

Animal Assisted Therapy in Clinical Practice



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M.A. Psychology - SUNY Stony Brook

M.S. Veterinary Social Work - University Tennessee

MUSC Ambulatory Psychiatry

- individual, family, and group **therapy**
- Animal Assisted Therapy **program development**
- Animal Therapy **research**

<https://muschealth.org/patients-visitors/volunteers/therapy-animal-program>

Pawsitive Mental Health, LLC

<https://pawsitivementalhealth.com>



Veterinary Social Work

supporting human needs within
human-animal relationships

- University of Tennessee
Veterinary Social Work certificate
- University of Denver
Canine-Assisted Intervention Specialist (CAIS) certificate
- University of Pennsylvania
Master of Social Work/Doctor of Veterinary
Medicine (MSW/VMD) program
- Association of Animal-Assisted
Intervention Professionals (AAAIP)
Animal-Assisted Intervention Specialist Certification (C-AAIS)



Animal Definitions

All recognize the importance of human-animal relationships

	Target Beneficiary	Goal	Training Requirements	Legal Public Access
Service Animal	Handler (1 specific person)	Complete specific tasks that actively mitigate symptoms or effects of a person's disability	Extensive: generally 1-2 years after maturity	All (see ADA)
Therapy Animal	Patients interacted with (multiple people)	AAA: benefits through naturalistic interactions AAT: therapeutic contribution to professional service	Therapy dog evaluation	Needs to be obtained by facility prior to visit
Emotional Support Animal	Handler (1 specific person)	Benefits through naturalistic interactions	None	None

Practice Terminology - AAA

Animal Assisted Activities

- Passive in nature. No specific objectives planned
- Goal is to engage people in positive interactions with certified therapy dog

Examples: campus visits in public spaces during exams, visiting public airports, visiting nursing homes/hospitals, etc



Practice Terminology - AAT

Animal Assisted Therapy

- Formally goal-directed and designed to promote improvement in physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning of the person(s) involved
- Specially trained animal-handler team is an integral part of the treatment process
- Directed and/or delivered by health/human service professional with specialized expertise and within the scope of practice of his/her profession
- There are specific goals for each individual involved and the process is documented and evaluated



Example: incorporating certified therapy dog in treatment interventions with specific goals and documentation within mental health or occupational therapy setting

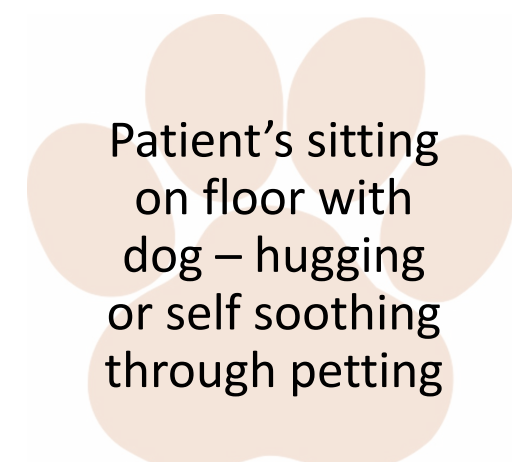
Important to Note

While incorporating the therapy dog actively in therapeutic interventions, you still get to benefits of passive AAA:

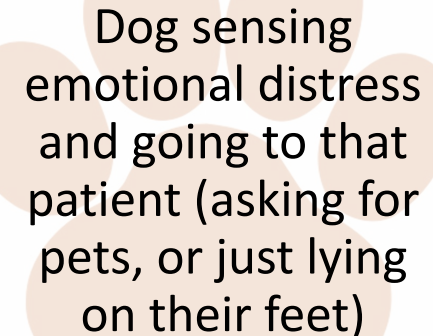
- Social lubricant
- Improve relationship (therapeutic alliance)
- Motivator to attend program/sessions
- Acts as a “safe barrier” for guarded patients



Dog stopping
stimming
behaviors and
re-focusing
patient



Patient's sitting
on floor with
dog – hugging
or self soothing
through petting



Dog sensing
emotional distress
and going to that
patient (asking for
pets, or just lying
on their feet)

Dogs going above and beyond

Ethical Considerations

Animal Safety & Comfort

- Qualifications:
domestic, well socialized, & certified
- Preference/personality:
should enjoy activity being asked to engage in
- Health & well-being
- Canine consent
 - **invited** to participate in the encounter with the patient
 - signs of stress - knowledge & advocacy



Ethical Considerations

Patient Safety & Comfort

- allergies & zoonotic diseases
- fear
- preferences, religion, culture
- discuss ahead of time:
what to expect

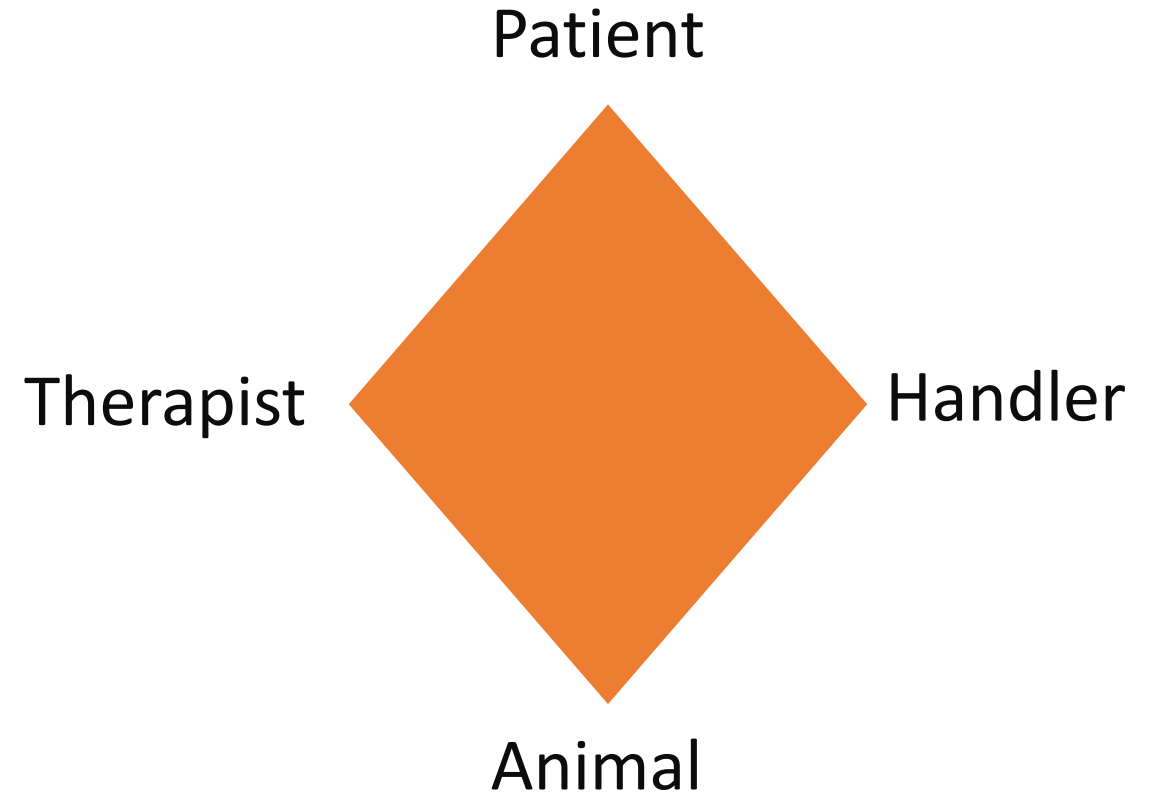
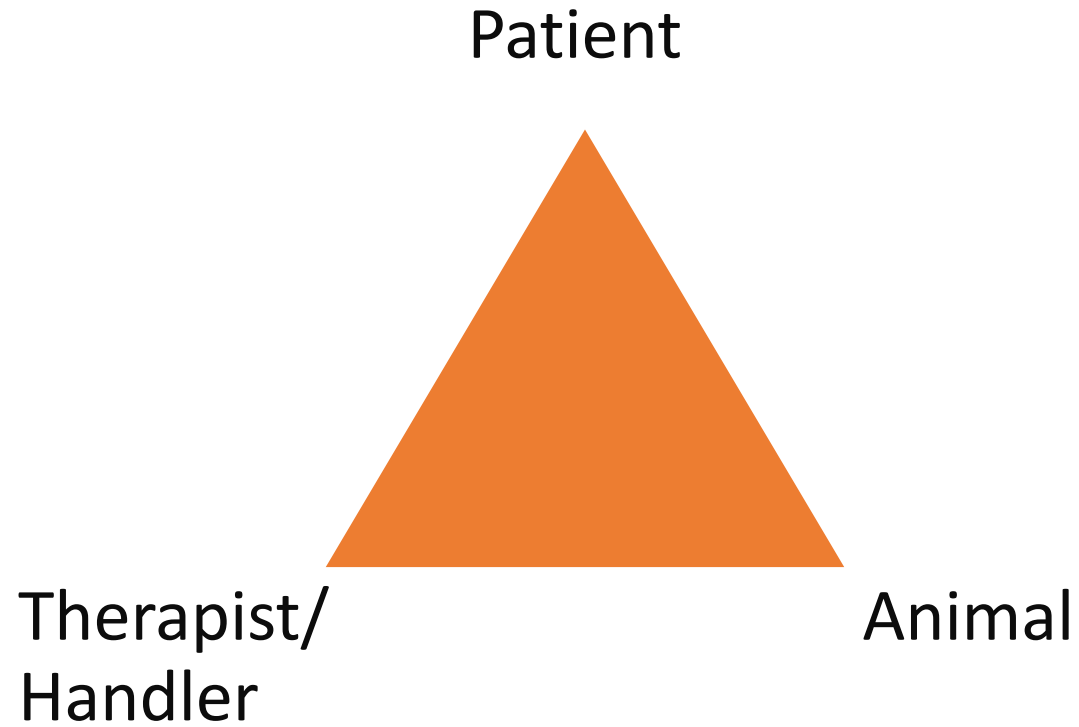
NASW Code of Ethics:

Value: Competence

Ethical Principle: Social workers practice within their areas of competence



Practice Terminology




I love that, is not only about petting the dog it is also about learning something new and talking about experiences.

The way you integrated Grant into the topic was spectacular. Patients seemed to gain much more insight due to your technique.
Amazing session!

THERAPY DOGS TOUCH
THE SOUL! NEED
MORE! Even those who think it
isn't going to work, they realize it
does. They make a difference.

Incorporating the therapy dog



Ice-breaker/
tension breaker



Reflections
& comparisons




Mindfulness

Communication

Coping

Practice
Therapy Skills

CBT
- behavioral
activation



Non
-directive and
Directive Play
Therapy



Role
playing



Metaphors

- Communication
- Boundaries
- Emotional Regulation
- Behavioral activation (depression)
- Frustration tolerance

- Self Esteem
 - Write down and then say negative self-talk statement to dog. Discuss how saying these things to dog/others is difficult but to say to self is easy - how does saying statement to dog/others affect our relationship/make us feel (reflect that onto relationship with self). Using original statement and how you felt, what would you want to say differently to dog (opposite of statement)? Say new statement to dog - how do you feel; say to self - how do you feel. Reflect on how saying that statement to self/others would affect your relationship.

Individual Therapy Practice Examples

- Assertive and empathetic communication
- Setting and maintaining boundaries/consequences
- Anxiety/stress management
- Parental self esteem/empowerment
- Responding to behavioral noncompliance
 - Ask dog to help with taxes (discuss how even though communicated effectively, asking something outside dog's scope/abilities). Ask dog to do a trick he knows how to do (discuss why dog may not respond or complete what was asked - identifying other factors outside our control despite us communicating clearly what we need from dog). Reflect on what was needed to get dog to engage in behavior needed (repetition, calm/assertive tone, praise, etc).

Family Therapy Practice Examples

- Acceptance
- Grief
- Gratitude
- Relationships
- Self Care

- Anxiety

- Discuss what anxiety is and how it affects us - how it can be learned from negative experiences we didn't predict, so anxiety becomes defense to protect future self due to fear of being caught off guard again. Discuss how opposite of anxiety is trust (not calm): trust process, trust that things will work out, trust in yourself/your abilities. Group members sit in circle on floor in open space, close their eyes and call dog over to them > trust that dog will come, trust in your abilities to call him over, & trust in your peers to let dog go.

Group Therapy Practice Examples

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