



CANADIAN COUNSELLING AND
PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION

L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE
COUNSELING ET DE PSYCHOTHÉRAPIE

Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association

Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling Chapter

Suggested Guidelines for Practice

Developed 2021, Updated 2024

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Introduction

Adding a sentient being into the therapeutic milieu requires a specialized skill set that includes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected to continuously provide and improve the safety and efficacy within the field of [Animal Assisted Interventions] AAI

APA Code of Ethics - Human-Animal Interactions Ethics Workgroup¹

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) is a national bilingual association of professionally trained and certified counsellors engaged in the helping professions. It offers unique Chapters in counselling specialties, one of which is the Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling Chapter. The Executive Committee of this Chapter consists of members who conduct scholarly and/or professional activities and offer training that advances the field of human-animal interactions in both counselling as well as therapy practices. The members of the Executive Committee of the CCPA AAT-C Chapter who were instrumental in the development of this document are: Eileen Bona, Julia Wassef, Kim Neuman, Kayla Shore, Sue McIntosh and Lisa Wade.

Although the Chapter previously provided a set of Core Competencies that were intended to advise the profession on qualifications to practice Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), we felt that these competencies were lacking in specificity to counselling. In this document we have therefore chosen to give more attention to counselling and animal welfare and to be more clear of descriptors that are important to this field. Given the growing popularity and interest in the field, we felt it necessary to review the previously provided set of *Core Competencies for Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C)* and bring forward a document that offers *Suggested Guidelines for Practice in AAT-C*.

To begin the review process, the executive of the AAT-C Chapter researched existing competencies developed by leading experts in the field of AAT, including *Pet Partners*, *the International Association of the Human-Animal Interaction Organizations* and *Animal Assisted Interventions International*.

Another staple resource for many practitioners in AAT-C, and one that is referenced repeatedly in this document, is *Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling* by Cynthia Chandler. This book has been a valuable resource since its release, and one that the writers of this document continue to recommend. However, the *American Veterinary Society of Animal Behaviour* (AVSAB) advises against dominance-based approaches with dogs²; the CCPA AAT-C Chapter supports this statement.

As there are a vast number of animal species that can take part in AAT-C programming, this document and its appendices are not able to include resources on how to appropriately work with every species. However, horses and dogs are well recognized as two of the most popular animals in Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) and therefore, this document has included some key additional information about these two species. Please see the international guidelines on care, training and welfare requirements for equines in equine-assisted services set up by the *International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO)*³ and appendix A for more recommended resources.

Based on all the beforementioned research, a new document has been developed to replace the previous CCPA Core Competency document with new Suggested Guidelines for Practice in AAT-C. The document before you has, with permission, been extracted and adapted from the *Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling Competencies*⁴.

¹ Human-Animal Interactions Ethics Workgroup. *Summary of Considerations for APA Ethical Standards Competencies in Animal-Assisted Interventions*. <https://www.human-animal-interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Summary-of-Considerations-for-APA-Ethical-Standards-.pdf>, page 1

² American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior. *Position statement on the use of dominance theory in behavior modification of animals*. AVSAB. 2008. https://avsab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Dominance_Position_Statement_download-10-3-14.pdf

³ IAHAIO. *International guidelines on care, training and welfare requirements for equines in equine-assisted services*. 2021. <https://iahaio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/feb21-final-guidelines-equine-care-welfare-training-and-handling.pdf>

⁴

Stewart, L. A., Chang, C. Y., Parker, L. K., & Grubbs, N. *Animal-assisted therapy in counseling competencies*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association,

Purpose

In 2022 a national committee⁵ released national standards for *Development of a Management System for Animal-Assisted Human Services*⁶ in Canada. However, these national standards are currently only voluntary, meaning that there are no regulated standards for best practice in AAT (or any other form of AAI) in Canada. This places the onus on the organization and individual counsellor to take ‘reasonable steps’ to ensure their AAT competence, especially in animal behaviour and communication and adherence to professional scope of practice.

The *CCPA Standards of Practice* provide direction and guidelines to its members on how to conduct themselves in a professional manner consistent with the *CCPA Code of Ethics*. These practice standards ensure the highest ethical ideals, that include working within one’s *boundaries of competence* and within one’s *scope of practice*.

As an adjunct therapy, Animal Assisted Therapy is an enhancement to the treatment process, rather than a stand-alone intervention. These suggested guidelines for including animals in professional practice are intended to inform practitioners about how to participate in safe, ethical, and effective AAT. These guidelines will support counsellors in providing evidence-based practices and will aim to safeguard the well-being of themselves, the public, and their animal partners. Essential for offering and executing AAT is a clear understanding of the definition of AAT as well as ensuring alignment with one’s professional *Standards of Practice* and *Scope of Practice*.

Animal-Assisted Therapy in Mental Health Interest Network. 2008. https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/animal-assisted-therapy-competencies-june-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=c469472c_18

⁵ The committee was comprised of an interdisciplinary group of professionals who work with animals in health care; including service/assistance and AAI animals in Canada.

⁶ Human Research Standards Organization. *Development of a Management System for Animal-Assisted Human Services*. 2022. <https://www.hrso-onrh.org/hrso/wp-content/uploads/CAN.HRSO-500.01-2022-EN.pdf>

Definitions

Due to AAT-C including important parts of counselling as well as animal assisted interventions, the definitions have been categorized in three different subjects: counselling, animal assisted interventions and finally animal assisted therapy in counselling.

Specific to Counselling

The following definitions apply to counselling in particular:

Counselling/Psychotherapy: Counselling is a relational process based upon the ethical use of specific professional competencies to facilitate human change. Counselling addresses wellness, relationships, personal growth, career development, mental health, and psychological illness or distress. The counselling process is characterized by the application of recognized cognitive, affective, expressive, somatic, spiritual, developmental, behavioural, learning, and systemic principles (CCPA, n.d.).

There are numerous professional titles for counselling practitioners, including but not limited to: psychotherapists, mental health therapists, mental health practitioners, counselling therapists, clinical counsellors, etc. For the purposes of this document, we will be using the term “counsellor” throughout, as it relates to Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counselling.

Boundaries of Competence: “Counsellors/therapists restrict their counselling/therapy services to those areas within the boundaries of their competence by virtue of verifiable education, training, supervised experience, and other appropriate professional experience. They also restrict their services based on their role and function, their legal authority, and their jurisdiction of employment.

Counsellors/therapists who wish to extend their professional services ensure competence in any additional areas of expertise through extra verifiable education or training in these areas and provide service only after they have secured adequate supervision from supervisors with demonstrative expertise in the practice area. Supervisors should have a high level of expertise in the area that is certified by an independent process such as: certification, registration, licensing, or similar independent process that is overseen by an Elder or knowledge keeper recognized by community when the expertise is related to Indigenous competencies.

When counsellors/therapists are faced with clients whose needs exceed the counsellors/therapists’ boundaries of competence, they make appropriate referrals for their clients. Counsellors/ therapists provide appropriate contact and support for their clients during any transitional period associated with referring them to other sources of professional help”⁷.

Scope of Practice: Scope of practice is defined as counsellors working within their professional credentials, training, education, and expertise.

Specific to Animal Assisted Interventions

The field of Animal Assisted Interventions has grown rapidly in recent years. As the field has expanded, the terminology has also evolved. The most widely recognized terms and definitions in the field come from the *IAHAIO White Paper*⁸, brought forward in 2014 and updated in 2018. The IAHAIO is a global association of organizations that engage in practice, research and/or education in animal assisted activity, animal assisted therapy, and service animal training. These terms and definitions remain the most widely recognized and offer the most comprehensive AAI-specific terminology. Some of the following terms are therefore from this White Paper.

The earlier mentioned document *Development of a Management System for Animal-Assisted Human Services* provides further clarification on the differences between service/assistance and AAI animals.

⁷ Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association. *Standards of Practice*, Sixth Edition. 2021. <https://www.ccpa-accp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CCPA-Standards-of-Practice-ENG-Sept-29-Web-file.pdf> p. 3

⁸ IAHAIO. *White Paper: Definitions for Animal Assisted Interventions and Guidelines for Wellness of Animals Involved*. 2018. <https://iahaio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/iahaio-white-paper-2018-english.pdf>

Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI): An Animal Assisted Intervention is a goal oriented and structured intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals in health, education and human services (e.g., social work) for the purpose of therapeutic gains in humans. It involves people with knowledge of the people and animals involved. Animal assisted interventions incorporate human-animal teams in human services such as Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), Animal Assisted Education (AAE) or Animal Assisted Activity (AAA). They also include Animal Assisted Coaching (AAC). Such interventions should be developed and implemented using an interdisciplinary approach.

AAI Animal: An animal that partners with a trained handler or a healthcare professional to help numerous people, within their handler or healthcare professional's scope of practice. AAI animals work within the setting that their handler works in and do not have general public access rights. AAI animals should ideally be trained, screened, and certified to partner with their handler. At this point in time, equines and other farm animals are not generally certified by outside professionals but they should still be thoroughly evaluated for program fit and safety by a knowledgeable AAI provider and expert in the animal's species. Other common terms for AAI animals include (but are not limited to) wellness animals and therapy animals. For more information on the terminology of intervention animals, please see the article *Defining Terms Used for Animals Working in Support Roles for People with Support Needs*⁹.

AAI Animal Handler: A (para)professional and/or volunteer who is trained to work with an AAI animal within the diamond or triangle model of AAI (see definitions below), depending on their scope of practice and the type of AAI they are a part of. Handlers should be experts in working with and understanding their AAI animal, and be trained (and ideally certified) in how to work ethically within the type of AAI, client population, and setting in which they are placed.

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT): Animal Assisted Therapy is a goal oriented, planned and structured therapeutic intervention directed and/or delivered by health or human service therapy professionals, including for example: mental health counsellors, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers and anyone with a certified therapist designation. Intervention progress is measured and included in professional documentation. AAT is delivered and/or directed by a formally trained (with active licensure, degree or equivalent) professional therapist with expertise within the scope of the professionals' practice. AAT focuses on enhancing physical, cognitive, behavioural and/or socio-emotional functioning of the human recipient either in the group or individual setting. The professional delivering AAT (or the person handling the animal under the supervision of the human service professional) must have adequate knowledge about the behaviour, needs, health and indicators of stress of the animals involved.

Triangle Model: The triangle model describes the interaction between the AAI professional, the client and the animal-partner.

Diamond Model: The Diamond Model of AAI is referred to when the counsellor requires a skilled animal handler in the AAT session to handle the animal. This may be due to the counsellor being unfamiliar with a particular species or a new animal, a counsellor being in the process of learning about that species or animal, or a counsellor in need of assistance due to a client with special or high needs. Groups may require animal handlers as well, due to the high volume of clients and the need for additional safety measures.

Specific to Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling

For the purpose of the AAT-C Chapter, the following clarification with regard to AAT-C is given:

Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C): The inclusion of specially trained and certified (non-equine) animals into the counselling process as a direct intervention to treatment. AAT-C is unique to mental health professionals, including certified counsellors, counselling psychologists and clinical social workers.

Scope of Practice AAT-C: Scope of practice is defined as the practitioners' training, education, and expertise within AAT in particular, within their client population as well as within their setting and animal species (*See Appendix B*).

⁹ Howell, Tiffani J et al.. *Defining Terms Used for Animals Working in Support Roles for People with Support Needs*. In: *Animals: an open access journal from MDPI* vol. 12, 15 1975. 2022.

In keeping within the terms of their professional license (i.e., registered counselling therapists, psychologists, social workers), members should ensure their AAT-C work falls within their Scope of Practice. This is demonstrated by their ability to:

1. Understand, support, communicate and work with people and animals to protect and enhance the physical and emotional safety and wellbeing of clients and animal partners.
2. Solidly defend their position for doing so in the event of a negative or harmful incident involving their clients and animals in practice. In counselling practice, there is always the possibility of therapeutic error.

When partnering with an animal, the possibility of error is magnified if the correct knowledge, training, and supervision is not obtained. In the legal article *Working Like a Dog: Legal Considerations for Therapy Dogs* disciplinary action was taken against a therapist for “incompetence and/or gross negligence in the performance of clinical social work with a minor patient, specifically with respect to AAT,” (para. 2) that resulted in a young client being bitten by the social worker’s dog. The following reasons were cited as contributing to the “physical and emotional harm to the patient and committed incompetence or gross negligence:”

1. “The therapist did not obtain the proper training or certification to include a dog in counselling sessions;
2. The therapist did not adhere to animal assisted therapy best practices, especially during the beginning and end of the counselling session; and
3. The therapist did not have the minor parents sign a “consent to treat” form informing the parents [or legal representatives] of the risks, benefits and expected outcomes and goals of AAT.”¹⁰

Counsellors are encouraged to thoroughly review and adhere to the Code of Ethics of the CCPA when practicing AAT-C to avoid liability in practice.

¹⁰ Lien, An tran. *Working Like a Dog Legal Considerations for Therapy Dogs*. 2017. <https://www.camft.org/Resources/Legal-Articles/Chronological-Article-List/working-like-a-dog-legal-considerations-for-therapy-dogs>

AAT-C Suggested Guidelines for Practice

The professional AAT counsellor is able to effectively incorporate an animal as a therapeutic change agent into to the counselling process in a manner that protects the safety and welfare of both humans and animals.

Chandler, 2012¹¹

The following guidelines suggest five key competency areas to assure ethical, effective, and safe therapeutic animal-assisted interventions: Formal Training, Counsellor Knowledge, Cultural Considerations, Professional Values and Professional Development.

A. Formal Training

Competent providers of AAT-C should acquire AAT-C specific training, assessment and supervision that includes:

A.1. Basic Counselling Skills

Competent providers of AAT-C should demonstrate competency in general counselling skills and training in AAT-C prior to integrating AAT-C interventions. AAT-C is practiced only within the boundaries of a provider's professional scope of practice.

- Counsellors are expected to effectively integrate AAT-C into their personal model of counselling.
- Counsellors are expected to demonstrate counselling effectiveness without the integration of an animal.
- Counsellors are expected to recognize that AAT-C is used to enhance the therapeutic process rather than as a stand-alone intervention.

A.2. Intentionality

Competent providers of AAT-C should demonstrate intentional incorporation of AAT-C into the counselling relationship, plan, and process. Providers are able to demonstrate:

- Knowledge that AAT-C is a purposeful intervention and that AAT-C is:
 - More than owning/loving animals or executing animal husbandry.
 - More than simply including an animal in the counselling setting.
- Knowledge and integration of theory-based interventions, including;
 - The ability to articulate the role of AAT-C within a provider's personal theoretical approach or personal model of counselling.
 - Demonstrating an understanding of the goals of AAT-C interventions.
 - Awareness of the validity of the AAT-C interventions being used.
- Skilled selections and assessment of AAT-C intervention strategies, including:
 - Selection of appropriate interventions and strategies for each client, in each session, based on treatment goals.
 - Ability to assess the outcome of AAT-C interventions.

¹¹ Chandler, C.K. *Animal assisted therapy in counselling (2nd ed.)*. Routledge. 2012. p. 33.

A.3. Specialized Skill Set

Competent providers of AAT-C recognize that AAT-C is a specialty area with a learned and practiced skill set. Competent AAT-C providers should demonstrate specialized skills and abilities that are appropriate to the specialty area of AAT-C, including:

- Ability to understand the experiential nature of AAT-C interventions and demonstrate skill in spontaneous situations, meaning expertly handling anything that can happen before a session starts, during a session, or after in regard to the animal's behaviour or interactions with clients/handlers/other humans or other animals.
- Ability to attend to/care for the client(s) and animal(s) simultaneously by demonstrating:
 - Effective judgment when assessing the session's impact on themselves as providers.
 - Effective judgment when assessing the session's impact on the AAT animal(s).
 - Effective judgment when assessing the session's impact on the client(s).
 - Effective judgment when assessing the session's impact on volunteers / assistants / paraprofessionals (if applicable).
- Ability to assess, interpret, and incorporate the AAT animal's response in a therapeutically meaningful way, including:
 - Ability to link animal–client interactions to client behaviours, goals, or conceptualization.
 - Willingness to allow natural client–animal interactions to occur.
 - Ability to link unexpected events or interactions to client goals or presenting concerns, including an animal that does not want to work: e.g. bring forward alternative methods/treatments when an animal does not appear comfortable or willing to be part of the intervention.
 - Ability to model ethical, appropriate, respectful, and empathetic animal care.

A.4. Formal Evaluative Coursework

Counsellors should have formal evaluative coursework in:

- Understanding and evaluating the literature in the AAT field including:
 - The history of AAT.
 - The most up-to-date terms and definitions in the field of AAT.
 - Important literature and evidence-based practice of AAT.
- Understanding of the relevant aspects of the human–animal bond, including:
 - Physiological and neurological impact of human–animal interaction on both humans and animals.
 - Awareness that human–animal interactions can elicit unexpected vulnerability and disclosure in others.
 - Impact of the human–animal bond on the therapeutic process, including advantages, limitations, and contraindications.
- Understanding how to incorporate animals into practice including:
 - Knowledge of how animals are ethically and effectively incorporated in therapeutic settings.
 - How to work effectively with an AAI animal.
 - How to work with an AAI animal handler effectively as an AAT professional team in the diamond model (when applicable).
 - Understanding the potential risks as well as limitations for all involved in working with an AAI animal in client sessions.
- Understanding AAT-C specific counselling techniques and principles, including implications for specific presenting concerns and client populations.
- Participation in supervised professional practice, including:

- Applied experience under the supervision of an appropriately qualified AAT-C provider to supplement didactic knowledge.
- Feedback and assessment of AAT-C skills by a qualified AAT-C supervisor.
- Collaboration (when appropriate) with an AAI animal handler to deliver AAT-C services through the diamond model. While the AAI animal handler acts as the animal expert and the counsellor acts as the client expert, it is important that both are cross trained to work together, to ensure ethical and effective professional collaboration.

B. Counsellor Knowledge

B.1. Animal Knowledge

Providers of AAT-C should be knowledgeable about their AAI animal as an individual, breed and species, which includes:

- Adequate evidence-based species-specific ethological knowledge about the selected AAI animal(s), including:
 - Physiology, communication, behaviour, and history.
 - Care and husbandry requirements.
 - Understanding that knowledge about one species is not necessarily generalizable to another species.
- Knowledge of the importance of animal training techniques, including:
 - Humane, non-coercive, science-based training methods.
 - Ensuring that the animal is trained, screened and certified for the counselling environments and situations they will be working in. As noted previously, equines and other farm animals are not generally certified by outside professionals, but they should still be thoroughly evaluated for program fit and safety by well-versed or cross-trained therapy animal trainers.
 - Seeking additional training, screening, and certification as necessary, before expanding the animal's scope of practice.
 - Ensuring that screening and certification is provided by an appropriately qualified individual or organization, with relevant species-specific and AAI knowledge.
 - Ability to detect an animal's discomfort and arrange to facilitate the animals' socialization, desensitization, and counter conditioning to improve the animal's well-being as necessary.
- Establish and maintain a strong working relationship with the AAI animal(s), including:
 - Knowledge of, and ability to educate others, on the animal's triggers to stress.
 - Ability to apply effective calming interventions to a stressed AAI animal.
 - Understand the importance of the animal's choice to participate and facilitate the ability/space for an animal to opt out of engagement.

B.2. Ethical Requirements

Providers of AAT-C should demonstrate integrated ethics. Thus, competent providers of AAT-C are aware of AAT-C-specific ethical considerations and incorporate AAT-C practice within the CCPA Code of Ethics with actions that include:

- Ability to recognize and discuss the ethical implications of AAT-C, including:
 - Assessing the suitability and amenability of each client to this type of counselling.
 - Informing clients of the purpose of AAT-C.
 - Obtaining assent/consent from clients and their guardians.

- Discussing and addressing potential safety issues and informing clients on rules concerning ethics with regard to the animals that are incorporated in the AAT-C interventions. Maintaining respect for the animal(s), the client(s), and the therapeutic process.
- Being aware of the counsellor's personal biases, including the impact of the provider's emotional bond with the animal and the impact that the bond may have on the therapeutic process.
- Ability to maximize the potential for safe interactions between clients and animals, including:
 - Infection prevention/control for animals, clients, the professional and the space in which AAT-C is being executed.
 - Understanding and consideration of zoonotic agents.
 - Considerations of,(and a guaranteed check during intake with clients) regarding any allergies, phobias, history of animal abuse and animal-related trauma.
- Effective risk-management strategies and skills, including:
 - Knowledge of liability issues related to AAT-C.
 - Knowledge of legal issues associated with AAT-C.
 - Inclusion of appropriate documentation procedures, like intake forms, session notes, consent forms.
 - Having appropriate personal and professional insurance coverage in place as well as having an understanding of the insurance coverage(s) for AAT-C.
- Ability to understand the social and cultural factors relevant to AAT-C and multicultural implications of AAT-C, including: (*See Cultural Considerations*)
 - Respecting the attitudes of others, particularly those concerned with the animal's presence.
 - Understanding that human-animal interaction may hold different meanings across a variety of cultures (*See Cultural Considerations*)

B.3. Animal Welfare

Animal welfare is at the forefront of AAT-C. Competent providers should be able to assess how animal(s) cope with their involvement prior, during, and after any engagement with the client. Providers should be able to or consult with somebody who can:

- Objectively assess an animal's suitability, strengths, and limitations despite the provider's potential emotional bond with or personal bias toward the animal.
- Prevent and respond to animal stress, fatigue, and burnout, including:
 - Addressing unexpected animal stress and proactively planning stress-relief and stress prevention strategies for the animal(s).
 - Identify and respond to the animal's signals and body language, especially when the animal may be indicating a lack of motivation to interact in an AAT-C session.
- Provide for the animal's needs, both in general and at the site including:
 - Ensuring the animal's access to water, quiet rest/retreat area free from clients, and regular bathroom breaks¹².
 - Attending to the animal's overall wellness through appropriate supervision of quality nutrition, exercise, grooming, enrichment, and veterinary care.
- Attain and maintain compliance with applicable legal requirements for registration (through local bylaw), inoculation of animals (in consultation with your local veterinarian) and zoonosis related subjects.
- Identify and address personal biases toward the therapy animal(s) including:

¹² Mellor, David J., Ngaio J. Beausoleil, Katherine E. Littlewood, Andrew N. McLean, Paul D. McGreevy, Bidia Jones, and Cristina Wilkins. *The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human-Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare*, *Animals* 10, no. 10: 1870. 2020.

- Objective assessment of an animal's suitability for AAT-C.
- Objective assessment of an animal's suitability for each AAT-C session on an individual basis.
- Awareness of transference/countertransference considerations related to and during AAT-C interventions.
- Awareness of authentic willingness of the animal to participate in the intervention.

B.4. Animal Advocacy

Competent providers of AAT-C should prioritize their responsibility to animals involved in AAT-C and demonstrate that they are effective animal advocates by:

- Understanding that the animal(s) involved are the provider's responsibility, including:
 - Professionally determining, understanding, and respecting the animal's scope of practice (*see Appendix B for animal scope of practice example*)
 - Understanding how and why animal welfare and advocacy directly affect client safety.
 - Understanding how and why animal welfare and advocacy are essential to the ethical practice of AAT-C.
 - At all times the AAT-C professional is responsible for the safety of all individuals involved, both humans and animals.

- Respecting and protecting animal rights and animal welfare including:
 - Recognizing and respecting when animals are not suitable for AAT-C.
 - Recognizing that animals have a right to choose their level of participation in AAT-C.
 - Recognizing that AAT-C has the potential for animal exploitation, either accidentally or intentionally.
 - Recognizing and respecting when animals need to be taken out of the program when ill, injured, pregnant or need to retire from working.
 - Ensuring animal-human ratios are individualized to the animal's capabilities.
 - Ensuring animal schedules are ethical and individualized to the animal's needs.

C. Cultural Considerations

Most of the widely used psychotherapy models practiced today are the products of Western culture, bringing into question the relevancy of these models' effectiveness and efficiency for people belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds (Koç & Kafa, 2019). While a substantial amount of literature has emphasized the importance of incorporating cultural variables into health research, few studies have focused on providing concrete frameworks for how this can be achieved¹³.

With the growing popularity and common practice of AAT-C, the modality is now playing catch up in the field of research. This lag has thereby intensified the need to review and appreciate cultural diversity considerations when practicing AAT-C¹⁴ (HAIB, p 83).

Cultural and religious beliefs and values vary greatly by ethnicity, including how we conceptualize our relationships toward, and with, animals. And just as cultural differences between counsellor and client may influence the therapeutic relationship, cultural differences regarding attitudes about animals may influence the therapeutic relationship and consequently the course of therapy (Sheade & Chandler, 2014).

While the scope of these guidelines does not include a comprehensive culturally specific approach, it is essential that competent practitioners of AAT-C have: "An understanding that attitudes toward non-human animals and the conceptualization of the human-animal bond varies across cultures and population groups (...) An understanding that animals, both at an individual and group level, are laden with 'cultural and symbolic baggage' and hence culture becomes a crucial consideration in animal-assisted intervention." (Serpell, 2004, p.148)

D. Professional Values

Competent providers of AAT-C should strive toward AAT-C-specific professional values, including:

- Demonstrating enthusiasm and passion for AAT-C.
- Demonstrating flexibility, openness, and creativity.
- Demonstrating a calm demeanour during unexpected situations.
- Demonstrating extensive empathy for humans and animals.
- Demonstrating a willingness to embrace the experiential nature of AAT-C by being cognitively present and responsive to ever-changing situational factors.

E. Professional Development

Competent providers of AAT-C should continue the development of their AAT-C skills by:

- Ensuring they have skilled knowledge and training in the field of AAT-C, which may be achieved through:
 - Professional trainings with recognized experts in the AAI field.
 - Regular consultation and collaboration with other AAT-C providers.
 - Regular consultation and collaboration with professional animal specialists.
- Familiarity with existing and emerging AAT-C literature, including:
 - Familiarity with current AAT-C terminology.
 - Encouragement and support for the continued development of AAT-C literature.

¹³ Human Animal Interaction Bulletin. *Multicultural considerations in animal-assisted intervention*. <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/epdf/10.1079/hai.2018.0019>. 2018. p. 95

¹⁴ Human Animal Interaction Bulletin. *Multicultural considerations in animal-assisted intervention*. <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/epdf/10.1079/hai.2018.0019>. 2018. p. 83

Epilogue

Recently introduced and updated *Standards of Practice* from the CCPA emphasize the importance of working within one's *Boundaries of Competence*, which highlights the importance of specialized training and qualification to ensure safe, effective, and ethical practice. To maintain competence, practitioners should continue to develop their skills through professional development opportunities focusing on research, collaboration, and consultation, as well as advocating for professional values that exhibit a passion and willingness to engage in the work. Part of this practice includes knowledge of cultural considerations of different populations and understanding the role that animals play within diverse client groups and its potential effect on the therapeutic alliance.

Ethical practice of AAT-C requires appropriate competence, skill, capacity, and suitability for both the counsellor and animal(s) involved. Training and certification in AAT-C as well as a clear working knowledge of animal behaviour, handling, welfare, and advocacy are essential aspects of the work that have been somewhat vague and lacking in specificity. It is understood that qualitative training and certification in AAT-C (and other forms of AAI) is not yet widely available in all areas of Canada; especially hands-on and experiential learning opportunities. It is the responsibility of each individual AAT-C counsellor to ensure they have received relevant education and certification to the highest level available to them, to make sure they execute the unique intervention of AAT-C accordingly. It is then imperative for all trained and certified counsellors to stay within their professional scope of practice while integrating AAT as their new therapeutic medium.

Appendix A - Recommended resources

The following resources are recommended by the authors of this document but should not be considered an exhaustive or complete list. Formal education in the practitioner's species of choice is highly recommended to ensure ethical AAT-C practice.

AAI

- Books:
 - Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Foundations and Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions, Fifth Edition, Aubrey H. Fine.
 - Animal Assisted Play Therapy, Rise Vanfleet, Tracie Faa-Thompson
 - Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling, Third Edition, Cynthia K. Chandler.

DOGS

- Books:
 - Don't Shoot the Dog, Karen Pryor
 - Culture Clash, Jean Donaldson
 - Puppy Primer, Patricia McConnell, PhD
 - Canine Behaviour: A Photo Illustrated Handbook, Barbara Handelman
 - How Dogs Learn, Mary R. Burch, Jon S. Bailey, PhD
 - Getting in TTouch with your Dog, Linda Tellington-Jones
 - Our Faithful Companions, Aubrey H. Fine
- Video:
 - The Language of Dogs, Sarah Kalnajs
 - Calming Signals: What Your Dog Tells You, Turid Rugaas

HORSES

- Books:
 - Connection Training: The Heart and Science of Positive Horse Training, Hannah Weston & Rachel Bedingfield
 - Horse Brain Human Brain, Janet Jones PhD
 - Training and Retraining Horses the Tellington Way, Linda Tellington-Jones & Mandy Pretty

CATS

- Video:
 - Dogs Have Owners, but Cats Have Staff, Patricia McConnell PhD

Appendix B - Practitioner and Animal Scope of Practice

It is recommended that practitioners in AAI have a clearly defined scope of practice. The documents provided below outline some examples. How each practitioner chooses to document their own scope of practice, is ultimately up to them.

The animal scope of practice is also recommended. Outlining an animal's scope is more important for animals attending public facilities and partaking in specialized programming. Farm-based AAI programs with numerous animals, such as a flock of chickens, are less likely to require scope of practice documents for every individual animal.

Practitioner Scope of Practice:

In animal assisted interventions (AAI), it is necessary for all practitioners to understand and stay within their professional scope of practice. Scope of practice is defined as practitioners working within their professional credentials, training, education, and expertise. In AAI, this includes practitioners' training, education, and expertise within their client population as well as in their setting and animal species. A clearly defined scope of practice includes:

- 1. Professional Qualifications:** The education, credentials, experience and skill in a helping profession.
- 2. Client Population:** The ages and presenting issues of the clients who the professional is currently qualified, trained and skilled to work with.
- 3. Setting:** The location the professional is trained and skilled at working within. For example, a hospital, a school, or a private practice.
- 4. Animals:** The current species and breed that the professional is trained, educated and skilled in working with.
- 5. Qualifications in AAI:** The level of training or certification professionals have received to ethically and successfully integrate animals into their practice.
- 6. Additional Information:** A description of what is outside the professional's scope of practice and current insurance coverages, and whether the professional works alone or is part of a team.

EXAMPLE
AAI Practitioner Scope of Practice

Document Outline

Purpose	This document serves to outline the education, certification, and specified scope of practice for the practitioner working in AAI.
Date Created	May 6, 2020
Updated	March 1, 2023

Practitioner Details

Name	Mary Smith
Address	Town / City
Contact	(555) 555-5555, marysmith@gmail

Current Professional Scope

Counsellor with 10 years' experience, working primarily with adults ages 18 - 65. Previous professional history can be found in professional resume, upon request. Completed specialized AAT education in 2020.

Position	Registered Psychologist
Organization	Private Practice Name
Population	Adults, mostly ages 18 – 65 Specializes in working with anxiety, grief and loss, depression.
Modalities	CBT, Animal Assisted Therapy
Location	Town, Province

Professional Qualifications

Date	Qualification	Organization
1995	Bachelor of Psychology	University
1998	Master of Counselling	University

Current AAI Scope

AAI Designation	Animal Assisted Therapist
Partnering Species	Dog
Organization	Private Practice Name
Location	Town, Province

AAI Qualifications

Date	Certification	Organization
2019	Animal Assisted Therapy Certification	AAI Training Organization
2019	Completed AAI Canine Preparation Courses	AAI Training Organization
2020	Completed Dog Ethology Course	Training Organization

Scope of Practice Parameters

<p>Scope of Practice DOES Include:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working with adults ages 18 – 65. ● Working with clients who present with anxiety, grief and loss, and depression. ● Partnering with the AAI dog to offer Animal Assisted Therapy to clients who would benefit from, and consent to working within, an AAT modality at the private practice. ● Handling the dog in a professional and ethical manner in public spaces where there may be individuals who have not consented, or been approved, to interact with the AAI animal. ● Handling the dog on leash for initial introductions with clients and for the duration of sessions when it is deemed necessary. ● Deploying the dog off-leash in a controlled area to interact with a client who has consented and would benefit from organic interaction. ● Cueing the dog to greet/interact with clients, while ensuring that the dog’s personal comfort is assessed and respected throughout the session. ● Cueing the dog to perform certain trained behaviors that will enrich the AAT session. ● Ensuring that the dog has access to water and a safe space where they can go if they no longer want to participate in the session. ● Maintaining and updating the scheduling and routine of the AAI dog to ensure it is ethically cared for. ● Maintaining signage and awareness for when and where the AAI dog attends the private practice.
<p>Scope of Practice does NOT include:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working outside of the scope listed above. ● Working with children under the age of 18 and seniors over the age of 65. ● Working outside of the approved private practice with the AAI dog. ● Bringing the AAI dog into sessions with clients who have not been assessed as potentially benefiting from working within an AAT modality. ● Bringing the AAI dog into sessions where a client has not consented to taking part in AAT. ● Allowing the dog to interact with other clients in the private practice (such as those who may be in the waiting room) who have not consented to interacting with the AAI dog.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Letting the dog off-leash in an uncontrolled area in or around the private practice. ● Taking the AAI dog in public places where pets are not allowed, other than the private practice. ● Screening new dogs for work within the private practice. ● Working with other species within AAI.
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Insurance Information

Date	Coverage Type/Provider	Expires
March 1, 2023	AAI Services Provider, Insurance Company	March 1, 2024

Animal Scope of Practice

In animal assisted interventions (AAI), it is important for animal partners to work within their scope of practice as well. An animal’s scope of practice is defined by the population it is trained, certified and skilled/comfortable working with, the setting it is trained and certified to work within, and the behaviours it is trained to offer. Animals must always work with a handler who is trained and skilled in working with them and with whom they are familiar and have a positive relationship with. A clearly defined animal scope of practice includes:

1. **Training and Certification:** The levels of training in basic obedience, public access skills, animal assisted activities, etc. that the animal has completed and successfully passed.
2. **Client Population:** The ages and presenting issues of the clients who the animal has been screened, trained and certified to work with.
3. **Setting:** The location where the animal has been screened, trained, and certified to work in. For example, a hospital, a school, or a private practice.
4. **Handlers:** Identification of the current people who are trained, skilled and have a positive and approved handling relationship with the animal.
5. **Additional Information:** A description of what is outside the animal’s scope of practice, current veterinarian examinations, and immunization shots.

EXAMPLE AAI Animal Scope of Practice

Document Outline

Purpose	This document serves to outline the education, certification, and specified scope of practice for the animal working in AAI.
Date Created	May 6, 2020
Updated	March 1, 2023

Animal Info

Animal Name	Fido
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Species	Dog
Breed	Labrador Retriever
DOB	June 2018
Owner	Mary Smith
Veterinarian	Veterinarian Office Name

Animal Placement Details

AAI Designation	AAI/AAT Animal, “Therapy Dog”
Organization	Private Practice Name
Location	Town, Province
Population	Adults, ages 18 – 65 within the private practice.

Handlers **see handler’s individual scope of practice document for further details.*

Primary Handler	Mary Smith
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Certification

Date	Organization	Certification Earned
2020	AAI Certifying Organization	AAT Animal
2022	AAI Certifying Organization	AAT Animal - Renewed

Completed Training

Date	Organization/Trainer	Class/Skills
2019	Fido Trainer	Preparing for AAI
2019	Fido Trainer	Special Tricks

Scope of Practice Parameters

Scope of Practice DOES Include:	<p>*The following must be facilitated by a trained and certified handler.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working with adults, ages 18 – 65. ● Being present at the private practice throughout the day, in pre-approved offices and common areas. ● Being off leash in controlled, safe spaces, under the guidance of the primary handler. ● Interacting with other staff at the private practice. ● Interacting with clients, with the guidance and support of the primary handler for activities including petting, gentle grooming
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	<p>with a soft brush, laying at the client's feet, resting head on the client's lap, lying beside the client on a couch.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interacting with clients who may become distressed and cry, with the support of the primary handler.
Scope of practice does NOT include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working with children under the age of 18 and seniors over 65. ● Working outside of the private practice. ● Going to public places where pets are not allowed, other than the private practice. ● Working with a handler who is NOT trained and certified in AAI or approved to work with this particular AAI animal. ● Working with clients who may become aggressive towards an animal or are presenting with issues beyond anxiety, grief and loss, and depression. ● Working with clients who are not deemed to benefit by, or have consented to, participating in AAT. ● Interacting with clients in common areas who have not consented. ● Working alongside another AAI animal.

Medical/Immunization Information

Date	Health Check/Immunization	Next Due
March 1, 2023	Rabies	March 2, 2026

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