

ANIMAL ASSISTED PLAY THERAPY- FREEDOM NOT FORCE HOW TO INVOLVE ANIMALS IN THERAPY TO ENHANCE THE WELFARE OF ANIMALS AND HUMANS



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Learning objectives

- ▶ WHAT IS ANIMAL ASSISTED PLAY THERAPY?
- ▶ RELATIONSHIP REIGNS.
- ▶ The importance of FUN
- ▶ FREEDOM to Choose for ALL
- ▶ Connection
- ▶ DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AQUIENCE AND ENJOYMENT
- ▶ PLAY PLAY PLAY
- ▶ IN RELATION TO THERAPY



Even in AAI!



Many programs focus only on what the animals do for us & clients

Expect the animals to tolerate what we ask of them

AAT/AAI professionals need greater awareness of their animals' desires and needs

Requirement of Animal Assisted Play Therapy™ that animals must have real choice & enjoy it



Animal Assisted Play Therapy

- ▶ Complete integration of AAI with the many forms of play therapy
- ▶ Relationship-centered; play-based; process-oriented
- ▶ Nondirective, directive, individual, family, & group forms
- ▶ All ages
- ▶ Strong emphasis on animal welfare: animal must *enjoy*, not merely tolerate, the majority of interactions
- ▶ Therapist-animal relationship is metaphor for therapeutic relationship
- ▶ Focus on client-animal relationship through play, in service of therapeutic goals



Taking play Seriously

Life is too important to be taken seriously. --Oscar Wilde

- ▶ A lighter tone creates emotional safety for clients of all ages
- ▶ Problems and feelings are taken seriously
- ▶ Need not be maudlin or intense about it, as that can create anxiety for clients
- ▶ Must use affirming humor and playfulness that is sensitive to the client's needs and sensibilities



Play & Development

- Play is a critical mechanism for development in mammals and other species:
 - Physically
 - Intellectually
 - Emotionally
 - Behaviorally
 - Socially
 - Morally



Play Has Its Own Language





Priorities



- ▶ Relationships take priority
- ▶ Animal welfare vs. therapeutic process - not an either-or question
- ▶ Always think of the care of the animal and the message your behavior gives



Choosing NOT to involve our animals !!!!!



Sometimes because of who they are, temperament, breeding, age, history etc our animals are just not suited or happy to become involved in the work we would love them to be part of.

This realisation can be uncomfortable to us especially if we have invested time, money and emotions into getting the right 'therapy animal' This is where acceptance is key and holding the thought that just as I am not defined or called Therapist Tracie so our animals are themselves first and foremost and we celebrate them for who they are not who we want them to be



Guiding Principles - 1

- ▶ Respect: equal for humans & animals
- ▶ Safety: physical & emotional for all
- ▶ Enjoyment: client & animal must enjoy it; either can opt out
- ▶ Acceptance: of client & animal for who they are



Guiding Principles - 2

- ▶ Training - nonaversive, positive, relationship-centered
- ▶ Relationship - relationship, not control; recognition & consideration of animal's point of view, too
- ▶ Process - process-oriented therapy, but with general and specific goals
- ▶ “ LEAVE THE DOG IN THE DOG AND THE HORSE IN THE HORSE”*Tracie Faa-Thompson*



Guiding Principles - 3

- ▶ Foundations - grounded in theory & accepted practice, proper training to ensure ethical and beneficial treatment for client & animal. Consistent with current knowledge/practice in:
 - ▶ Child/family development
 - ▶ Clinical & psychoeducational intervention
 - ▶ Play therapy
 - ▶ Humane animal treatment





ANIMAL WELLBEING

- ▶ **Learned helplessness; resignation**

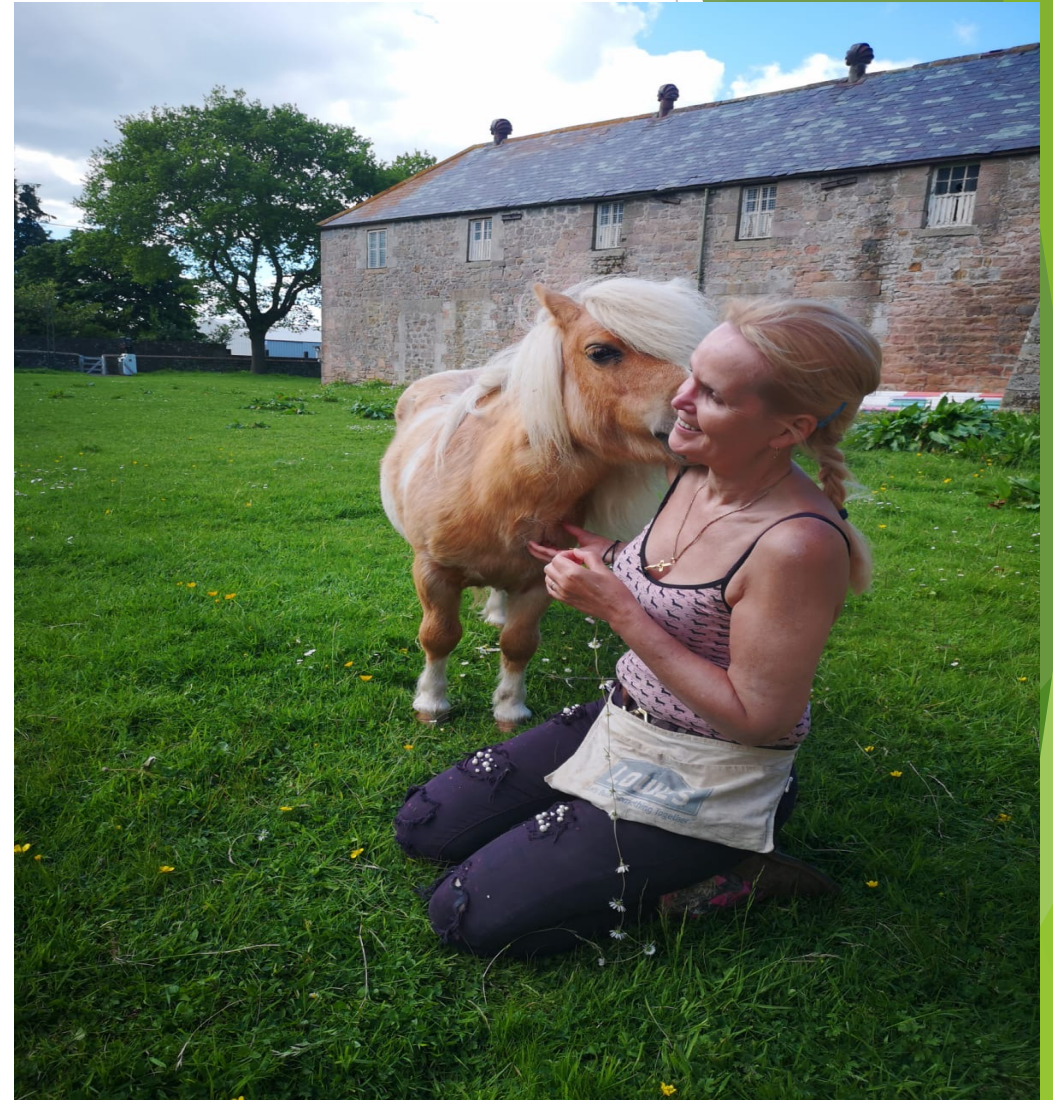
- ▶ Switched off
- ▶ Shut down
- ▶ Avoidance

- ▶ **Enjoyment**

- ▶ Interested, curious
- ▶ Eager
- ▶ Approach

- ▶ **Well-being informed by empathy**

- ▶ Think: The ANIMALS's point of view
- ▶ Fluency in SPECIES body language
- ▶ Proactive view; seeing all situations from the ANIMALS's viewpoint



CURIOSITY AND CHOICES

- ▶ ALL HEALTHY ANIMALS ARE BORN CURIOUS ITS HOW WE LEARN.
- ▶ IF THE ENVIRONMENT WE KEEP ANIMALS' IN IS EITHER NOT SENSORY ENOUGH OR TOO STIMULATING AND THEY ARE OVERLOADED JUST LIKE HUMANS THEY WILL BE UNABLE OVER TIME TO REMAIN PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY HEALTHY.
- ▶ TO LEARN AND BE CURIOUS WE HAVE TO FEEL SAFE
- ▶ WE CAN FEEL SAFE WITHIN A RELATIONSHIP.



Acceptance and behaving naturally

In AAPT we want our animals to be free to display as many natural behaviours as possible.

Overtraining your animal can be worse than no training (animals need some training to keep them and others safe and pleasant to be around)

It's not a mutually satisfying relationship when an animal is so focused on getting a treat that the person holding it becomes irrelevant.
Therapeutically what message does that give?
“Im only with you when you have something I want”.



Best candidate for the job



What is on your particular animals agenda. Are they best suited for indoor outdoor work. Laying around on couches and being petted and adored, high energy activity.?

There is a saying if you enjoy your chosen career/job you never work a day in your life. That's what we want for our animals.

Just like us our animals have preferences and things that they find easy to do and things that they struggle to do. How hard is it for us to struggle on doing things we don't enjoy and find hard and stressful. It's important therapeutically that our animals are not in this position `





Natural behaviours occur in natural environments



We build our work around the natural behaviors



Natural behaviours= bridges for therapeutic breakthroughs

Therapy happens whether the animal does what the client wants them to do or not. Some of the best therapeutic moments are when the animal has the freedom of choice to do something unexpected.

Important to remember that the therapist is the therapist NOT the animal who can unknowingly act as a conduct for therapy.

There is a lot of magical thinking in some AAT circles. It's fine if the client thinks the horse/dog knows exactly what they are feeling etc. It's neither ethical nor professional for a therapist to suggest this to the client.



OUR View: Relationship and its implications



Type of human-animal relationship has implications for our clients

- ▶ Important for animal welfare AND client welfare!!!
- ▶ The model we present through our own relationships with animals conveys much to clients
- ▶ How we help clients behave with the animals impacts their human relationships
- ▶ Concept of a “template” for healthy relationship





Healthy relationships show with others



Interest ↑

Initiative ↓



Playfulness ↑





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