

# Animal-Assisted Therapy

MossRehab Aphasia Center



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## What is animal-assisted therapy?

- Animal-Assisted Therapy
  - A licensed clinician, such as an SLP, providing treatment to a particular client
  - Work on the client's skills toward their personal treatment goals
  - AAT is a treatment method
    - Activities that help the client work toward their goals and incorporate the animal
  - Person 'handling' the animal might be the clinician
  - Clinician might work with someone else who 'handles' the animal

## Animal-assisted therapy is different from...

- Animal-assisted activities
  - Animal-handler team provides enrichment
  - A licensed clinician is not required
  - Team is available to a lot of different people, and the interactions are relatively spontaneous
    - Visiting people in the hospital
    - Going to a library so children can read to the animal
    - Visiting college students during exam times

## Animal-assisted therapy is different from...

- Service animal
  - Trained to do specific tasks for their particular person
  - Service animals can enter public places with their person
    - They are working animals
  - Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (2011)
    - Dogs
    - Miniature horses

## What kind of animals can do AAT?

- Non-human animal
  - Actively enjoys being around people
    - An animal should not be doing this work if they are just tolerating it or dislike it
  - Has the skills to interact with different types of people
  - Can remain calm and responsive in different environments
  - Different types of animals
    - Domesticated mammals and birds
    - Adults only, no puppies, kittens, etc.
    - No 'exotic' or wild animals
- Human (handler)
  - Understands and responds to what the animal communicates
  - Understands the treatment plan and abides by the 'rules' of treatment
- Animal and handler registered and work as a team
- Human handler must always be the non-human animal's advocate

## Training and requirements to provide AAT

- Licensed clinician
- Animal-Handler Team
  - Demonstrate specific sets of skills and aptitudes
  - Assessed and registered with a recognized organization
  - Continuing education/practice and re-certification at intervals
- Clinician/Handler
  - Get necessary permissions
  - Adhere to safety and hygiene requirements
  - If the handler is not also the clinician
    - Understand therapeutic process, abide by healthcare 'rules'

## Who is a candidate for participating in AAT?

- People who like animals and want to interact them
- People who can interact with animals safely
  
- For people who like animals, but cannot interact with them, clinicians can consider 'animal-related engagement'

## Examples of things to do in AAT with people with aphasia

Behavior	AAT method	Outcome Measurement
Say or write more specific words and more types of words	Provide cues of increasing length to animal; Name concepts associated with the animal	Language sample: # words in spoken or written Types of words spoken or written
Start more conversations with familiar and unfamiliar people	Introduce animal to new people; tell /respond questions with pieces of information about animal	# new introductions # words/sentences used Length of conversation/# of turns # of reminders or cues used
Say or write a sequence of at least 3 steps or directions	Write out list of animal's daily activities to provide to a pet-sitter	# of steps provided # of important steps left out # of steps provided in the correct order

Adapted from Antonucci (2022), Animal-Assisted Intervention in Speech-Language Pathology: Practical, Clinical, and Theoretical Considerations, *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 43(1), Table 3, p. 4

## What is the evidence?

- Relatively 'young' science
- Mix of evidence from different types of engagement
- In general
  - Physical health
    - ↓ Blood pressure
    - ↓ Heart rate
    - Environmental stress responses, promoting healing
      - ↑ Oxytocin (bonding and social affiliation) (for example, Beetz et al., 2012)
      - ↓ Cortisol levels (mediating stress response)
  - Social/Emotional
    - Reduced social anxiety
    - Positive mood
    - Animal as social facilitator
    - "Promotes the pre-conditions for learning" (Beetz, 2017, p. 7)

## What is the evidence?

- Related to aphasia (stroke-aphasia)
  - Adams, 1997
  - Macauley, 2006
  - LaFrance, 2007
  - Sherrill & Hengst, 2021
    - Includes case report of individual with aphasia
- Findings:
  - Achievement of speech-language goals being targeted
  - Increased motivation to participate in treatment
  - Increased positive mood and enjoyment of treatment
  - More social opportunities and communication with others
- Keep an eye out for more to come...

Thank you!

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## Some references and resources

- Pet Partners, <https://petpartners.org/>
- Association of Animal-Assisted Interventions Professionals, <https://www.aaaiponline.org/>
- Canine Companions for Independence, <https://canine.org/assistance-dogs/our-dogs/therapy-dogs/>
- ADA info about service animals, [https://www.ada.gov/service\\_animals\\_2010.htm](https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm)
- *Seminars in Speech and Language, 43(1), 2022 Role of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Speech-Language Services Guest Editor, Sharon M. Antonucci, Ph.D., CCC-SLP*
  - Antonucci, Sharon M.
  - *Animal-Assisted Intervention in Speech-Language Pathology: Practical, Clinical, and Theoretical Considerations*
  - Fine, Aubrey H.; Griffin, Taylor Chastain
  - *Protecting Animal Welfare in Animal-Assisted Intervention: Our Ethical Obligation*
  - Atherton, W. Leigh; Hudock, Daniel
  - *Addressing the Psychosocial Needs of Individuals with Communication Disorders: The Integration of Animal-Assisted Therapy within Counseling*
  - Macauley, Beth L.
  - *Speech-Language Pathology Incorporating Horses*
  - Decina, Elizabeth; Evangelista, Bernadette; Harantschuk, Alicia:
  - *Collaboration in Animal-Assisted Activities and Animal-Assisted Therapy*

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