ANIMAL ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY:
AN INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP FOR THERAPISTS

A graduate thesis project in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For degree of Masters of Science
in Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy

By
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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the two who served as my inspiration and kept me relatively sane throughout my graduate school experience; Zero, my dog, and Q, my horse. These two, my best four-legged friends, have shown me just how influential an animal can be on a person. They have served as my therapists, my support system. Writing this project allowed me to explore how I can use animals to help other people as much as my own have helped me, and more specifically, how I can allow Q and Zero to help others. They are incredibly empathetic, nonjudgmental, and they simply accept me for who I am. With every hard day that I have, I know there is a fluffy white dog who wants nothing more than to lick my nose and have me chase her around the yard. Nearly every stressor I encounter is pushed to the background when Q hears my footsteps coming down the barn aisle and gives me an enthusiastic whinny to say hello. They inspired me to write this project and supported me through it, and for that I am endlessly grateful. I have had a huge amount of support from the people in my life, but the animals are the ones who kept me going. I got through graduate school not despite them, but because of them. This is their project.
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ABSTRACT

ANIMAL ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY: AN INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP FOR THERAPISTS

By

Erica Marie Pollack

Master of Science in Counseling,
Marriage and Family Therapy

The purpose of this thesis project is to create an introductory workshop for therapists that are interested in animal assisted psychotherapy. The curriculum covers the origins of animal assisted therapy, the physiological benefits that animals have on people, the benefits of using an animal in a therapy practice, and the client populations that benefit most from interactions with a therapy animal. It outlines some specific interventions that can be used both in the office with a smaller animal and outside of the traditional therapy office with a horse. The workshop is designed for therapists who want to learn the basis of using an animal in their practice or are interested in referring out to a therapist that does. This workshop is anticipated to provide a knowledge base for therapists to go on and explore the topic further before practicing animal assisted therapy themselves.
Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

This is a projected guidebook for professionals who wish to practice animal assisted therapy.

Animal assisted therapy is a term for diverse therapeutic approaches, used with people of all ages, wherein an animal is an integral part of the process of treatment (Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver 2011). It can be used in a wide variety of settings, from schools to therapy offices to the outdoors, with any kind of animal. The most common therapy animal is the dog, generally due to its calm nature and trainability. Interaction with animals has been proven to lower blood pressure in humans (Allen, Blascovich, Tomaka, and Kelsey 1991), provide companionship, act as a nonjudgmental friend (Hawkins, 2012), and serve as a model of how to maintain relationships (Hanselman, 2001).

Therapists have found animals to be a helpful therapeutic tool when working with clients. Animal assisted therapy is often more effective than play therapy with children (Levinson, 1965), can foster feelings of group acceptance (Hawkins, 2012), and can teach children how to treat other people with respect (Grado, 2011). People, especially children, tend to feel a deep connection to animals. A dog present in the therapy setting can allow a child to show more emotion and show true emotional connections in a way different from any other type of therapeutic intervention.

Other types of animal assisted therapies are experiential in nature. This includes equine assisted psychotherapy, which uses a client’s interactions with horses to serve as
metaphors for clients’ lives. Horses are prey animals, and are therefore finely attuned to the actions of humans, who are seen as predators. Horses can pick up on behaviors from the client that therapists typically cannot because horses rely heavily on reading body language for their own survival (Burgon, 2011). Through careful observation by the therapist of horse behavior within the therapy sessions, the client can draw parallels to their own life through the metaphors provided (Zugich et al., 2002).

**Statement of Problem**

The landscape of therapy is changing drastically with more and more complementary and alternative therapies becoming widely accepted. Many of these, such as art and drama therapies, have been widely researched. Animal assisted therapies have not been as thoroughly researched and most information on the topic is anecdotal (Reichert, 1998). For this reason, the purpose of this project is to provide therapists with research on the topic of animal assisted psychotherapy and to create a working model for them to integrate animals into their practice with clients.

**Purpose of Project**

The purpose of this project is to outline a workshop to provide a resource for industry professionals and students who wish to begin their investigation and learning in animal assisted therapy. This workshop is designed to be held over four hours for one day. The workshop has been designed to assist therapists who are currently practicing, but will be open for graduate students as well. It will be led by a licensed therapist currently utilizing animals in practice. The purpose of the workshop is to increase working knowledge of animals in therapy and how to use them to their full potential in
communicating, teaching life lessons, reading client behavior, and teaching clients acceptable behavior. The presentation will include current research, video demonstrations, and live role plays of sessions. If the situation allows, a willing client can be brought in to demonstrate how a trained therapy dog works in conjunction with the therapist. The presenter will provide at least one trained therapy dog to be used for demonstration purposes.

**Terminology**

**Animal assisted therapy:** “Animal assisted therapy is an umbrella term for diverse therapeutic approaches that are used with people of all ages in which an animal is an integral part of the therapy process.” (Kruger and Serpell, 2006).

**Therapy dog:** A dog that has been specially trained to partake in the therapeutic process

**Human/animal relationship:** The mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors essential to the health and well-being of both (American Veterinary Medicine Association).

**Stress:** A state of mental or emotional strain brought on by adverse or very demanding circumstances.

**Anxiety:** a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome (Gerrig and Zimbardo, 2002).

**Social Support:** Resources, including material aid, socioemotional support, and informational aid, provided by others to help a person cope with stress (Gerrig and Zimbardo, 2002).
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): An anxiety disorder characterized by the persistent re-experience of traumatic events through distressing recollections, dreams, hallucinations, or dissociative flashbacks; developed in response to rapes, life-threatening events, severe injuries, and natural disasters (Gerrig and Zimbardo, 2002).

Depression: Depression is a medical illness that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Depression can have physical symptoms and emotional symptoms (Mayo Clinic staff, 2012).

Pet: a domestic or tamed animal or bird kept for companionship or pleasure and treated with care and affection.

Experiential therapy: “Experiential techniques help clients resolve unfinished business through re-experiencing significant life events and relationships, allowing them to work through unresolved conflicts and emotions to live more fully in the present” (Wegscheider-Cruse and Bougher, 1990).

Summary

The following literature review will begin by examining the effects of animals on people and their physiological functioning. It will look at how people can benefit from animals both as pets and as therapists as well as therapeutic interventions. Next, there will be a discussion of the premise of animal assisted therapy and its benefits, followed by a more detailed review of therapy animals in an office setting. This is followed by a review of how horses can be involved in a specialized type of animal assisted, experiential therapy.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Physiological Effects of Animals on People

Pets have a profound effect on human beings. In America, there are over 68 million pet dogs and over 75 million pet cats. Most pet owners report that their animals make them feel calm, happy, and better able to handle stress in their lives. Pets have been shown to lower blood pressure in humans (Allen, Blascovich, Tomaka, and Kelsey, 1991) and these animals are viewed as social support to many people. Individuals with few social contacts seem to benefit the most from having a pet because the pet offers their owner a coping skill to deal with stress, thereby lowering their blood pressure and offering a greater sense of well-being (Allen, 2003).

Animals play a major role in the lives of many people. Pets are seen as a source of psychological support by many of their owners. This is evidenced by the number of pet owners who refuse to evacuate their home in the face of a natural disaster without their pet (Heath, Kass, Beck, and Glickman 2001). Pets, specifically dogs, can help facilitate recovery from certain types of ailments; specifically coronary heart disease. Pet owners were shown to be more likely to be alive one year following a heart attack than individuals without pets. Different species of pets have been shown to have differing effects on recovery time, though. Paradoxically, however, cat owners were actually shown to be less likely to be alive one year following a heart attack than non-cat owners (Parker, Gayed, Owen, Hyett, Hilton, and Heruc 2010).

A study (Peacock, Chur-Hansen, and Winefield 2012) was conducted in Australia with 150 adults who lived with a companion animal. Most participants reported owning either a dog or a dog and a cat with relatively few owning just a cat or another animal.
The participants were given a five part survey that looked to gather demographic data, psychological well-being (assessed using the Brief Symptom Inventory-18), and social support as measured by the Multi-Dimensional Support Scale, companion animal attachment, and the owner pet relationship. The aim of the study was to explore the relationship of companion animal attachment and psychological distress and investigate whether the relationship between social isolation and psychological distress would be moderated by companion animal attachment. The study found that individuals with higher levels of social isolation and higher levels of companion animal attachment were more likely to show higher levels of psychological distress. This is contrary to other studies, but is still worth noting.

There is a downside to owning pets, however, and that is the mental health effects of their death. Humans tend to form very close attachments to their companion animals: many people consider their pets a part of their family. This brings strong grief reactions after the death of a pet. However, the percentage of people who experience major pathological disruption after the death of a pet is relatively low, or less than five percent. A small percentage of pet owners report significant features of grief following the loss of a pet that reaches meaningful, but subclinical levels, including profound sadness, emptiness, longing, bitterness, and obtrusive thoughts or memories of the deceased pet that cause at least a slight functional impairment. Very few people meet the criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or complicated grief (Luiz Adrian, Deliramich, and Frueh 2009). This is worth noting because, while animals do a lot of physical good for their human companions, clinicians should be aware of the psychological trauma that the death of an animal can cause.
Animals’ Role in Child Development

Animals, both in the home and outside, play a key role in the socio-emotional development of children. Animals can serve as transitional objects to human relationships. This allows for opportunities for socialization, emotional support, and emotional security. This is especially true for children with disabilities who may experience increased social isolation and stigma. Companion animals can serve as catalysts for social interaction; for example, children in wheelchairs have been shown to receive more friendly attention from a passerby when they had an animal with them (Horowitz, 2008). Children can gain more confidence during social interactions with an animal, leading to the ability to socialize without it, leading to increased feelings of self-esteem.

Companion animals can also play a role in providing the self-object needs of developing children. Children tend to be more at ease in forming friendships and relationships with animals and have an innate understanding that people are both human and animal. Alper (1993) states that in families where the parents were incapable of emotionally attuning to their child, or were unable to be adequate idealizable figures with whom their child could identify, the child has difficulty forming a positive sense of self. An animal does not criticize, retaliate, feel overwhelmed, or reject a child who wants to demonstrate their newly found self. In this way, animals can play a huge role in a child’s ability to form their own identity. A family pet can provide a means to healthy emotional balance and continued opportunities for emotional development. Melson (2003) found that pets foster positive psychosocial development in children as evidenced by children who show enhanced empathy, self-esteem, cognitive development, and greater
involvement in social and athletic activities. Melson believes that children’s early interest in animals is due in part to a child being exposed to animals in stories, toys, and television programming.

**Introduction to Animal Assisted Psychotherapy**

Researchers have shown that animals can reduce the physiological reactions to stress. Allen et al. (1991) set out to gather physiological proof that companion animals, namely dogs, could affect levels of stress as reported by their owners. They conducted an experimental study involving women who reported having high levels of stress in their jobs. These women all had jobs within helping professions, such as nursing, teaching, medicine, etc. They were asked to perform difficult mental arithmetic tasks in one of three conditions; alone with the experimenter, alone with their best friend, and alone with their own dog. The women’s blood pressure was measured along with skin conductance response and heart rate. The women reported that they felt challenged by the task when their dogs were present. They reported feeling threatened by the task when only their best friend was present. In addition, the women with their dogs performed the more difficult arithmetic task considerably better than the women with their best friend or the experimenter. When asked, the women with their dogs reported that there was no fear of being judged and that the dogs exhibited all the qualities they would want in a best friend without some of the undesirable traits their friends might have (Allen et al. 1991). A very important characteristic of a good therapist is being nonjudgmental and, because animals are inherently nonjudgmental, they can enrich the therapeutic process and enhance the relationship between client and therapist.
Animal Assisted Therapy in the Office

Animals have long been associated with promoting physical and mental wellbeing in humans, but only recently has any research been done on the topic. Until the 1990s, the only information available was anecdotal and scarce. One of the first anecdotal evidence was published in the 1960s. Levinson, a psychology professor at Yeshiva University in New York City, had a resistant, uncommunicative child as a client. Levinson left the child in a room with his dog, Jingles, for a few minutes. Upon Levinson’s return, the child was talking to the dog (Reichert, 1998). Levinson stated that animal assisted therapy is very different from play therapy because therapists recognize that dolls and clay cannot respond or share a child’s feelings. He states, “Despite the fact that little is known about the meaning of an animal pet to a child, we know that the interaction between a child and his pet is psychodynamically very complex.” The way a child handles a pet is much more expressive and revealing of his mental state and attitude toward the world than is his play with toys (Levinson, 1965). Children often view animals as family members, so how they interact with an animal can be indicative of how they interact with people.

Animal assisted therapy is an umbrella term for diverse therapeutic approaches that are used with people of all ages wherein an animal is an integral part of the therapy process. Animal assisted therapy involves interactions in the therapy room between an animal, a client, and a therapist with the aim of improving therapeutic outcomes. Some clients may be pet owners, but the therapy interactions are with an animal that is unknown to the client. Some therapists present the animal as a co-therapist or facilitator, others present them as their own pets, and others let the clients decide how they wish to
refer to the animal (Kruger and Serpell, 2006). It is left up to the therapist how he or she wants to present the animal and is dependent upon the relationship with the client and his or her presenting problem.

Imber-Black (2009) tells a story of a family that came to his office for family therapy. The adult children of a 79 year old woman worried that their mother was becoming demented and were arguing about what to do to help her. The family reported that they were once a loving unit until the current situation, and now they only fight. One family member began to cry, and Imber-Black’s cat, Snuggles, jumped into her lap and wrapped its paws around her neck. The family took a cue from Snuggles to reach out to one another, and one of the sons grabbed his mother’s hand. He said, “Oh, maybe this is how we can help each other.” This interaction with an intuitive cat served as the catalyst for the family’s therapy going in a positive direction.

**Animal Assisted Therapy with Youth**

Animal assisted therapy can be helpful in fostering a sense of interconnectivity for young clients while acting as a catalyst to encourage a young client’s active participation in treatment. The first step in a young person’s acceptance of therapy can be the achievement of a positive relationship with the therapy animal. The animal offers unconditional acceptance of the young person and can increase self-esteem and self-perception due to the feelings of connectedness with the animal. With the assistance of a trained therapist, the client is left feeling like he or she have something to offer outside of the therapy room with the help of the relationship with the therapy animal. Expansion of self-worth feelings outside of the therapy room occurs and awareness that he or she are
capable of maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with another. The animal can help a young client develop a sense of place and purpose because it helps the individual with overall self-acceptance (Hawkins, 2012). The therapeutic alliance is of huge importance when working with children, and the presence of an animal therapy “assistant” can sometimes speed the development of the relationship.

**Animal Assisted Therapy in Schools**

Dogs have been found to be helpful in school counseling offices as well. One study describes two boys with emotional disturbances that had, over time, become more emotionally stable. Each boy experienced a personal crisis and acted out when they arrived back at school. They were escorted to the school counselor’s office that contained a therapy dog trained to rest its head on a child’s lap when the child became disregulated or expressed an escalation of anger. During the beginning of the session, the counselor did not interact with the student, but simply observed what was happening in the room. Reportedly, within a half an hour of interaction with the therapy dogs, the boys were expressing their emotions while petting the dog. Within two hours both boys were ready to go back to their classrooms to attempt some school work. The therapy dogs did not fix the student, but they helped provide temporary healing to help de-escalate and refocus in school (Geist, 2011). The boys reported feeling comforted by the dog, demonstrating how profound an effect a therapy dog can have when utilized to its potential with an equally well trained therapist.

Kogan, Granger., Fitchett, Helmer, and Young (1999) looked at two case studies where animal assisted therapy was used with children with emotional disorders. Two boys, ages 11 and 12, were chosen for the study. Both of these boys were placed into an
emotional support classroom and received weekly group and individual counseling services through the school. Each boy had an individualized education plan and was not showing any improvement with these additional supports. Each student was given fourteen individual sessions with an animal assisted therapist. At the culmination of the fourteenth session, the boys were to present the commands they had learned with the dog to their class.

The first twenty minutes of the sessions were used to talk with the student and build rapport while grooming the dog. The therapist introduced topics as they related to recent issues in the classroom, but the boys were never forced to discuss any of the topics. The second half of the session was spent working on various training techniques with the dog. As the sessions progressed, more difficult commands were introduced that required multiple steps and patience from the student. Their progress was measured by administering the boys’ teachers an ADHD Comprehensive Teacher Rating Scale both before and after treatment. The progress reports showed the boys using more positive comments, decreased levels of distractibility, an increase in eye contact with other people, improved appropriateness of voice tone, and a decrease in tantrums in the classroom. They also showed decreased negative symptoms associated with ADHD at the conclusion of the fourteen sessions. The dogs were used in a different way in the above study than the one previous, but still showed similar results; more focus in the students, more appropriate socialization, and a decrease in negative behaviors in the classroom. These findings would suggest that the one common factor, the dogs, was the catalyst for change.
Benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy for Social Skills

Research into animal assisted therapy suggests that interacting with a therapy animal can help encourage a client’s social interaction with peers because of a therapy animal’s perceived non-judgmental nature. It appears that interactions in animal assisted therapy settings are encouraged in one of three ways: the animal offers a unique kind of unconditional social support for a client with emotional disorders by acting as the client’s friend (as perceived by the client), the animal’s spontaneous enthusiasm for social interaction may provide a stimulus for the child’s own social behavior, or the animal may increase positive initiation interactions with the therapist while both are interacting with the animal (Friesen, 2010). This increased level of social interactions can help the client learn new social skills as they relate to the animal. By the same token, these social skills can be related to other people in their world.

A meta-analysis was performed by Chitic, Rusu, and Szamoskozi (2012) to determine the effect of animal assisted therapy on social skills and communication skills in people of all ages. The criteria for inclusion in the meta-analysis were that the original study had to be published in English, cover the domain of animal assisted therapy, utilize a control, and offer enough data to calculate the effect size using a Cohen’s D. The meta-analysis utilized variables that can moderate the effects of animal assisted therapy, such as the type of animal used, its level of training, the method of administering therapy (individual, group, or mixed), and the number and duration of the sessions. Results showed a large effect size of using an animal in the therapy room. The meta-analysis indicates that animal assisted therapy might function as a complementary therapy in the treatment of deficits in social skills and communication. One of the important effects in
animal assisted therapy that was not taken into account by any article analyzed is the novelty effect. Animal assisted therapy interventions may seem more effective at first because of the sheer novelty of having an animal in the room. The novelty effect can generate new enthusiasm for therapy. Despite the novelty effect, the effect size was large enough to suggest that animals can be a beneficial addition to a therapeutic program for improving social skills.

**Animal Assisted Therapy in the Treatment of Anxiety**

Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome and is often accompanied by physical symptoms (Gerrig and Zimbardo, 2002). A study by Barker and Dawson (1998) into the effects of animal assisted therapy on the anxiety ratings of hospitalized psychiatric patients looked at 230 patients that were referred for therapeutic recreation sessions. The patients were administered an anxiety rating scale before and after participating in two types of sessions; one with animals present and one without. Results showed significant differences in the ratings of anxiety before the animal assisted therapy session and after the session. Patients diagnosed with psychotic disorders, mood disorders, and other disorders showed significantly lower anxiety ratings after the animal assisted session, while the only patients that showed comparably low anxiety ratings after the traditional session were the patients with mood disorders. This suggests that animal assisted therapy techniques can be useful in reducing anxiety in all clients regardless of their diagnoses.

**Animal Assisted Therapy in Inpatient Settings**

Another study conducted by Prothmann, Beinert, and Ettrich (2006) looked at the
possible influences of animal assisted therapy on the state of mind of children and adolescents that had undergone psychiatric treatment in an inpatient setting. A control group did not receive any therapy sessions with a dog present while another group received five individual therapy sessions with a therapy dog. The group that received the animal assisted therapy demonstrated increased levels of alertness and vitality, and the participants appeared more psychologically well balanced. Additionally, these effects were stronger and more apparent the worse the individual felt before the session with the dog.

Mallon (1994) conducted a qualitative study using farm animals with 80 children in a residential setting in New York City. The children were between seven and sixteen years old, were racially mixed, and mostly urban. They were being treated for significant behavioral, emotional, and academic difficulties. Mallon discovered that the children who tended to the farm animals often used the animal as a nonjudgmental, confidential therapist. In fact, many of the children would visit the animals on their free time and speak openly to them. The children reported increased feelings of wellbeing from interacting with the animals. Mallon found that sometimes visiting the animals with the children could be a catalyst for change in bringing the therapist and child together in their therapeutic relationship.

A study by Barak, Savorai, Mavashev and Beni (2001) investigated whether an animal assisted therapy program would encourage increased mobility, interpersonal contacts, communication, and reinforced activities of daily living with elderly patients diagnosed with schizophrenia in a psychogeriatric ward. Results of the study found that animal assisted therapy could have a positive effect on this population demonstrated by
significant improvement on all of the above aspects. Marked improvements in social functioning were evident after six months of treatment. Elderly individuals, especially those in some sort of residential setting, require extra levels of social support. This study suggests that presenting an animal in an assisted living type residential setting can be of great benefit to the clients and their ability to socialize and communicate with others.

Hanselman (2001) measured coping skill interventions with adolescents in an anger management group that utilized therapy dogs. The subjects in the study were either court referred or self-referred to an anger management group. All of the group members had a history of parental brutality ranging from verbal to physical abuse. All of the group members had also abused animals in some form in their past. The group lasted for twelve weeks and included one outing to a local county jail. Two trained therapy dogs that had been previously abused and rescued were intermittently brought into the sessions to compare the differences for when the dogs were not present. The dogs were used for both petting and as props for discussions. The dogs’ abuse stories were shared with the groups and the group was shown a video about the link between animal abuse and later human violence. The dogs’ stories and the video were used as a discussion starter about how someone can manage to still love and be a caring person even after trauma. The group members were administered the Companion Animal Bonding Scale and the statistical means showed a significant increase in animal bonding. In addition, the presence of the dogs increased feelings of happiness, security, and self-worth and decreased feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress as reported by the group members. This study is important because it highlights the innate ability of an animal to bring about change in a human, be it through their story or history or through their simply being
empathetic and nonjudgmental.

**Animals in Group Therapy**

Animal assisted therapy can be effective in group therapy settings. A study by Folse, Minder, Avcock, and Santana (1994) looked at adult college students with depression. Forty four students with a median age of 21 were involved in group therapy sessions. Half of the students were in a control group that did not receive any animal assisted interventions. The other half of the group was split into two groups of eleven. One group was directive and interacted with an energetic seven-month-old collie puppy. The other nondirective group interacted with a quiet two-year-old female collie. All group participants met for 45 minutes once a week for seven weeks. Utilizing the Beck Depression Inventory as a measure of depression, the students in the group with the younger dog and directive leader showed significant improvement of mood when compared to the directive group with the older dog and the control. This could be attributed to the uplifting attitude and playfulness of the younger dog and the directive of the leader telling the participants to interact with the dog. The participants with the older dog and non-directive leader did not interact with the dog as much, thereby not receiving the physiological benefits of animal interaction. This is important to note because it shows the importance of selecting the proper therapy animal for different populations and needs. It is also worth noting that selecting the right animal shows the skill of a group leader, as well as the leader’s skills in directing the group.

**Animal Assisted Therapy and Autism**

Animal assisted therapy interventions can be very useful in priming children with Autism Spectrum Disorder for therapy. A 2011 case study looked at a twelve year old
boy diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder that had not been to therapy previously. The boy attended two therapy sessions per week; one with only a therapist present and one with a therapist and a trained therapy dog present. The sessions took place on nonconsecutive days during the week. The sessions were videotaped for comparison purposes so that behaviors could be quantified. The author found that found that, as compared to the control conditions, the presence of the dog during one on one interactions with the therapist was associated with higher levels of engagement from the boy. Additionally, he displayed fewer negative behaviors, namely aggressive and obsessive manifestations. He was more likely to listen to the therapist with the dog present and was more able to maintain his attention on her. Based on these findings, the study concluded that animal assisted therapy can help get an Autistic client ready for therapy and help them get maximum results (Silva, Correia, Lima, Magalhães and de Sousa, 2011

Not only is animal assisted therapy a tool for priming clients on the Autism Spectrum for therapy, but it is an effective intervention to use once they enter into therapy. Pitts (2005) believes this is because the animal becomes a transitional object to which the child forms a bond. According to Pitts, the relationship with the animal can help the client develop more relationships with people in their life. Autistic clients tend more to stay on task when in the presence of a therapy animal and talk less about topics that are unrelated to the clinical conversation and instead, talk more about the animal. Autistic children especially display a higher level of activity focused on their environment with an animal present (Pitts, 2005)
Structure of Animal Assisted Therapy Sessions

It is necessary that an animal assisted therapist have goals for each client. These goals can include improving fine motor skills, completing educational assignments, improving mental and emotional status, reducing anxiety and depression, and increasing motivation (Watts and Everly, 2009). Very often, children ascribe their own traits to animals and find the animal to be a safe, nonjudgmental listener. When using animal assisted therapy, the therapist must understand the bond between humans and animals and that, when an animal is used in a therapy setting, the need for language decreases. The client often finds it easier to express him or herself through physical interaction with the animal. Therefore, the counselor must rely more on body language than actual statements made by the client (George, 1988). When working with children, an indirect interview using the animal can be a useful approach. For example, the therapist may ask the child, “Buster would like to know about your favorite game” (Reichert, 1998). This can be especially useful when working with trauma victims. The animal, be it a dog, cat, horse, rabbit, or any other creature, can create a sense of calm with the child and can give them an outlet to discuss their experience without having to tell it to the adult. Animal assisted therapy is unique in that it incorporates a specific curriculum that is tailored to each client using the therapy animal. Additionally, some researchers believe that when children are taught how to properly treat animals, the children can generalize that knowledge toward the appropriate treatment of people (Grado, E. M, 2011).

Considerations When Implementing Animal Assisted Therapy

There are some treatment planning considerations that need to be addressed when working with animal assisted therapy techniques. Hoelscher and Garfat (1993) wrote
that, the therapist needs to possess the knowledge necessary to assess the needs of their client in relation to the contact with the therapy animal, utilize the appropriate animal and/or activity, and objectively evaluate the results for effectiveness. Once the goals of treatment are established with the client, the use of any animal to realize that goal must be carefully thought out. The therapist must ascertain information about previous pet ownership and attitude toward certain animals. For example, bringing a large dog to a session with a client who was once attacked by a large dog and is afraid would be detrimental to that client’s therapeutic process. The temperaments of the animal and client must also be matched with the goals of treatment (Parshall 2003). The issue of aggression is of concern to some therapists as well. Children who have not been treated kindly tend to be less gentle with animals (Mallon, 1994). The therapist must be able to intervene to prevent potential animal abuse and to protect the client from an animal that might defend itself. If the client and animal are not interacting beneficially, the therapist must take the appropriate steps to remove the animal and utilize a predetermined alternate plan. If it is safe to do so, teaching children how to treat the animal gently can be a therapeutic benefit in itself.

There are a few cultural issues that need to be addressed as well when practicing animal assisted therapy. When working with dogs, it is important to note that some cultures, most notably Middle Eastern or Southeast Asian cultures, regard dogs as unclean or generally as a nuisance. The local community needs to be evaluated if a clinician plans on bringing a dog into a therapeutic setting. With this in mind, sometimes children are naïve to their cultural beliefs about dogs and can have a very positive response to a therapy dog. This is most often surprising to the child’s parents who view
the dog with disgust. It is important for adults to keep an open mind to see how a child will react instead of assuming they will react as the adults do (Jolongo, Astorino, and Bomboy 2004).

**Equine Assisted Psychotherapy**

Equine assisted psychotherapy is an area of animal assisted therapy that is quite different from what has been discussed thus far. According to the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is intense and effective and is thereby considered a brief approach to therapy. The client participates in activities with the horses and then processes feelings, behaviors, and patterns that are observed. Clients and therapists do not interact directly for most of an equine assisted therapy session. Instead, the therapist and horse professional direct the client to perform a task or complete an activity using the horse. The therapist and horse professional then step back and watch the process take place. When the activity is completed, the treatment team comes together with the client to discuss what happened with the horses, what happened with the client, and what the client thought about it all. The role of the horse is as a metaphor in equine assisted therapy and very often the client recognizes the metaphors in their own life before the treatment team (EAGALA 2009).

A typical session with a client involves setting up activities and creating cause and effect situations for the client with the horses that require the client to find coping strategies. These types of activities have been found increase trust, self-confidence, problem solving skills, and self-esteem in a way that is transferrable to other aspects of day to day life. The task of leading a horse can give light to a client’s social skills. The therapist is given an opportunity to see if the client simply pulls on the rope or tries to get the horse to
willingly go with them (Bexson 2008).

An example of a typical activity in an equine assisted therapy session is grooming the horse. The equine specialist can instruct the client in how to groom the horse or simply hand them some brushes and tell them to get started. An important factor in horse grooming is cleaning the horses’ feet. The client often becomes acutely aware that the horse will only lift their hoof if they choose to do so. The client is often unable to force the horse to lift their hoof. More often than not, the client perceives this as resistance or unwillingness by the horse to cooperate. This can lead to feelings of fear, inadequacy, or anger, which opens an opportunity for the therapist to process feelings immediately. After some time, the client learns that the horse is much more likely to pick up their foot if the client is calm and relaxed instead of fearful and angry (Schultz, Remick-Barlow, and Robbins, 2007)

The most significant factor in successful intervention outcomes is the therapeutic relationship. Horses may help to facilitate the establishment of a positive therapeutic relationship. For example, many of the exercises and activities utilized in equine assisted psychotherapy are problem solving tasks that occur in novel surroundings, often forcing the client (and sometimes the therapist) to view situations in a different light than what is possible in a traditional therapeutic setting. Within this model, communication is based primarily on observations rather than what is said. Hidden emotions often emerge easily in this setting because the client is actively involved at solving problems at hand. Following each activity, the client processes the experience with the therapist and is encouraged to make connections between what occurred in the session and what occurs in their day to day life (Selby & Smith-Osborne, 2013)
Horses are prey animals, and therefore have developed highly effective communication systems that are based primarily on body language. In this regard, horses are also finely tuned in “picking up” human emotions and intentions. Horses are herd animals that form strong social bonds and their herd behavior shows a cooperative form of living. Each horse has a place in the herd and the herd has a leader. Clients often identify the horses’ needs for safety and security in session, drawing a metaphor of their own feelings by way of the horse. In order to work safely and effectively with the horses, the client must model behaviors that the horse responds to positively; such as calmness, clarity, and fair leadership (Burgon, 2011).

Horses bring up a wide range of emotions and behaviors in humans which can be used as a catalyst for personal growth and awareness (Zugich, Klontz, and Leinart, 2002). Horses also offer many opportunities for projection and transference for the client. A horse walking away or “ignoring” a client can bring up many emotions for the client and may lead the client to speculate as to why the horse is walking away. Other activities common for horses, such as biting, sleeping, eating, and vocalizing, can bring up emotions for clients. These projections offer the therapist great insight into the client and can aid in creating metaphors for them. Horses give accurate and unbiased feedback when they mirror the physical and emotional state of the client during a session, thus providing clients with an opportunity to raise their own awareness and practice congruence between their feelings and behaviors (Zugich et al. 2002). Equine assisted therapy can reach clients in a way that traditional therapy cannot. The interventions in this modality are set up as exercises where the therapist and horse specialist have little direct interaction with the client through the duration of the exercise. Oftentimes, the
client will ask the therapist of horse specialist to help them get through an exercise when they are having trouble, but the treatment team never concedes. The exercises are set up in a way that allows the client to attribute their own meaning and judgment and then relay these back to the treatment team. This allows the therapist to utilize the experience in a metaphoric way to illuminate to the client his or her response to the exercise. Because the horses are large, formidable creatures, they remain visible reminders of how large a client’s disorder can be. This insight can be utilized to gain perspective on a problem and truly realize the need for support (Christian, 2005).

Research has been done into the efficacy of equine assisted therapy as a therapeutic intervention. A clinical trial was conducted to examine the effectiveness of equine assisted therapy by measuring clinical distress (Brief Symptom Inventory) and self-actualization (Personal Orientation Inventory) prior to treatment, immediately following treatment, and six months following treatment. Participants in the trial attended eight equine assisted therapy sessions within eight months. As predicted, participants showed stable and significant reductions in their overall psychological distress and enhanced psychological well-being from pretest to posttest to the follow up. They reported being more oriented in the present, better able to live more fully in the present, less burdened by guilt, regrets, and resentments, less focused on fears rooted in the future, more independent, and more self-supportive (Klontz, Bivens, Leinart, and Klontz, 2007).

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy for trauma survivors

Equine assisted psychotherapy has been shown to bring about improvements in
the psychological well-being of trauma survivors. In their 2008 study, Meinersmann, Bradberry, and Roberts set out to see how participating in an equine facilitated therapy program aids women in recovery from abuse. The sample was drawn from women all over the continental United States who had endured abuse at some point in their lives. Abuse was broadly defined as physical, mental, and/or sexual. Data was gathered through a formal interview in a private setting. Data was compared using audio recordings of the formal interviews. The participants’ interviews showed four major patterns reflective of their experience participating in an equine facilitated therapy program. The patterns were named using the women’s words: “I can have power”, “Doing it hands on”, “Horses as co-therapists”, and “Turned my life around”. In regard to “I can have power”, the women reported that their equine therapy program helped them realize that they did not need to feel powerless any more. “Doing it hands on” brought up stories of interactions with the horse that involved physical, kinesthetic, and visual experiences that also gave the women back their power and ability to make a difference.

Horses can be particularly effective when working with clients suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Individuals with this diagnosis often isolate themselves, have difficulty connecting with other people, and have difficulty trusting other people. Maclean (2001) believes people connect more easily with animals because the animals are more accepting of them, do not talk back, are nonjudgmental, and enjoy being touched. This is part of the reason that pet therapy has become so popular. Horses are much larger than the average pet, and because of their size, bring up feelings in people that are much different from those brought up by a dog or a cat. Individuals with PTSD
sometimes have trouble controlling their impulses and, when around horses, realize that if they express anger violently or make sudden movements, the horse is large enough to cause them harm if startled. Due to their own hyper vigilance, those with PTSD can easily understand and relate to the hyper vigilance present in horses.

There are dozens of interventions that can be used when practicing animal assisted therapy. It has been found to be helpful when working with clients of all ages, ethnicities, and most cultures. Therapy animals can be brought into group and individual counseling sessions, used in drug and alcohol treatment programs, and in residential type programs with great benefit to the client. Animals can serve as a surrogate therapist when working with children, as a friendly dog or cat is often much easier to open up to than an adult. Because animals lessen the physiological symptoms of stress, like blood pressure, they can help clients to feel more at ease in the counseling environment. The easement of physical stress can dampen a client’s anxiety in the therapy room, making the process easier and less stressful.
Chapter III: Project Audience and Implementation Factors

Introduction

Through education and participatory exercises, the goal of this workshop is to teach therapists about animal assisted therapy and its benefits, as well as give them tools to utilize animals within the framework of their own practice. Throughout the workshop, attendees will explore the history and existing literature about animals in therapy. The workshop leader will demonstrate interventions and techniques that can be used in sessions. He or she will also present videos and vignettes to show different techniques when using animals as an intervention.

Development of Project

In creating this workshop, I have examined an abundance of literature regarding animals, their effects on people, and how to use them in a therapeutic setting. I have also attended the requisite trainings to become a certified Equine Assisted Psychotherapy practitioner through EAGALA. I am an accomplished equestrian, well versed in equine training techniques, behavior, and relationships.

My training and life experience has given me a foundation in the topics to be addressed in the workshop. This research and training has given me the working knowledge to develop interventions and activities that use animals in a therapeutic manner to help people. I also have amassed enough knowledge to pass on what I have learned to other therapists so they might learn new techniques to use in their practice.
Intended Audience

The current workshop is designed for all mental health professionals, but therapists are the true target audience. This workshop will recruit attendees by placing ads in CAMFT publications and advertising in trade publications. Attendees should not have an aversion or allergy to animals as there will be at least one therapy dog present at the trainings. This will be clearly noted in the advertisements. Participants must be open minded to nontraditional therapy techniques.

Personal Qualification

Due to the teaching and therapeutic nature of the workshop, it is required that the workshop leader be a practicing animal assisted therapist. He or she must possess one or more therapy animals that they are willing to bring to the training for demonstration purposes.

Environment and Equipment

The workshop should be held in a room large enough to hold approximately 15-20 attendees, the facilitator, and the animal(s) brought by the facilitator. The room needs to have a projector and screen so that the accompanying PowerPoint presentation can be shown. There must be a sufficient amount chairs and desks or tables so that everyone may sit comfortably. There also needs to be ample space for the role plays to take place with the animals present. The evaluator will distribute a workshop outline at the beginning of the presentation.
Formative Evaluation

In order to gain feedback and obtain suggestions about this workshop, I consulted with professors within the Marriage and Family Therapy program at California State University, Northridge as well as colleagues within the program. The primary goal of this workshop is to provide an introduction to animal assisted therapy to working therapists. The participants will be familiar with the research about animal assisted therapy and the basics of how it can be implemented. This workshop is not designed to be the only information that a therapist needs to begin practicing animal assisted therapy, but as a starting point in the journey to integrating an animal into their therapeutic practice.
Chapter IV: Conclusion

Summary of Project

The current project is a four hour workshop for therapists designed to teach about the topic of animal assisted therapy. Through an in depth presentation, participatory exercises, and demonstrations, it is hoped that attendees will gain a new knowledge of a relatively new therapy tool and intervention. The goal of the workshop is to assist the mental health professional in integrating animals into their practice and go on to do so.

This project is divided into five sections which include four chapters and the curriculum for the workshop. The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the problem: there is a potentially very useful intervention that most therapists are unaware of or are not using, if they are aware. This chapter briefly explains what animal assisted therapy is and how it can be used. The second chapter gives an extensive review of the literature that exists regarding the use of animals in therapy. It begins by looking at the manner in which animals affect humans on a physiological and psychological level in day to day functioning. The next section looks at the definition of animal assisted therapy and how it developed. Next is an in depth review of how animals have been and can be used in a therapy office setting. The final section of the literature review looks at equine assisted therapy as a specialized branch of animal assisted psychotherapy. Chapter three restates the need for the project, followed by an explanation of how the project was developed. It also includes the intended audience, qualifications necessary for the presenter, and the environment and equipment necessary to carry out the workshop. The fourth chapter presents a brief summary of the project, along with limitations and
potential areas of future research. Lastly, the project includes the curriculum for a four hour workshop for therapists and mental health practitioners. Whether a therapist is going to practice animal assisted therapy themselves or refer to someone who does, it is important to be familiar with this emerging and effective intervention.

**Recommendations for Implementation**

It is recommended that the facilitator use the included PowerPoint presentation as a guideline and add in his or her own experiences and anecdotes. Each presenter is different with different practical experiences using animals in therapeutic practice. The presenter may also change the vignettes and role play situations to fit the needs of the group in attendance. For example, more emphasis can be placed on using animals when working with children if a group of school psychologists are present. The included vignettes are meant as a means to open up dialogue and discussion. The presenter is encouraged to take the material and expand on it with their own knowledge base.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It became very obvious to me as I began researching this topic that literature on this topic is limited. As this area of psychotherapy gains popularity, there is a need for more quantitative research to be done on the effect that trained therapy animals can have in a session. Most of what has been studied is case studies or anecdotes. Additionally, a majority of past research focuses on children and how they interact with animals in session. It should be noted that animals can be highly beneficial for adults in therapy. In the future, perhaps more research can be done centered on individual adults and couples to see if animals can be helpful in those arenas as well.
Conclusion

Alternative therapies are becoming more widely accepted in today’s therapeutic landscape. In particular, the benefits of animal assisted therapy are slowly gaining recognition by clinicians and clients. I became interested in this topic after bringing my own dog to a session with my personal therapist and seeing how she was able to calm me when I was experiencing anxiety. As my interest in this topic grew, I recognized that it is not as well-known as I originally thought. There is a staggeringly small amount of research that has been done on this topic, and hopefully the workshop laid out in this project can inspire other clinicians to look outside the box, so to speak, when it comes to working with their clients. Animals can bring out the best in people and exact great change on the lives they touch. It is my hope that, in doing this project, I can help others in the way that animals have helped me.
References


Appendix A: Presentation PowerPoint Slides

Animal Assisted Psychotherapy
Animal Assisted Psychotherapy

• What is it?
  • An umbrella term for diverse therapeutic approaches that are used with people of all ages in which an animal is an integral part of the therapy process
  • Interactions in the therapy room are between the client, the therapist, and the animal
  • The therapist always has a goal for their client, be it improving motor skills, coordination, communication, etc.
Origination

- Boris Levinson of Yeshiva University was the first person to write about animal assisted psychotherapy
  - Levinson discovered that when he left an uncommunicative child in his office with his dog, the child began speaking to and interacting with the dog.
  - “Despite the fact that little is known about the meaning of an animal pet to a child, we know that the interaction between a child and his pet is psychodynamically very complex.”
Why Animals?

• Animals have been shown to reduce physiological signs of stress in humans
  • Allen et al. conducted a study where women were given a math test and either had their dog, a tester, or their best friend present
    • Participants reported feeling the lowest levels of stress when the dog was present because there was no fear of judgment
Why animals?

- Animals can be especially important to childhood development and the sense of self
  - Animals serve as attachment objects and help a child with socialization, emotional support, and emotional stability
  - Children with disabilities are especially helped by an animal because the animal can serve as a catalyst for socialization
How does AAT work?

• The animal is an integral part of the therapy process
  • The animal is presented with the intent of improving therapeutic outcomes
  • The animal can be presented as the therapist’s pet, the co-therapist, or it can be left to the client to decide how they want to interpret the animal

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCbDUUxl7h4&feature=player_detailpage
How does AAT work?

• AAT is especially helpful with young children
  • It is much easier for a child to tell a dog or a cat why they are feeling sad instead of an adult or a therapist
  • The relationship between a child and an animal is very complex and allows the therapist a different view of the child’s world from traditional play therapy
“Can you tell Buddy why you are sad?”
Vignette

• You are a therapist practicing Animal Assisted Psychotherapy in private practice with your trained therapy dog. Jimmy, an eight year old boy with poor social skills, has been brought to you by his parents who are concerned about him at school. Jimmy’s teacher has told them that he has been bullied and is often picked on at school, but Jimmy has not told them anything about it. He is withdrawn, afraid of interacting with adults and other children, and relies on his parents to communicate with others.

• How would you utilize your therapy dog to work with Jimmy?

• Do you think that animal assisted therapy could help Jimmy with his school problems?
Vignette

• You are a therapist in private practice with an office cat who sometimes accompanies you in sessions. Janice and Mark are a middle aged married couple with no children. Janice reports that she suffers from anxiety attacks and is resistant to counseling but will try at Mark’s insistence. Mark reports that they are having trouble in their marriage relating to Janice being very needy and clingy. Mark also reports that he works long hours and has little time to spend with Janice during the week, but tries to give her attention on the weekends. He reports feeling out of touch with the relationship.

• Janice has an anxiety attack in the middle of your first session. How might your office cat help? What interventions can you do with the cat to help Janice and Mark?
• AAT works with clients of all demographics, not just children
  • AAT has been shown to be very effective with trauma victims, as the animal is a safe “person” with whom to share their feelings
  • Individuals on the Autism Spectrum can learn new social skills when working with animals that they can generalize to other people
  • The inherent ability of animals to reduce stress in humans can be used in sessions when a client is in crisis
Equine Assisted Psychotherapy

• Horses can be effective therapy animals to do experiential therapy
  • EAP is effective and intensive, and is thereby considered a brief therapy
  • The horse comes to serve as a metaphor for the client
  • Some goals of EAP are to increase self-confidence, improve communication skills, increase trust, and improve problem solving skills
Equine Assisted Psychotherapy

• An EAP session looks very different from an animal assisted therapy session in an office
  • The therapy team consists of the therapist, the equine specialist, and the horse(s)
  • The client is given a task to complete with the horse(s) and then does the task with little input from the therapist
  • The equine specialist makes observations about the horse and is in constant dialogue with the therapist
Equine Assisted Psychotherapy

• When the client has either completed the task or time for the session is almost over, the team comes together with the client to process
• Very often the client will be able to pick up on metaphors while they interact with the horse
• It is the therapist’s job to interpret these metaphors and help create change in the client’s thinking using their interaction with the horse
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Drm_vK5deFs&feature=player_detailpage
Appendix B: Presenter Notes

A. Physiological effects of animals on people

1. Researchers have found that pets can lower blood pressure in humans

2. Animals oftentimes serve as social support to people with few social contacts, lowering their blood pressure and offering coping skills for dealing with stressors
   i. The importance of pets to their owners can be seen when examining the number of pet owners who refuse to evacuate in the face of a natural disaster without their pet
   ii. Pet owners can help their owners recover from coronary heart disease and often recover more quickly from health problems

B. Animals can play a role in childhood development

1. Animals can be transitional objects for human relationships, allowing for opportunities for socialization, emotional support, and emotional security
   i. For children with disabilities, animals can serve as catalysts in social interactions
   ii. Companion animals can help teach children empathy, improve their self-esteem, and foster cognitive development

2. In families where the parents are unable to provide emotional attachment or serve as social role models for their children, the children often seek out a family pet as an attachment figure

3. Animals do not criticize, retaliate, feel overwhelmed by, or reject a child and their emotional needs
C. Animals can reduce the physiological signs of stress in humans

1. Researchers have found that dogs can lower blood pressure in a testing environment

2. Test subjects reported that they felt judged, and therefore stressed, when their human best friend was present, but not when their dog was with them
   i. Additionally, they reported that their dogs exhibited all the qualities they would look for in a friend without the undesirable traits that a friend might have

D. The first writings that appeared about animal assisted psychotherapy were from Dr. Boris Levinson, a psychology professor at Yeshiva University in the 1960s

1. Levinson wrote that animal assisted therapy is very different from play therapy because the therapist knows that a doll cannot respond to a child or share their feelings

2. “Despite the fact that little is known about the meaning of an animal pet to a child, we know that the interaction between a child and his pet is psychodynamically very complex.”

3. Levinson wrote that the way a child handles a pet is much more expressive and revealing of his mental state than playing with a toy or simply talking to a therapist

E. Animal assisted therapy is an umbrella term for diverse therapeutic approaches that are used with people of all ages wherein an animal is an integral part of the therapy process
F. Animal assisted therapy is highly effective with young clients, as the animal offers unconditional acceptance of the young person and can increase their self-esteem and feelings of connectedness.

G. Animals can be used by school counselors to help contain disregulated and angry children and teach children feelings of self-efficacy.
   i. When used in a school counseling environment, dogs can bring about change in students’ focus, socialization, and a decrease in negative attention seeking behaviors.

H. Children perceive animals as nonjudgmental, and the child often perceives the therapy animal as their own personal friend.
   1. The therapy animal demonstrates spontaneous enthusiasm for social interactions with a child client, acting as a stimulus for a child’s social behavior.
   2. A child in therapy to improve their social skills can have more positive interactions with a therapist while both interact with a therapy animal.

I. Studies have suggested that animals can reduce anxiety symptoms in inpatient settings with all patients, regardless of their diagnosis.
   1. In inpatient settings, groups that received animal assisted interventions in counseling demonstrated increased levels of alertness and vitality appeared more psychologically well balanced.
   2. Some inpatient programs have on site farms that require tending by the patients.
      i. Oftentimes, patients can be found visiting the animals during
their free time

ii. They report being able to speak openly with the animals in their care and increased feelings of well-being from their animal interactions

3. Animal assisted interventions have been shown to be highly effective in anger management groups with adolescents
   i. Two trained therapy dogs with history of abuse were used for petting and as props for discussion with a group of adolescents in an anger management group
   ii. One of the key points discussed regarding the dogs was their ability to love and be gentle even after having experienced trauma
   iii. The group members showed increased feelings of happiness, security, and self-worth as measured by the Companion Animal Bonding Scale

J. It is very important to select the proper therapy animal for different populations
   1. The ability to do so shows the therapist’s skill level and knowledge of their client and animal

K. Individuals with Autism have shown a greater ability to attune to a therapist and display fewer negative behaviors when a therapy animal is present
   1. A case study looked at a boy who was engaging in “pre-therapy” sessions with an animal assisted therapist
      i. He was more likely to listen to the therapist and maintain
attention when the therapy dog was present

ii. He also displayed fewer aggressive and obsessive behaviors when the dog was in the room.

iii. Based on these findings, it is suggested that animal assisted therapy can help an Autistic client get ready for true psychotherapy and maximize the result.

2. In terms of working with Autistic clients, animals become a transitional object to which a child can form a bond, thereby helping them develop more bonds with people outside the therapy room.

L. Equine assisted psychotherapy is intense, effective, brief therapy that involves activities with horses after which the client processes with the therapist.

1. The client and therapist have little interaction while the activities take place.

2. The treatment team takes a step back after providing instructions for the activity and watch the process take place.

3. When the activity is completed, the treatment team come together with the client to discuss what happened and draw metaphors to the client’s life.

M. Most equine assisted psychotherapy sessions take place around activities designed for the client that are cause and effect situations that require the client to find coping strategies.

N. The most significant factor in a successful intervention is the therapeutic relationship.

1. Horses can facilitate the establishment of a positive therapeutic
relationship because the client is forced to look at situations in a different way than is possible in a traditional therapeutic setting.

2. Communication is based more on reading body language than what is said, so the client often does not feel uncomfortable telling the therapist about what is going on in their life; the horse does that for them.

O. Horses are prey animals, and therefore have a highly developed communication system based on body language.

1. Based on this, horses are finely tuned in to human emotions and intentions.

2. Clients can identify with a horse’s need for safety and security in a session, drawing a metaphor of their own feelings by way of the horse.

P. Horses bring up a wide range of emotions and behaviors in humans which can be used as a catalyst for personal growth and awareness.

1. Horses offer many opportunities for projection and transference for a client, which gives the therapist insight and can allow for metaphors to be formed.