

Safety Guidelines for Educational Visits

Miniature Shetland Therapy Ponies & Small Animals Team

Bringing Animal Magic to Your School or Setting – Including SEN Support

We're so pleased to be visiting your educational setting with our Miniature Shetland Therapy Ponies and friendly small animals. Our aim is to create magical, meaningful, and safe experiences for all children—especially those with additional needs.

Your support as staff is essential in helping us deliver a calm, inclusive visit. Below are key safety points, as well as guidance for how we can work together to support every child.



Supporting Children with Additional Needs

We are experienced in working with children who have:

- Autism / sensory processing difficulties
- ADHD or behavioural needs
- Learning disabilities
- Anxiety or emotional regulation needs
- Physical disabilities or mobility issues

To support children effectively, we ask staff to:

- Let us know in advance about any children who may need a quieter approach, extra time, or a different style of interaction.
- Be present and actively engaged during animal interactions—your presence helps children feel secure.
- Help us observe signs of overwhelm or dysregulation (e.g. stimming, covering ears, becoming non-verbal, signs of distress), so we can pause or adapt the session.
- Support transitions to and from the animal area—some children may need visuals, timers, or quiet space after a visit.
- Share calming strategies that work well for individual children—especially if they are known to bolt, shut down, or become overstimulated.

We will always go at the pace of the child and are happy to adapt.

Meeting the Ponies – Key Safety & Support

Our ponies are calm, trained, and love attention, but all animals can react unexpectedly. Here's how we work together to keep everyone safe:

Staff Can Help By:

- Gently guiding children to approach from the pony's side, not behind.
- Reminding children not to shout, run, or wave hands near ponies.
- Supporting children who may become excited or overwhelmed near the animals.
- Helping children follow instructions for brushing or touching.
- Watching for signs of distress in the pony (ears back, tail swish, stepping away).

We Recommend:

- No crouching near legs or kneeling under the pony.
- No touching around the pony's mouth unless guided by staff.
- Using grooming as a calming, sensory-friendly activity—we provide SEN-friendly brushes.
- 1-to-1 introductions for anxious children, when needed.

Small Animal & Farm Friend Safety

We'll bring a range of friendly small animals—rabbits, guinea pigs, goats, chickens, and sometimes sheep.

Children Will Be:

- Offered calm, opportunities to interact.
- Encouraged to stroke animals while they are in soft-lined “cuddle baskets” or pens.
- Reminded not to pick up animals unless guided directly by a staff member.

Staff Can Help By:

- Sitting with children during animal time.
- Reminding children to use gentle, flat hands.
- Watching for nibbles or unexpected movements.
- Helping redirect if a child becomes overstimulated or rough.

Common, Low-Level Risks (and How to Manage Them)

- **Sudden Movements or Reactions:** Even our calmest animals can react if startled. They may move quickly, jump slightly, flap wings (chickens), or give a gentle nip or kick if frightened.
 - What helps: Calm voices, gentle movements, and allowing space around the animal. We'll guide children clearly—your presence helps reinforce this.
- **Nibbles or Scratches:** Small animals like rabbits or guinea pigs may nibble gently or scratch if they're trying to adjust themselves in a cuddle basket.
 - What helps: Close supervision, flat gentle hands, and allowing animals to stay in baskets unless guided otherwise.
- **Mess or Droppings:** As with any live animals, there's a small chance of toileting during a visit.
 - What helps: Our ponies wear specially designed diaper bags which are usually very effective at catching any droppings. While not 100% guaranteed, they greatly reduce the chance of mess. We also carry cleaning supplies just in case, and we'll handle everything discreetly and quickly. If any children are particularly sensitive to smells or mess, just let us know in advance so we can make any needed adjustments.
- **Zoonotic Infections (e.g. E. coli, ringworm):** These are rare but possible with direct contact.
 - What helps: Thorough handwashing after any interaction. We provide hand sanitiser and mobile wash stations if needed.
- **Allergic Reactions:** Some children may react to animal dander, hay, or feed.

Hygiene First

To keep everyone safe:

- Handwashing is essential after touching animals or equipment.
- We bring hand sanitiser
- Please assist children with handwashing, especially those who may need help with routines.

For Pregnant Staff or Students

Please avoid contact with sheep if pregnant—particularly if lambs are present. They can carry infections such as toxoplasmosis. Let us know in advance, and we'll adapt the experience accordingly.

Before Our Visit

By confirming your booking, you agree to:

- Share these guidelines with your staff team.
- Tell us in advance about any medical, behavioural, or sensory needs.
- Provide at least one member of staff per small group during animal time.
- Assist with supervision, hygiene, and emotional support throughout.

We're Here to Help

We understand that every child is unique, and every setting is different.

Whether your group needs a sensory-adapted visit, non-verbal communication support, a visual timetable, or a calm-down zone—we're happy to accommodate. We work closely with you to make sure each visit is as inclusive, safe, and special as it can be.

Thank you for welcoming us into your school or setting—we can't wait to meet you!