

Working with Animals in Practice

TERMINOLOGY

The last article “Working with Animals in Practice” provided an overview of the important ethical considerations for including animals in professional practice. These considerations apply to animals in any workspace or public setting where the animal and people can be negatively impacted if the practice is not informed or thoughtfully prepared. This article will provide details on the terminology in animal assisted practices.

The first point mentioned in the last article was:

- Understanding the many terms in the field to determine where your particular practice, skills and knowledge might fit.

This information can also be helpful for you to discern any training you or your animal partner may need in order to work in your particular domain.

Working with animals therapeutically has many names and is done in many different ways. As the field is not yet standardized in Canada, it can be confusing trying to understand all the different kinds of animal-related work and what you might need to practice effectively.

Other places in North America and the world have been incorporating animals into healing and learning practices for far longer than here in Canada and as a result, there are some commonly agreed upon terms including:

Animal Assisted Interventions (AAs)

“(AAs) are therapeutic processes that intentionally include or involve (certified) animals as part of the therapeutic process. Animal-Assisted Therapy, Animal-Assisted Activities, and service animals are some examples of animal assisted interventions.” Fine (2006)
AAI is an umbrella term for all aspects of involving animals to facilitate or enhance human health and learning. Every other term for working with animals to help people in any capacity falls under this term.

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)

“AAT is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. AAT is directed and/or delivered by a health/human service professional with specialized training and expertise in AAT and within the scope of practice of his/her profession.”

Pet Partners

Key Features of AAT

- A certified animal is included to enhance or facilitate the therapy process.

- There are specified goals and objectives for each individual.
- A qualified professional, trained and certified in AAT, is involved in the animal interactions for a specific purpose.
- Progress is measured.

Examples of Goals of AAT Programs:

The following are some examples of AAT goals:

Physical Health - Improve fine motor skills, balance

Mental Health and Cognitive Ability - Increase self-esteem, reduce anxiety, increase attention skills, process traumatic events

Social Skills - Increase verbal interactions, develop leisure skills

Developing and increasing Empathy

Animal Assisted Education and/or Learning (AAE/L)

AAE/L incorporates animals into the learning environment. The certified, trained animal in educational settings is either the subject of the lesson plan to facilitate the learning or is included to enhance the environment for learning to take place.

Key Features of AAE/L

- A certified animal is included to enhance or facilitate the learning process.
- Educators, aides or knowledgeable volunteers are trained in AAE/L and conduct the sessions.
- Educational content is planned and can be within or outside the classroom environment.

Examples of AAE/L

- Reading Assistance programs where certified animals are present as motivators and read to by people who are reading-challenged.

Animal Assisted Activities (AAA)

"AAA provides opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life. AAA are delivered in a variety of environments by specially trained professionals, paraprofessionals, and/or volunteers, in association with animals that meet specific criteria." Pet Partners

What does this mean?

AAA are basically the casual "meet and greet" activities that involve animals visiting people. There are not typically any particular or measurable goals and the "visit" does not have to be carried out by a qualified professional. This is often referred to as "Pet Visitation." The term "Pet Therapy" is outdated. The animal is certified for this work.

Key Features of AAA

- Treatment goals are not planned for each visit.
- The animal is certified for its work.
- The animal handler is certified for this work.

- Visit content is spontaneous and visits last as long or as short as needed.

Examples of AAA:

- Volunteers certified in AAA take their certified animals to a nursing home once a month to "visit." No formal goals are expected to be reached.

Animal Assisted Crisis Response (AACR)

"AAC) gives...trained professionals an additional means with which to help people affected by crisis. AACR teams can be used to establish rapport, build therapeutic bridges, normalize the experience, and act as ... a catalyst for physical movement."

What does this mean?

AACR involves professionals trained both in crisis response and AACR. They work alongside certified therapy animals to relieve stress and build bridges between them and the people they are attempting to help.

Key Features of AACR

- Specific treatment goals are not planned for each visit.
- The overall intent is to help people at the moment of crisis and to alleviate the side effects of crisis.
- AACR professionals are cross trained in crisis protocols and animal assisted methods.
- Animals are screened, trained and certified to do this work in a variety of crisis situations.

Example of AACR:

- A person is rescued from a burning house and is too traumatized to respond to questions of whether or not there is anyone else in the house. The AACR specialist, with the help of the certified dog, assists the survivor of the fire to become de-escalated and lucid enough to tell the firefighters if anyone else was in the house.

These are the most common terms for working with animals in the helping profession including mini horses. When working with ponies, full sized horses, donkeys or mules, the terminology is equine specific. We will discuss equine facilitated terminology in the next blog!

Do you know what your working title is? If you have any questions or comments, please leave them here and a response will be provided.

References available upon request.

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