

# Questions to Ask a Caregiver When Working With a Non-Speaking Riding Student

Building a supportive relationship with a non-speaking equestrian starts with thoughtful, proactive communication with their caregiver. Our goal is to understand each equestrian's unique needs, preferences, and communication style so we can create a positive and empowering experience.

## Communication

- How does the rider communicate? What tools or methods do they use (e.g., gestures, signs, AAC device, yes/no signals)?
- Are there specific cues or behaviors I should look for to understand how they're feeling or what they need?
- How do they show when they are enjoying something—or when they are uncomfortable or overwhelmed?
- What method is most reliable for yes/no choices?
- How do they usually communicate a problem or that they need to get down?
- Do they have any unusual ways of showing emotions like joy, discomfort, frustration or pain?
- How can we work together to reinforce learning, safety, and enjoyment both during and outside of lessons?
- What's your preferred way for us to stay in touch (e.g., text, email or phone call)?
- Are there any cultural, family, or personal preferences I should respect?

## Triggers, Sensitivities & Support

- Are there specific situations that may overwhelm or upset them?
- What does overstimulation look like for them?
- What strategies or supports help them feel safe and regulated?
- What do they do when they're struggling, tired, or done?
- How do they handle changes in routine or new experiences?
- How can I best support their independence and self-confidence in the barn and the arena?
- What does it look like when they're having a really hard day?

## Motivation & Interests

- What are the rider's favorite activities or topics at home or in the community?
- How would they express they are having a great time or a good day?
- What types of rewards, praise, or encouragement work well?
- What is something they are proud of?