

Code of Ethics- AAT (Animal-Assisted Therapy)

Dear Inquirer,

Thank you for your time. The composition of this document began more than fifteen years ago. Over time, the field has evolved. I invite you to suggest corrections and changes.

Warm regards,

Yoni

General:

Animal assisted therapy has become popular around the world over the last 20 years, including of course, in Israel. This field is being studied in Israel and the world, and different professionals are working in it at different levels of expertise as follows:

AAE -Animal Assisted Education

AAA- Animal Assisted Advisor

AAT – Animal Assisted Therapy

AAP – Animal Assisted Psychotherapy

The purpose of this document is to include the different workers using animal assisted therapy, to give ethical direction for each of these disciplines according to training and professional background at each level of training. All of this is to be done according to the level of experience and training of the worker in the field of animal assisted therapy.

Hereafter, the word “therapist” or AAT will be used but the content of the paper is directed also at those who work at the AAE, AAA and AAP levels. It is important to emphasize that an additional purpose of this document is to encourage and promote research processes in the area of animal assisted intervention/therapy.

1. An Animal-assisted therapist is one who meets the professional requirements for accreditation determined by the ISAAT (International Society for Animal-Assisted Therapy), according to the vision set forth by the IAHAIO (International Association of Human-Animal Interaction), and with the aspiration that there will soon be official recognition from the government of the State of Israel.
2. Animal-assisted therapists must be aware of their responsibilities and duties, and adhere to the regulations set forth in this document.

3. Animal-assisted therapists must comply with the laws of the State in which they are employed, subject to all laws pertaining to mental health, welfare and education, as well as all derivative regulations included in the Animal Welfare Law (1994).
4. Patients may do no harm of any kind to animals. Should a patient maim or even kill an animal, the therapist must act both according to the needs of the patient and with regard to the specific incident, and of course, follow all guidelines set forth by the Ministry of Health and other relevant factors.
5. Animal-assisted therapists must diagnose, treat and advise only within their areas of expertise, and in accordance with their professional training and experience. They must inform patients or their guardians of their relevant education, skills, specialization and occupational experience before proceeding with treatment.
6. Animal-assisted therapists must act with integrity and dignity towards patients and other professionals. When acting as part of a multi-disciplinary team, animal therapists must cooperate with other therapists and professionals for the good of the patient. They must avoid any disparagement of others and show no bias of age, race, gender or religion.
7. Animal-assisted therapists must accept wholeheartedly the complexity and disparity of patients and their views. They must avoid forcing their personal beliefs and work methods with different animals on their patients. Animal-assisted therapists must broaden their familiarity with as many cultures, traditions, religions and faiths as possible, with the understanding that such knowledge may prove beneficial to patients during sessions. Therapists must be aware of their convictions, opinions, and biases, as well as those of their patients, before taking on the responsibility of treatment. Furthermore, therapists must be aware of the possible effects of therapy and the relationship dynamic with the animals they employ. Therapists must understand the cultural significance and symbolism of the animals they work with.
8. Animal-assisted therapists must avoid using their role and status to adversely affect patients.
9. Animal-assisted therapists must document sessions and summarize them professionally for when documentation and updates are necessary. The reporting process will be conducted in such a way as to maintain patient-therapist confidentiality, with use of personal discretion and judgment.
10. Animal-assisted therapists must maintain strong professional ties (through training, consultation and discussion) with other professionals in the fields of mental health, welfare, education and veterinary services, appropriate to the population they work with.
11. Animal-assisted therapists must maintain the highest measure of professionalism and keep up with new developments in the field.
12. Animal-assisted therapists must know when to complete treatment in a suitable and timely manner, and assist patients in their transition to other therapists when necessary.
13. Animal-assisted therapists must be aware of circumstances requiring the termination of their work with a patient, and/or the transition to other therapists, due to personal constraints relating to their own personal history, to any inability to deal with the patient, or to any other difficulty that may arise.

14. It is not recommended to treat patients that therapists are connected to, either through familial, social or economic ties. Also, it is not recommended to treat [one's] students for at least two years after they have completed therapy studies. In such cases when therapy is initiated with someone close to the therapist, this fact must be included in the therapy contract.

15. Animal-assisted therapist trainers/educators are those who have come from the mental health field and have undergone training to become a senior therapist/educator or an animal-assisted therapist who has undergone training that certifies him/her as a teacher in an AAP program.

16. Animal-assisted therapist trainers/educators must comply with the following regulations:

- Avoid using their influential status over students and interns.
- Avoid establishing therapeutic ties with those they are instructing, students and interns, unless explicitly agreed upon through mutual contract.
- An obligation to nurture the professional development of students and those who are being instructed over time; provide a personal example of conduct in complying with Code of Ethics, exhibit professionalism and interpersonal relationships that dignify the profession and its patients.

17. Animal-assisted therapists working for a public entity/organization must comply with the following regulations:

- It is prohibited for a therapist who works with a public entity/organization to work privately within the same entity/organization and/or with its patients, unless explicitly permitted to by said entity/organization.
- The therapist must allow for a “one-year” cooling period between working as a therapist for a public entity/organization and continuing in a personal capacity unless authorized to do so through a special contract that justifies directly continuing treatment.

18. Animal-assisted therapists must be aware of the unique nature of this form of therapy, stemming from the presence of animals in sessions. The encounter with animals allows for various therapeutic connections to be established, as detailed in Dr. Yoni Yehuda's model: “Therapeutic Triangles - Psychotherapy Implementations in the Work with Animals”:

The unique attributes of animals as living, thinking, feeling and creative beings, influence the progress and dynamics of therapy.

- Animals allow and elicit touch.
- Animals facilitate and allow for the establishment of connections.
- Animals elicit and encourage experiences, emotions and feelings.
- Animals and their environments allow for many and varied consequential processes in diverse areas of life.
- Animals allow for establishing elements of self-identity and distinguishing between self and environment.

- Animals assist in developing empathy and caring for others.
- Animals reflect primary needs, such as feeding, love, inclusion, maintenance, cleanliness and others.
- Animals allow adults and teens to re-experience childhood.
- Animals embody passion, sexuality, aggression, etc.
- Animals and time spent with them allow for experiences of success, feelings of capability and a sense of control.
- Animals can provide therapeutic benefit in helping overcome a wide range of past and present medical and psychological problems. **I changed this from the Hebrew – let me know if this can work**
- Animals can be helpful in encouraging ego strength– adaptation, discipline and self control.

19. Animal-assisted therapists must familiarize themselves with all the animals they may come to work with: life style in nature and in captivity, nutrition, maintenance, habitat, husbandry, reproduction, classification, appearance and known human-animal interaction. Also, therapists must acquaint themselves with the nature of each animal, its abilities and limitations with regard to therapy, and work with them while considering their needs and with the understanding that they are responsible for the animals' wellbeing.
20. Animal-assisted therapists must consider the medical, psychiatric, neurological and/or psychological status of patients when working with them.
21. Animal-assisted therapists must harmonize the therapeutic setting, resources and methods with specific patient needs. The therapeutic setting must be a safe environment and be suitable for the physical, emotional and cognitive needs and limitations of each patient. Therapists must be especially alert to any changes that may occur during sessions and respond immediately to such changes.
22. Animal-assisted therapists must use professional discretion when deciding on the appropriate animal for therapy: adapting methods to therapy goals, personal adaptations due to considerations of age, developmental stage, motor skills, cognitive and emotional status, and work environment.
23. Animal-assisted therapists must draft a therapy contract before beginning treatment: treatment conditions, mutual responsibility, meeting schedule, information on specific methods when employing animals, information about therapist-patient confidentiality and the obligation to report, etc.
24. Animal-assisted therapists must work in the best interests of their patients and use therapeutic intervention methods that address their needs. These must also comply with the employment framework and contract agreed on with understanding and mutual responsibility.
25. Animal-assisted therapists must care for patients' emotional welfare when in the presence of animals.

Patients may not be forced or coerced into encountering or touching animals they do not wish to see or touch, excluding special circumstances in which such methods are agreed upon ahead of time in the therapy contract and with therapeutic benefit in mind. The therapeutic setting must allow for free and protected movement for patients and animals alike. During sessions, therapists must remain alert to any change in patients' stance towards the animal, or vice versa.

26. Animal-assisted therapists must care for patients' emotional and psychological welfare when in the presence of animals.

- In the initial data-gathering stage (anamnesis), allergies or sensitivity to animals, animal spoor or food must be ruled out. Some patients may require a doctor's approval or a referral/health assessment signed by a doctor. Patients with immune deficiencies of any kind (youth, old age, cancer, AIDS, head injuries, motor injuries, etc.) must receive approval from the patient's personal physician or other certified professional. Without written approval, therapists must inform patients and/or their appointed guardians of the possible risks and refuse further treatment.
- During sessions with the patient, therapists must remain alert to any possible signs of distress, allergies or sensitivity to animals, animal spoor or food. Patients must not be allowed to perform any act that may endanger them or bring them to possible injury, either from the animals or from any accompanying accessories, without first receiving instruction on possible dangers. Patients may not be exposed to sick animals suffering from zoonotic illnesses. Furthermore, patients may not be exposed to aggressive animals or those unfamiliar with human contact. Therapists may work only with animals they are familiar with.
- Should the animal harm the patient, therapists must adhere to Health Ministry protocols while providing first aid treatment according to type of injury, reporting the incident to those responsible for overseeing treatment, and referring the patient for further medical attention (updated tetanus vaccine and/or other treatments). A report must be filed and distributed to relevant authorized personal in compliance with the law, and type of injury.

27. Animal-assisted sessions normally facilitate psychological and emotional intimacy between the three points of the therapeutic triangle - therapist, patient and animal, since the presence of live animals may awaken the need for touch. Working with animals, simply because they are living creatures with basic urges, connects the patient, to a large extent, with basic urges and physical closeness. The job of the therapist is to establish clear goals to distinguish between demonstrations of closeness and those of sexual behavior. This should be done while establishing an intimate relationship that is significant to the therapeutic process and to the personal development of the patient.

28. In cases where physical contact between patients and therapists is necessary (such as with motor disabilities, aversion, distress, need for soothing and others), the conditions for such contact must be specified in the therapy contract. If cases of unnecessary contact occur because of a mishap such as transferring the animal or equipment, or in emergency situations when a risk is posed to either patient or animal, therapists must discuss this in a training framework and afterwards with the patient.

29. Animals are living, instinctual beings that tangibly demonstrate such situations as parenthood, birth, breastfeeding, sexuality, mating, intimacy, violence and others. On the one hand, this provides a wonderful opportunity to advance the therapeutic process. On the other, it may pose a difficulty for some patients.

Therefore, therapists must give careful thought and take into consideration the specifics of each case, according to the patient and the situation as to whether proximity to animals may bring up charged or sexually-related memories or experiences. This must be discussed in training and later with the patient.

30. Regarding sexuality between therapist and patient:

- As with every therapist, the animal assisted therapist is bound by the following regulations:
- Therapists may not have any sexual involvement with patients and/or students.
- Therapists may not have any erotic involvement with patients and/or students.
- Therapists may not be undressed in the presence of patients and/or students.
- Therapists may not permit patients to undress in their presence.
- Therapists may not have any sexual involvement with past patients after completion of therapy.
- Therapists must take care to discourage and avoid any inappropriate intimacies that may result from distorted views on intimacy from patients, themselves or both.