because of those darn wrappers, which inevitably end up on the ground and pose a health hazard to our horses. We also ask that our students leave their chewing gum at home so that we don't have to practice the Heimlich Maneuver in the middle of a lesson.

Before you take your child home each day, please remind her to throw away any food containers or water bottles she brought to the farm. Leaving trash for Dana to clean up makes her crabby!

## Lost and found

We strongly suggest that you label EVERYTHING your child brings to the barn – especially clothing -- because at some point they will leave it all here. Unclaimed items go into our Lost and Found box for 30 days, and then get donated to the thrift store.

## The loading zone

We encourage you to stay and watch your child's lesson whenever possible – but if you need to drop her off and go elsewhere, please make sure that you have signed a Medical Release so that we can get emergency help for your child if required.

## Staying in the loop

We try hard to keep the lines of communication open so that both you and your child stay current with whatever's happening at HorseSense. Please take the time occasionally to browse through our barn bulletin boards and our website so you won't miss the next barn party or clinic or day camp enrollment deadline.

We also publish information about upcoming events (and results and photos) on our Facebook page; look for "HorseSense Riding Academy" and become our friend!

[www.HorseSenseRidingAcademy.com](http://www.HorseSenseRidingAcademy.com)

We hope your child has a safe and enjoyable learning experience here at HorseSense. Please don't hesitate to ask us for more information or feedback as required.