

# Ethan and Cocoa



Ethan was on top of the world, because today was his riding lesson with Cocoa, a therapy pony for children with Down's Syndrome. "Hurry, Mom, hurry! I can't wait to see my friend Cocoa!" Mom laughed and kept driving.

Finally, they pulled into the stable parking lot. "Don't forget the rules about running and yelling around horses, Ethan," Mom reminded him.

"I know, Mom," Ethan said impatiently. "I might scare them, and then they might kick me."

"Hi, Ethan!" said his teacher Katie, giving him a high-five. "Cocoa just finished breakfast. You get her brushes while I lead her out of her stall, okay?"

In his excitement, Ethan felt like running to the tack room. Then he remembered what Mom said. He walked carefully through the barn, breathing in the heavenly smells of oats, leather, and horses.

“Look, Katie,” said Ethan, very proud of himself. “I got Cocoa’s brushes all by myself. I put on my helmet by myself, too!”

“Good for you, Ethan! Now say hello to your friend.” Ethan couldn’t stop smiling as he hugged his pony’s neck. Cocoa nuzzled him back with her velvety nose.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Some horses are trained as **therapy horses**. These animals must be calm and quiet, and used to being around people of all ages. Therapy horses can help children and adults have a sense of control and independence.

“Cocoa and I are good friends, aren’t we?” Ethan said to Katie as they brushed the pony.

“You sure are, and I really like how you take such good care of her. That’s what friends do, you know. They look out for each other.”

“Can I give her a carrot?” asked Ethan.

“Do you remember how to hold it so Cocoa doesn’t bite you by accident?”

Ethan nodded and placed the carrot in the palm of his open hand. He was careful to keep his fingers close together and flat. Cocoa’s soft muzzle tickled his hand as she took the carrot and chomped on it loudly.

“I’m so proud of you, Ethan!” Katie praised him.

