



**New England Pet Partners, Inc. 501c.3**  
**Community Pet Partner #46489**  
*Enhancing Well-Being and Education*  
*with Pet Assisted Therapy*



**Animal-Assisted Activities/Therapy 101 also known as Pet Assisted Activities and Pet Assisted Therapy (PAT)**

Animal-assisted activities (AAA) and animal-assisted therapy (AAT) are the preferred terms used by Pet Partners as they suggest that the animal is the motivating force that enhances treatment provided by a well-trained person.

**AAA/AAT at a Glance**

Registered Pet Partner Teams are not service animals. A **service dog** is trained to help people with disabilities such as visual impairments, mental illnesses, seizure disorders, diabetes, etc. A **therapy dog** is trained to provide comfort and affection to people in hospice, disaster areas, retirement homes, hospitals, nursing homes, schools and more. **Emotional support dogs** provide their **owners** therapeutic benefits through companionship.

**Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA)**

**The formal definition of Animal-Assisted Activities is**

AAA provides opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life. AAA is delivered in a variety of environments by specially trained professionals, paraprofessionals, and/or volunteer teams, in association with animals that meet specific criteria." (Standards of Practice for Animal-Assisted Activities and Therapy).

**What does this mean?**

Animal-assisted activities are casual "meet and greet" activities involving pets visiting people. The same activity can be repeated with many people, unlike a therapy program that is tailored to a particular person, medical condition, intervention, treatment plan and documentation by a qualified Health Care Professional.

**Key Features of AAA**

- Specific treatment goals are not planned for each visit.
- Volunteers and treatment providers are not required to take detailed notes.
- Visit content is planned and organized but generally spontaneous. Visits last as long or as short as needed - and is safe for the pet (team) and clients being visited,

**Examples of AAA**

- A group of volunteers takes their dog or cat to a nursing home once a month to visit. The visit occurs as a large-group activity with direction and assistance provided by facility staff. The volunteer group facilitator keeps an informal log about who was visited.

- An individual brings her dog to a children's long-term care facility to safely "play" with residents. Although the staff is involved in the visits, the staff has not set treatment goals for the interactions. Aside from signing in and out, no records are kept.
- A registered team may give a demonstration at a residential facility behavior.

## **Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)**

### **The formal definition of animal-assisted therapy is:**

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 expertise within the scope of practice of his/her profession.

AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning (cognitive functioning refers to thinking and intellectual skills). AAT is provided in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. This process is documented and evaluated on regular basis between.

### **The Key Features of AAT**

- There are specified goals and objectives for each individual.
- Therapeutic progress is documented and measured.
- There may be a fee for the attending Registered Pet Partner AAT Specialist.

### **Examples of AAT**

- A volunteer brings her dog to a rehabilitation center to work with an occupational therapist and a child who has difficulty controlling fine motor skills. To improve the client's fine motor skills, the therapist has the child manipulate buckles, clasps on leashes, collars and animal carriers.
- Example using a therapy cat: A child or adult opens containers of treats for the cat and feeds small pieces of food to the cat.
- In an animal-assisted therapy session designed to improve a client's ability to sequence events, a therapist teaches a client the steps of brushing a dog. Motivated by the opportunity to brush the dog, the client remembers the steps and the therapist has the client recite the order of events aloud as s/he goes through the actual sequence.
- A woman recovering from a stroke has limited standing and walking tolerance. A physical therapist uses the presence of a dog to motivate the client by placing a (small) dog on a raised table and asking the client to stand while stroking or brushing the animal's back and head.
- To increase a client's ambulation skills, the therapist has the client walk the dog for short distances around the facility grounds (handler uses a double lead and walks alongside the dog and client).

### **Goals of AAT Programs**

Animals can be incorporated into a variety of programs. If you become involved in an AAT program, ask the treatment provider to explain the goals to you. The following are some examples of AAT goals:

#### **Physical**

Improve fine motor skills, wheelchair skills, standing balance and increase exercise.

#### **Mental Health**

Increase verbal interactions between group members.

Increase attention skills (i.e., paying attention, staying on task).

Develop leisure/recreation skills.

Increase self-esteem.

Reduce anxiety.

Reduce loneliness with connection / engaging.

#### **Educational Enrichment**

Increase vocabulary. Aid in long or short-term memory.

Improve knowledge of concepts such as size, color, etc.

Improve willingness to be involved in a group activity.

Improve interactions with others / engaging.

Improve interactions with staff / teamwork.

### **Understanding the Differences Between AAA and AAT**

At a glance, it may be difficult to tell the difference between AAA and AAT. The following are some critical differences you can learn to identify. Although AAA may have one or more of these characteristics, AAT must have all six. AAT is a more formal process than AAA.

<b>AAA</b>	<b>AAT – May be a contract/fee involved</b>
Casual “meet and greet” activities that involve pets visiting people	Significant part of treatment for people who are physically, socially, emotionally or cognitively challenged
No specific treatment goals	Stated goals / review for each session
Same activity can be used with many people	Individual treatment for each patient
Detailed notes unnecessary	Notes on patient progress taken at each session
Visit content is spontaneous	Visit scheduled usually at set at intervals
Visit can be as long or short as desired	Length of visit is pre-determined to best fit needs of patient and safely for the therapy team (dog, cat, horse).

### **Benefits of Animal-Assisted Activities / Therapy**

Human-animal interactions may provide the following benefits to adults and children in a variety of human care facilities:

### **Empathy**

Studies report that children who live in homes with a pet considered a member of the family are more empathetic. Children see animals as peers. It is easier to teach children to be empathetic with an animal than with a human. With animals, what you see is what you get. Humans are not as direct. Children can be taught to read and respect an animal's body language. Understanding what an animal is feeling is easier than determining what a person is feeling. The animal is straightforward and lives in the moment. As children get older, their ability to empathize with animals will carry over into their experiences/relationships with people.

### **Awareness and Focus (Inward / Outward)**

You can focus outward or focus inward. Focusing outward means paying attention to what's happening around you. Focusing inward means paying attention to what's happening inside you: your breath, your feelings, and your thoughts.

The difference between focus and awareness is that focus is more immediate than awareness due to its capability to train the mind on what it needs to pay attention to in the moment.

Awareness, on the other hand, is the ability to notice what areas of attention need focus.

**Focused awareness** (meditation, breathing) relieves stress and improves thinking. Focused awareness gives us better control over our attention. The mind wanders less.

### **Nurturing**

Nurturing skills are learned. Many at-risk children have not learned nurturing skills through the traditional channel - their parents. By being taught to take care of an animal, the children can develop these skills. Psychologically, when a person nurtures, his/her need to be nurtured is being fulfilled.

### **Rapport/Safety**

Animals can open a channel of emotionally safe, non-threatening communication between client and health care professionals. In therapy settings, animals help present an air of emotional safety. The animal's presence may open a path through the person's initial resistance or distrust. Children are especially likely to project their feelings/experiences with an animal *who they trust*.

### **Acceptance**

Animals have a way of unconditionally accepting. They don't care how a person looks or what they say. An animal's acceptance is nonjudgmental, forgiving and uncomplicated by the psychological games people often play.

### **Entertainment**

At a minimum, the presence of an animal can be entertaining. Even people who don't like animals often enjoy watching their reactions. Especially in long-term care facilities, most are entertained by animal visits.

### **Socialization/Motivation/Connection**

Studies have shown that when dogs and cats visit a care facility, there is more laughter and interaction among residents than during any other "therapy" or entertainment time. In an inpatient setting, the presence of animals encourages socialization in three ways: Between clients, between clients and staff, and between clients, staff and family or other visitors. Staff members have reported that it is easier to talk to residents during and after animal visits. Family members often come during the animal visits. Some have reported that it is an especially comfortable and pleasant time to come.

### **Mental Stimulation**

Mental stimulation occurs because of increased communication with other people, recalled memories, reflection, and the entertainment provided by the animals. In situations that are depressing or institutional, the presence of the animals brightens the atmosphere, increasing amusement, laughter and play. These positive distractions may help to decrease people's feelings of isolation or alienation.

### **Physical Contact, Touch**

Much has been written about the correlation between touch and health. Infants who are not touched seldom develop healthy relationships with other people, often failing to thrive and grow physically. For some people, touch from another person is not acceptable, but the warm, furry touch of a dog or cat is. In hospitals, where most touch is painful or invasive, the touch of an animal is safe, non-threatening and pleasant. There are several programs for people who have been physically or sexually abused in which staff and volunteers are not allowed to touch the clients. Having an animal to hold, hug, touch and trust can make a big difference to people who would otherwise have no positive, appropriate physical contact.

### **Physiological Benefits**

Many people can relax when animals are present. Tests have shown that the decrease in heart rate and blood pressure can be dramatic. Even watching fish swim in an aquarium can be very calming.

### **Something More**

When people are with animals, they may feel spiritual fulfillment or a sense of oneness with life and nature. This is hard to define or explain. Some well-known authors have described their relationships with animals and nature as sustaining life energy and/or part of their communion and relationship with God. Albert Schweitzer, George W. Carver, and J. Allen Boone (author of *Kinship with All Life*), Dr. Jane Goodall, Betty White, Oprah Winfrey, among others, express this "something more" from their pets.