



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 9 years, and is certified as an instructor with a USPC H rating (the highest national USCP teaching 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 co-manages the barn at the farm. If you have questions about your child's lesson program, she's the one to ask:

Nikki Surrusco Farm: 706-636-2123 Cell: 706-889-6453 Email: info@HorseSenseRidingAcademy.com
gamespony@yahoo.com

Dana helps to manage the barn, 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, teaches our HorseSense Unit Studies for homeschoolers, directs Internships and Working Students, 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 Farm: 706-636-2123 Home: 706-635-3249 Email: info@HorseSenseRidingAcademy.com
Cell: 706-889-6494 (*when I remember to turn it 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 and unit studies for homeschoolers, and offer a variety of day camps. 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 unique 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 a few 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. 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! Jodhpurs, breeches, or riding tights are recommended, but 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](#) – critical here both in the summer and on sunny winter days. No shade in this arena!
- 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.

The loading zone

Our designated parking area for lessons and camps is the gravel lot between the arena and the barn. Please park facing out towards the pastures along the sides of the parking area, leaving the center free for trailer access between the farmhouse and the barn. Follow the signs to park for shows and events.

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.

Scheduling

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

- [Except for extreme conditions \(lightning, blizzards, monsoons\), we ride. In the event that weather won't allow a riding lesson, we'll substitute an unmounted lesson in the barn or farmhouse.](#) 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.
- 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 farm voicemail and our home voicemail if you can't catch us in person.
- We currently have 30+ 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.

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 other people. 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 (we don't feed treats by hand to some horses, since they tend to get greedy and nippy)! No candy or other foodstuffs, please.

Barn rules

Are posted at the farmhouse and on the tack room door 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. So send your kid with a nice, [eco-friendly refillable water bottle – labeled with her name](#). 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.

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 write the lesson/camp dates on your check.](#) 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, but do please include a \$5 service charge.

Our fee schedule is pretty complicated, largely because we want to give you plenty of options. When you look over the attached fee 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 – and we hope our low fees will allow you to extend those lessons with camps and clinics.
- 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.](#)



HorseSense Riding Academy

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 we all 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!

HorseSense Horsekeeping instruction

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.

We offer a Horsekeeping track in our Learning Levels that gives students a structured approach to learning about horses. Unlike the Horsemanship track, which is taught through a student's riding lessons, most Horsekeeping instruction is self-paced and self-motivated; students study on their own and let us know when they're ready to be tested on a particular horsekeeping topic. Having said that, we offer a LOT of help, most of it free of charge: we have a free lending library of books, videos, and other resource materials; we have a Working Student program that allows students to earn free individualized horsekeeping instruction; we include horsekeeping lessons in all of our specialty weekend and summer day camps; and we offer several Level Up Clinics each year to help students focus on specific level topics. The only thing we can't do is to make students put in the time and effort to study – that's up to you!

HorseSense Study Guides and continuing education

There's a lot of specialized knowledge required to keep riders and horses safe and happy! In order to make sure that our students have access to important equine facts and concepts – and to help them progress through our Learning Levels Program --- we're developing a set of study guides for each instructional level. Students may purchase a Horsekeeping Guide or Horsemanship Guide for their level (\$8 each) or buy the set (\$15); guides may be purchased from us at the farm or via our website.

Parents, please encourage your child to be a lifelong student of horsemanship by reading horse books, magazines, and online articles – there are even online equine instructional videos! Learning all you can about horses – and staying abreast of the latest research and methods – is the only way to insure that horses aren't unwittingly abused or endangered.

Our Working Student program

Our unique program for working students aged 8 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, distribute 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 (who also have

achieved their Horsemanship Green Level or above) 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 Level Up Clinics

Level Up Clinics are designed to help our students power through those Learning Levels. We offer several clinics each year; most clinics offer a group riding lesson and group or individual horsekeeping instruction. This is a great way to boost progress in those horsekeeping levels!

Advanced registration is required. Check our website or bulletin boards for details and scheduling.

Horse shows

We don't require our students to show – there are many other ways to enjoy horses! – but we do encourage students to learn our team-centered approach to showing. Horse shows, whether they're small camp shows or big recognized events, provide students with an opportunity to learn planning and time management, responsibility, commitment, sportsmanship and teamwork. They also let students show off their new skills (and their favorite ponies!) in front of family and friends. Ribbons are a great way to reward those achievements, but we think the learning experience is always a reward in itself. Don't forget to invite a cheering section!

So, we have two in-house shows each year: our spring **Over-the-Rainbow Schooling Show**, and our fall **Not-Your-Typical Schooling Show**. Both of these shows are combined into our HorseSense Show Series, with top honors earning Champion and Reserve Champion ribbons for the show year. Information and enrollment forms are on our website. Our show fees are deliberately low to encourage all of our students to participate – which means we need lots of help from parents during the show! (No prior experience required.)

We also offer a few opportunities for students to attend outside shows and events as members of the HorseSense show team. Students must attend our Ready-to-Show Bootcamp before joining the team. Details for these events are on our website.

Day camps and other fun activities

HorseSense Summer Day Camp is a wildly popular part of our riding academy programming. Camps are a great way for students to make friends with other horsey students. They provide a relaxed setting for students to apply the skills they learned in lessons; they also allow us to teach disciplines and horsekeeping topics using fun games and activities that encourage students to keep learning about horses.

We offer two **Novice camps** each summer for beginner and advanced beginner riders (Red/Yellow Level), ages 9-18, and a half-day **Rising Rider** camps for younger kids (Rainbow/Red Level), aged 6-8. 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.

Our current students, particularly those who have already attended Novice Camp, can attend a 4-Day Level Up Camp each summer. This camp provides the same intensive Learning Levels instruction as our clinics – but allows for much faster progress.

We also offer several **Weekend Specialty Camps** throughout the year, all of which provide extensive knowledge and skills practice in a particular discipline: **Ground Games, Mounted Games, Show Jumping, Dressage, and Quadrille**. To help students learn our team-centered approach to showing, we include a **Ready-to-Show Bootcamp** each spring – required for any student who wants to compete on a HorseSense show team, and highly recommended for all of our students. And on alternating years we put on our big **Eventing Camp** – a coveted goal for our intermediate and advanced students. Boxed lunch options and overnight sleepovers in our bunkroom may be available for some specialty camps for an additional fee. All camps require enrollment before a closing date (usually a week before the camp) to avoid a late fee; camp infosheets and enrollment forms may be downloaded from our website – or enroll via our new online camp entry form.

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. Do please RSVP, though.

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.

In short, we have a lot of fun. That's the idea, right? Keep an eye on the on our website's Latest News page and Facebook page for dates and details.

Horse leasing

Several of our school horses are available to be leased by our students. We offer quarter- and half-leases for these horses; occasionally we'll have a horse available for a full lease. We encourage prospective horse owners – particularly if you're thinking of buying a horse for a child – to “try-before-before-you-buy” with relatively safe horses in a controlled environment. Students must first attend our **Horse Buyers Clinic**, held twice a year, and must achieve their Green Horsekeeping Level or above to be eligible for a lease. Lease candidates also must be carefully matched with a pony's training and temperament. Details are on our website.

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 bulletin boards and our website's [Latest News](#) page so you won't miss the next barn party or clinic or day camp enrollment deadline.

Students and parents have the option of receiving [email notifications for scheduling reminders and updates, newsletters, and](#) . Our mailing list is currently un-automated, and is maintained by Zahtar (zahtar@HorseSenseRidingAcademy.com); let him know of any changes to your list subscription.

We also publish information about upcoming events (and results and photos) in seasonal newsletters and on our Facebook page; look for “HorseSense Riding Academy” and become a fan!

www.HorseSenseRidingAcademy.com

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



HorseSense Riding Academy

Current Fee Schedule

RIDING LESSONS:

- 🐾 Private 60-minute lessons = \$40.00
- 🐾 Group 60-minute lessons = \$30.00
- 🐾 Homeschooler's 45-minute group lessons = \$25.00
- 🐾 Rising Rider 30-minute lessons = \$20.00
- 🐾 Introductory 15-minute lessons = \$20.00

HORSEKEEPING INSTRUCTION:

- 🐾 Level Up Clinics = \$20-40.00
- 🐾 HorseSense Learning Levels Study Guides = \$8.00 each or \$15.00/set
- 🐾 Working Student/Internship Program = FREE – but your child must commit to the program!

ONE-TIME HORSE EXPERIENCES:

- 🐾 Birthday Parties = \$50.00 for first child and \$30 for each additional child
- 🐾 Group Experiences (Scouts, church groups, etc.) = call for pricing
- 🐾 Introductory 15-minute pony ride lessons = \$20.00

HORSESENSE DAY CAMPS:

- 🐾 One-Day Specialty Camps (incl. Ground Games Camp) = \$55.00
- 🐾 Two-Day Weekend Specialty Camps = \$85.00
- 🐾 4-Day Eventing Camp = \$200.00
- 🐾 4-Day Level-Up Camp = \$55.00/day or 4-days/\$200.00
- 🐾 Summer Novice Camps = \$250.00/morning only or \$300.00/all-day
- 🐾 Summer Rising Rider Camps = \$150.00
- 🐾 *Late fee for camp forms after the closing date = \$5.00*
- 🐾 Bunkroom sleepovers, incl. meals = \$25.00/night
- 🐾 Box lunch (specialty camps only) = \$5.00/day

HORSE LEASING:

- 🐾 Quarter-lease = \$50/month; ask us for details
- 🐾 Half-lease = \$100.00 /month; ask us for details
- 🐾 Full-lease = \$200.00 + all expenses/month

OTHER FEES:

- 🐾 HorseSense Shows and Events = \$5.00 - 30.00/class + \$10 office fee; see show forms for details
- 🐾 Coaching fees at outside shows = \$45.00/day
- 🐾 Overnight stall board = \$10.00/day