



PSYCHOLOGIST

# No Need to Worry! Canine assisted interventions for anxiety disorders

**Betz King, PsyD, LP  
Saybrook University**

**King & Associates Psychotherapy  
Div 17 Sec 13 Human-Animal Interaction**

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CAREER PATHS IN  
HUMAN-ANIMAL  
INTERACTION  
FOR SOCIAL AND  
BEHAVIORAL  
SCIENTISTS

Edited by LORI R. KOGAN  
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## **Summary of Considerations for APA Ethical Standards Competencies in Animal-Assisted Interventions**

**Submitted by the Human-Animal Interactions Ethics Workgroup**

Members:

Amy Johnson, MA, MAT, LPC, CPDT-KA, UW-AAB

Rise VanFleet, PhD, LP, RPT-S, CDBC

Leslie Stewart, PhD, LPC

Susan Crowley

Molly DePrekel MA LP

Emily Eccles, M.A.

Laura Hey, BAS, Certified Animal Assisted Intervention Specialist

Ann R Howie, MSW

Cynthia Johnson, Ph.D.

Betz King, Psy.D., L.P.

Natalie Runge, MA, LPCC

Sonya Snyder, MPhil, MSSW

Melissa Trevathan-Minnis, Ph.D.



What is anxiety?

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## Canine-Assisted Psychotherapy

- Conducted by a trained, licensed mental health clinician, who is competent in their licensing scope of practice as well as therapy animal welfare and AAT competencies.
- Includes a canine with an industry recognized therapy dog certification (Pet Partners, Therapy Dogs International etc)
- Goals are measurable and objective, planned and structured.
- Document, document, document!

# Examples of interventions (not necessarily anxiety specific)

O'Callaghan, D.M. & Chandler, C.K. (2011) An exploratory study of animal-assisted interventions utilized by mental health professionals. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 6, 90-104

Piper, L.J. The practice of animal assisted psychotherapy. E Street Lane Publicaitons

- Th. comments on client-TD relationship
- Th. encourages Ct. to play with TD in session
- Th. engages TD in performing tricks
- Th. encourages Ct. to touch and or pet TD
- Th. encourages Ct. to express distress / concerns to TD
- Th. encourages Ct. to engage the TD in performing tricks
- Th. develops specific activities that involve TD
- Th. allows TD to engage spontaneously with Ct.
- Ct., TD and TH. engage outside of traditional therapy environment, i.e take a walk.
- Th. asks Ct. to command TD in some manner
- Th. encourages Ct. to make up stories involving TD
- TH. asks questions based on the Ct.-TD relationships, i.e. "if Paisley was your best friend, what would she know about you that nobody else knows?"
- Spontaneous interactions between Ct. and TD are reflected upon by Th.
- Th. shares specific stories about TD's history with Ct.

# Who is a good AAT client?

- Does not have an intense fear of dogs
- Has no history of harming animals
- Has not been harmed by a dog
- No animal allergies
- No cultural prohibitions about being with dogs



# Benefits & Risks

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Break the ice</li><li>• Build rapport</li><li>• Give Th. and Ct. a shared interest</li><li>• Foster trust</li><li>• Offer comfort</li><li>• Provide comic relief</li><li>• Can help to teach Ct. skills</li><li>• Foster / teach empathy</li><li>• Decrease heart rate &amp; blood pressure</li><li>• Increase oxytocin</li><li>• Improve peer-to-peer relationships</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TD can exercise free will and disrupt process</li><li>• TD can refuse to engage, or walk away</li><li>• TD can injure Ct.; Ct. can injure TD</li><li>• Ct can experience intense grief and loss when terminating therapy or if TD dies</li><li>• Zoonotic diseases</li><li>• Maintaining welfare of both Ct. and TD is double stressful for Th.</li><li>• TD welfare requires Th to make sufficient time for breaks and</li><li>• Peer judgments</li><li>• Legal liability – you need extra liability insurance. Get it. Volunteer agency cert does not cover work.</li></ul>

# Anxiety Interventions in the office

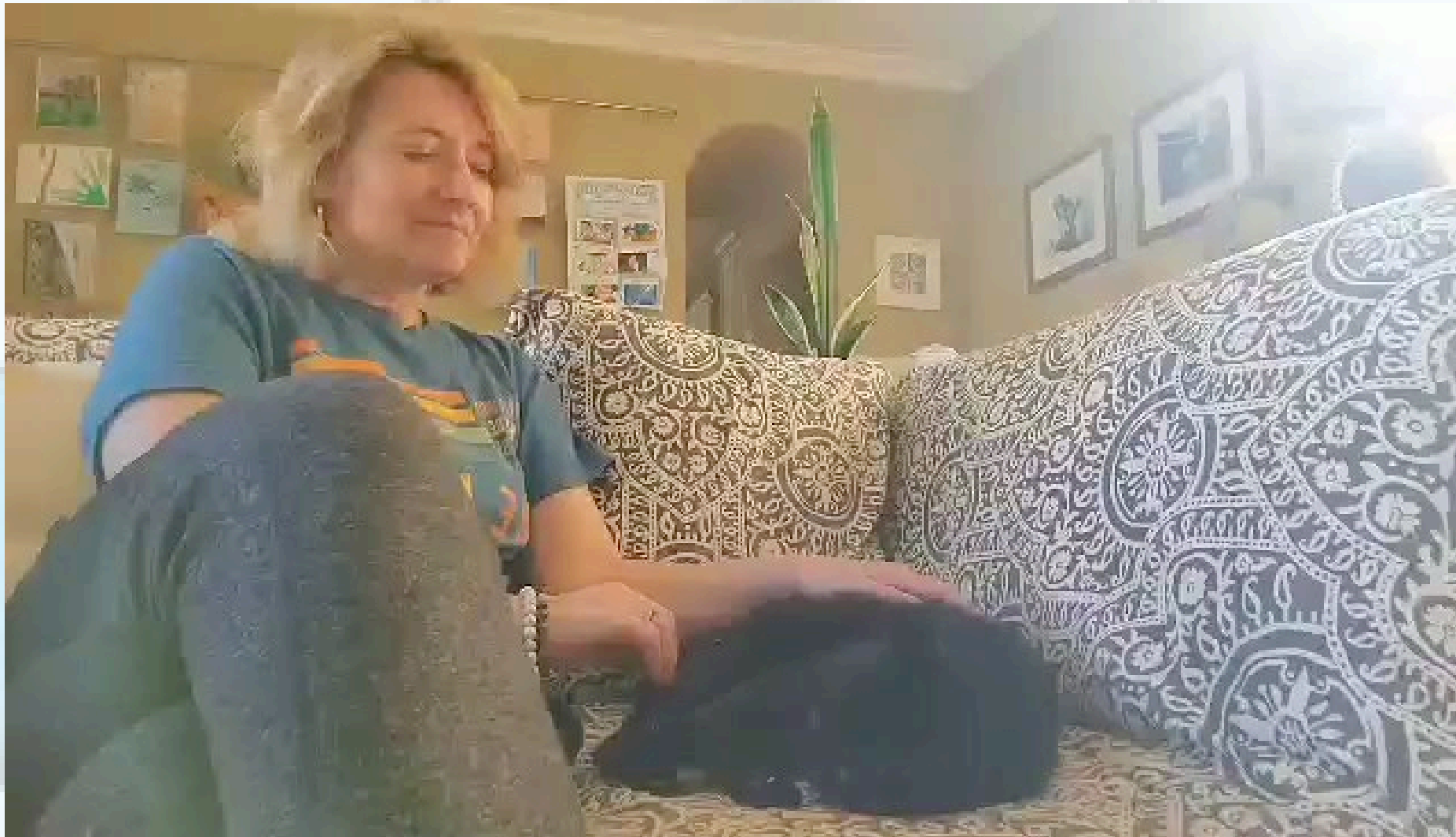
Goal: Reduce anxiety

Objectives:

1. Bring Ct. into the present moment, into here-and-now awareness = P
2. Activate Vagus nervous system response = V
3. Defuse / distract Ct. from ruminating, i.e. “change the channel” of their thinking = D
4. Create new coping skills = C

- Vagus nerve stimulation - V
  - Cold weather
  - Gargling, humming, om-ing
- Teach Ct. signs of canine anxiety to foster empathy and problem solving = P, D, C
- Petting or grooming while listening to a song = P, D, C
- Share what helps your dog when they are anxious (food distraction, pacing, playing, removing threats etc) and transfer ideas to the Ct.'s life = C
- Go for a walk = P, V, D, C
- Learn a new trick together = P, D
- Ask Ct. for stories about other dogs they knew or know = P, D
- Ask Ct. how it feels to be accepted and welcomed by dog (unconditional positive regard) = P, D
- Match breath with animal = P, V, D, C

# Matching breath with the therapy cat



# Anxiety Interventions clients can do at home

- Vagus nerve stimulation
  - Cold water or weather
  - Gargling, humming, om-ing
  - Match breathing with animal
  - Exercising / being outdoors
- Petting or grooming while listening to a song
- Go for a walk
- Learn a new trick together
- Petting / snuggling while watching TV
- Volunteering with dog, or at a dog rescue
- Join local dog park (exercise and socialization for both human and animal)

# Take aways

- Canine assisted psychotherapy (CAP) is a dynamic, effective evidence based treatment for anxiety.
- We need more evidence based research, so please conduct some 😊
- AAT should only be executed by a therapist who is competent in their licensing scope of practice, animal assisted therapy and animal welfare.
- AAT should only be executed by a canine with an industry recognized certification, who is healthy, enjoys interacting with clients, and is allowed to take breaks and say 'no thank you'.
- AAT poses liability risks that should be mitigated by human training, canine training, best practice standards, evidence based interventions and ample liability coverage.
- AAT can be done with other animals besides canines. Pet Partners recognizes dogs, cats, equines, rabbits, guinea pigs, llamas and alpacas, birds, miniature pigs, and rats
- Training is available through HAI, AAll, Pet Partners and other organizations.

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