



IAHAIO WHITE PAPER

THE IAHAIO DEFINITIONS FOR ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTION
AND ANIMAL ASSISTED ACTIVITY AND GUIDELINES FOR
WELLNESS OF ANIMALS INVOLVED

FINAL REPORT

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THE IAHAIO DEFINITIONS FOR ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTION
AND ANIMAL ASSISTED ACTIVITY AND GUIDELINES
FOR WELLNESS OF ANIMALS INVOLVED TASK FORCE

The IAHAIO Definitions for Animal Assisted Intervention and Animal Assisted Activity and Guidelines for the Wellness of Animals Involved Task Force was established in March 2013. Those appointed to serve on the Task Force were academics, veterinary medicine professionals, and practitioners from different countries with a background in, or special knowledge in different dimensions in the field of Human-Animal Interaction (HAI).

Challenges facing the field of HAI at an international level are numerous. For example the numerous and various terminologies of Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) and Animal Assisted Activity (AAA) result in confusion. There is also a dearth of guidelines regarding those involved, especially concerning the animals. Recognizing the urgency to address the issues above, a Task Force was established and charged with the responsibility of clarifying and making recommendations on AAI and AAA terminologies and definitions and outlining ethical practices for the wellbeing of animals involved.

The recommendations of the Task Force are the result of a year of thorough, thoughtful and candid discussions about the gravity of the confusion and lack of guidelines confronting the field of HAI, respectful and proactive sharing of information and different points of view and careful review of pertinent materials. The Task Force encourages IAHAIO members to have these definitions and guidelines adopted and implemented in theory, research and practice as they stand in their own programs and those of others working within the geographic range of the member's organization. The Task Force also recommends IAHAIO members to promote these definitions and guidelines in their respective countries.

DEFINITIONS

Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)

An Animal Assisted Intervention is a goal oriented intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals in health, education and human service (e.g., social work) for the purpose of therapeutic gains in humans. Animal assisted interventions incorporate human-animal teams in formal human service such as Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) or Animal Assisted Education (AAE).

- **Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT):** Animal Assisted Therapy is a goal oriented, planned and structured therapeutic intervention directed and/or delivered by health, education and human service professionals. 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 with expertise within the scope of the professionals' practice. AAT focuses on enhancing physical, cognitive, behavioral and/or socio-emotional functioning of the particular human client.
- **Animal Assisted Education (or Animal Assisted Pedagogy):** Animal Assisted Education (AAE) is a goal oriented, planned and structured intervention directed and/or delivered by educational and related service professional. AAE is conducted by qualified (with degree) general and special education teacher. Regular education teachers who conduct AAE must have knowledge of the animals involved. An example of AAE delivered by a regular education teacher is an educational visit that promotes responsible pet ownership. AAE, when done by special (remedial) education teachers is also considered therapeutic and a goal oriented intervention. The focus of the activities is on academic goals, pro-social skills and cognitive functioning. The student's progress is measured and documented. An example of AAE delivered by a special education teacher is a dog-assisted reading program.

Animal Assisted Activity (AAA)

AAAs are informal interactions/ visitations often conducted on a volunteer basis by the human-animal team for motivational, educational and recreational purposes. There are no treatment goals for the interactions. AAAs are generally facilitated by individuals who do not have a health, education or human service degree. Human-animal teams have received at least introductory training, preparation and assessment to participate in informal visitations. Human-animal teams who provide AAA may also work formally and directly with a healthcare, educator and/or human service provider on specific documentable goals. In this case they are participating in AAT or AAE that is

conducted by a specialist in his/her profession. Examples of AAA include animal assisted crisis response that focuses on providing comfort and support for trauma, crisis and disaster survivors, and visiting companion animals for 'meet and greet' activities with residents in nursing homes.

GUIDELINES FOR HUMAN AND ANIMAL WELLBEING IN 'AAI' AND 'AAA'

Human Wellbeing

- Safety measures for clients must be in place. Professionals must reduce risk for clients involved in AAI and AAA. They must ensure that clients do not have species or breed specific allergies, be aware of high risk in some population and of exclusion criteria depending on the risk (e.g., infection in immune-suppressed patients, and diseases which can be spread from client to client via the animal). Appropriate testing with individual animals is advised.
- Clients may have different views about specific animals included in interventions. When the clients' beliefs – religious, cultural, or otherwise – run counter to recommended AAI and AAA, it is advisable that professionals discuss with clients alternative options.

Animal Wellbeing

AAI and AAA should only be performed with the assistance of animals that are in good health, both physically and emotionally and that enjoy this type of activity.

Professionals are held accountable for the well-being of the animals they are working with. In all AAA/AAI professionals need to consider the safety and welfare of all participants. Professionals must understand that the participating animal, independent of the species, is not simply a tool, but a living being. Below are descriptions of best practices for animals involved in AAI and AAA, including assistance and service dogs.

- Only domesticated animals can be involved in interventions and activities. Domesticated animals (e.g., dogs, cats, horses, farm animals, guinea pigs, rats, fish, birds) are those animals that have been adapted for social interactions with humans. However, it is important to note that although many species of fish are kept as pets in institutions, few are adapted for social interactions. (Birds and fish should not be wild caught, but captive bred). Domesticated animals must be well socialized with humans and trained with humane techniques, such as positive reinforcement. Domesticated animals must be certified by one of the national/international organization as meeting certain criteria. Wild and exotic species (e.g., dolphins, elephants, capuchin monkeys, prairie dogs, arthropods, reptiles), even tame ones, cannot be involved in interactions. The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society's statement on Dolphin assisted therapy is that it

unlikely meets the psychological or physical welfare needs of either human participants or dolphins (Brakes & Williamson, 2007, p.18). However, observation and contemplation about wild animals in the natural world and in wild life sanctuaries that meet national/international animal welfare standards may be involved as opposed to direct contact with wild animals provided it is done in a way not to cause the animals any stress or damage to their habitat.

- Not all animals, including many that would be considered "good pets" by their owners, are good candidates for AAI or AAA. Animals considered for participation in AAI or AAA should be carefully evaluated by an expert in animal behavior such as veterinarians and animal behaviorists. Only those with the proper disposition and training should be selected for AAI or AAA. Regular evaluations should be performed to ensure that the animals continue to show proper disposition. A veterinarian behaviorist or an animal behaviorist should also examine animals considered for AAI before their involvement with clients – assessing them for health, temperament & behavior and ensuring that all appropriate preventive medicine protocols are in place.
- Handlers and professionals working with animals should have received training and knowledge of the animals' well-being needs, including being able to detect signs of discomfort and stress. Professionals should have taken a course on general animal behavior and appropriate human-animal interactions and species specific (i.e., horses, pigs, hamsters, gerbils, and others) interactions.
- Professionals must have an understanding of animal specific boundaries that are normal and respectful to them. Animals participating in AAI and AAA should never be involved in such ways that their safety and comfort are jeopardized. Examples of such inappropriate activities and therapy exercises include, but are not limited to, clients (children and adults) jumping or bending over animals, dressing up animals in human clothes or costumes, outfitting animals with uncomfortable accessories (dressing other than clothes such as bandanas, weather related jackets, booties designed specifically for animals), or asking an animal to perform physically challenging or stressful tasks (e.g., crawling, leaning/bending in unnatural positions, pulling heavy gear) or tricks and exercises that require such movements and postures. Clients should be supervised at all times and in all settings (e.g., schools, therapy sites, nursing homes) to make sure that they are not teasing the animal (e.g., pulling tail/ears, sitting on or crawling under the animal) or otherwise treating the animal inappropriately, thereby putting themselves and the animal at risk.

- Professionals who are responsible for the well-being of the animal during intervention must ensure that the animal is healthy, well rested, comfortable, and cared for during and after the sessions (e.g., provision of fresh water, work floors that are safe and suitable). Animals must not be overworked or overwhelmed and sessions should be time limited.
- Proper veterinary care must be provided. All animals participating in AAI or AAA must be checked by a veterinarian during the selection process and on a regular basis. The frequency of these checks should be decided by the veterinarian based on each animal's needs and the type of activities the animal is involved in. Care of the animals must be appropriate to the species. This includes species specific food and housing, appropriate temperature, lighting, environment enrichment and other pertinent features and ensuring that the animal is able to maintain natural behavior to the extent possible.
- Adequate measures must be taken to prevent zoonoses. Professionals must ensure that the animals receive a routine health evaluation by a licensed veterinarian at least once a year regarding appropriate (flea), parasite, (tick or mange) prevention (control) and screening for specific, potentially zoonotic microorganisms, including group A streptococci, if indicated.
- Professionals and administrators working in partnership with visiting or resident animals in institutions such as schools, psychiatric wards, prisons & residential programs need to be aware of local (e.g., school, district, state) laws and policies. Within their own programs and institutions professionals should advocate for policies and procedures to ensure care is provided for animals assisting in AAI and AAA. The formation of an ethics committee is advised and the committee must include individuals knowledgeable in animal welfare (e.g., veterinarian)
- Assistance Dogs are highly specialized and guidelines for professionals working in partnerships with Assistance dogs are not part of this document.

Given the biological and psychological evidence for the innate affinity of humans to companion animals and a commitment to their health and welfare, the members of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations overwhelmingly embrace the concept of "One Health," which asserts that the health and wellness of animals, people, and the environment are inextricably linked (<http://www.iahaio.org/files/declarationchicago.pdf>, IAHAIO 2013 Chicago Declaration) .

References

American Veterinary Medical Association

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