

Outline for Pet Therapy Presentation
Cat Writer's Conference
November 16, 2007

Our Relationship with Animals

1944 article by Prof. James Bossard entitled Mental Hygiene
1962 article by child Dr. Boris Levinson called the Dog as Co-Therapist.

1970 Dr. Levinson, a child psychologist, advocated the role of animals in the lives of children, both health and emotionally disturbed.

Why Are Animals Important?

Pervasive in our lives

Often the first toys we played with - stuffed animals

In children's story books

As adults, we are surrounded by animals

Results of a 2005 Survey by the APPMA

Illustrates the role pets play in our lives

The Role of the Animal/Human Bond in Healing

And how it led to the expansion of pet therapy

Therapy Animals vs Service Animals

Therapy animals, most of which are dogs, do not have the same legal protections given to service dogs. Although therapy dogs often have photo ID cards and wear vests, they are not allowed in restaurants, buses, libraries, etc.

Animal Assisted Therapy vs Animal Assisted Activities

These are the new terminologies that replaced pet therapy. AAA is the most common. AAT involves a trained therapist, usually a psychotherapist, physical therapist, or perhaps an occupational therapist who takes notes on each patient.

Benefits of AAA/AAT

Empathy

Socialization

Physical touch

Entertainment

Nurturance

Healing

Communication

Where do we find AAT/AAA?

Hospitals
Nursing Homes
Adult Day Care
Rehab Centers
Hospice
Abused children - crisis nurseries
Domestic violence shelters
Homeless shelters
Psychiatric hospitals

Certification

Mostly done through the Delta Society or Therapy Dog International. Dogs must pass a behavior test, which is actually an extension of the Canine Good Citizen test. Dogs must then be cleared by a vet once a year and be current on vaccinations.

The Delta Society accepts other animals for therapy work including cats, chickens, rabbits, horses, rats. The behavior test is modified depending on the animal.

At Gabriel's Angels, where I volunteer, we visit only abused and at risk children. All human volunteers must submit references, pass a background check and submit fingerprints.

Writing about therapy animals

Look at the therapy team. Is there something special about the dog, the person, that would interest readers.

What about the facility? One of the domestic violence shelters in Phoenix was built by a woman who wanted battered women to have a lovely home to escape to.

I used personal examples from my therapy work at Gabriel's Angels and how Luke lifted the spirits of abused children.