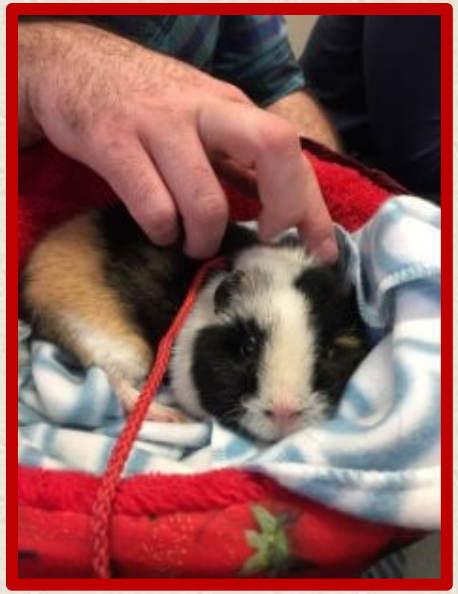
When Size Does Not Matter: Guinea Pigs & Rabbits Make a Big AAI Impact



September 1st, 2022

Meet the presenters!

Patti Anderson, M.Ed., C.P.D.T.

Instructor for Animal-Assisted Therapy Psychology courses at Saint Mary's University in MN

Tellington TTouch® Practitioner

Consultant for therapy dog programs at Mayo Clinic and the MSP Airport

Pet Partners® handler for twenty-two registered therapy animal teams & evaluator for seven species

Niki Vettel, M.A., M.Ed.

Certificate in Animals and Human Health, University of Colorado, Denver

Experience with Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI) & guinea pigs with adult populations including: group therapist with dual diagnosis patients, intensive outpatient programs, general adult psychiatric patients, and patients in sober houses

Reiki Master & certified Pet Bereavement Counselor

First registered Pet Partners® therapy guinea pig in MA!

Photo courtesy of Red Rock Rabbits

Bunny Basics

- Rabbits are from the lagomorph family & not considered rodents
- They are crepuscular
- Life span is between 5-10 years
- There are 49 recognized breeds of rabbits
- They are a prey animal
- Need to eat Timothy Hay & fresh greens daily
- Can be litterbox trained
- Indoor pet that needs *a lot* of space
- They are herd animals, so a buddy is best
- In general, they don’t like being picked up

Lagomorph Logistics

A “Lucky” Rabbit’s Foot?

Examples of Rabbit Symbolism:

- Good Luck
- Fertility
- A Zodiac sign
- A Trickster
- Spirit Animal
- A Witch in Disguise
- New Beginnings

HAVE YOU MET MY
THERAPIST?

NO ANTIBIOTICS EVER
PANKO CHICKEN BREAST TENDERLOINS

Rabbit/Guinea Pig
AAI Activities for Youth

Teach a trick!

Teach TTouch Techniques

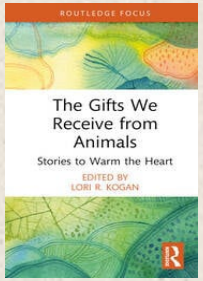
Pick a card

Experience being a critter!

Just be still!

Create a scene!

Rabbit agility

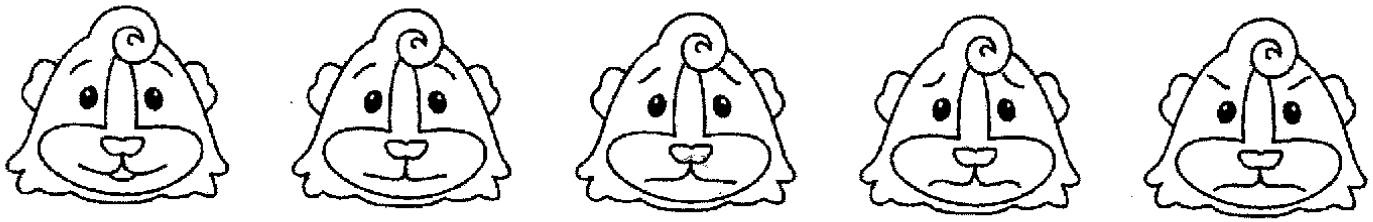


Bibliotherapy

Easy Measuring Tools
for AAT Activities with Youth

Your Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Please circle the face which shows the closest to how you felt when you sat down in class first thing this morning.



Please circle the face that best shows how you feel right now:

Likert Scale

Fist of Five

Guinea Pig Primer

- Guinea pigs are diurnal
- Life span is about 5-7 years
- There are 13 recognized breeds of guinea pigs
- They are a prey animal
- Need to eat Timothy Hay & fresh greens daily
- Need housing larger than those sold in the pet stores
- They are herd animals, so a buddy is best

Cavy History

One guinea for a pig!

- They originated in South America about 5,000 years ago
- The Andean peoples used them for religious ceremonies and as a food source.
- They are a domesticated species
- Queen Elizabeth the 1st, (1575) had guinea pigs as pets
- They arrived in North America in the 1800's
- Guinea pig is a nickname, they are officially called cavies

ADVENTURES IN THERAPY WITH A GUINEA PIG PARTNER

With Niki Vettel & Calvin

Meet Calvin

Calvin’s goal:

- To help you understand how a guinea pig can be a VERY positive therapy partner
- Some modalities/topics which benefit from incorporating a guinea pig into therapy practice
- Make sure you come away loving guinea pigs!

Are you a guinea pig expert?

1) Calvin goes into a Denny’s for dinner. Which of the following does he order?

a) Loaded nachos

b) Fish and chips

c) A nice leafy salad, with green & red peppers & parsley

Are you a guinea pig expert? (continued)

3) Guinea pigs are known to have existed 5,000 years ago in:
   a) Syrian desert
   b) New Guinea
   c) Peru
   d) Brooklyn, New York
4) Why are guinea pigs called “prey” animals?
   a) Because they go to church every Sunday
   b) Because they are hunted and eaten by other animals

Who can benefit from animal-assisted therapy with a cavy?

Adults, especially individuals who feel particularly vulnerable:

- Recovering from substance abuse
- Recovering from physical or emotional abuse
- Issues with confidence, anxiety, panic attacks

Children on the spectrum

Why partner with a guinea pig?

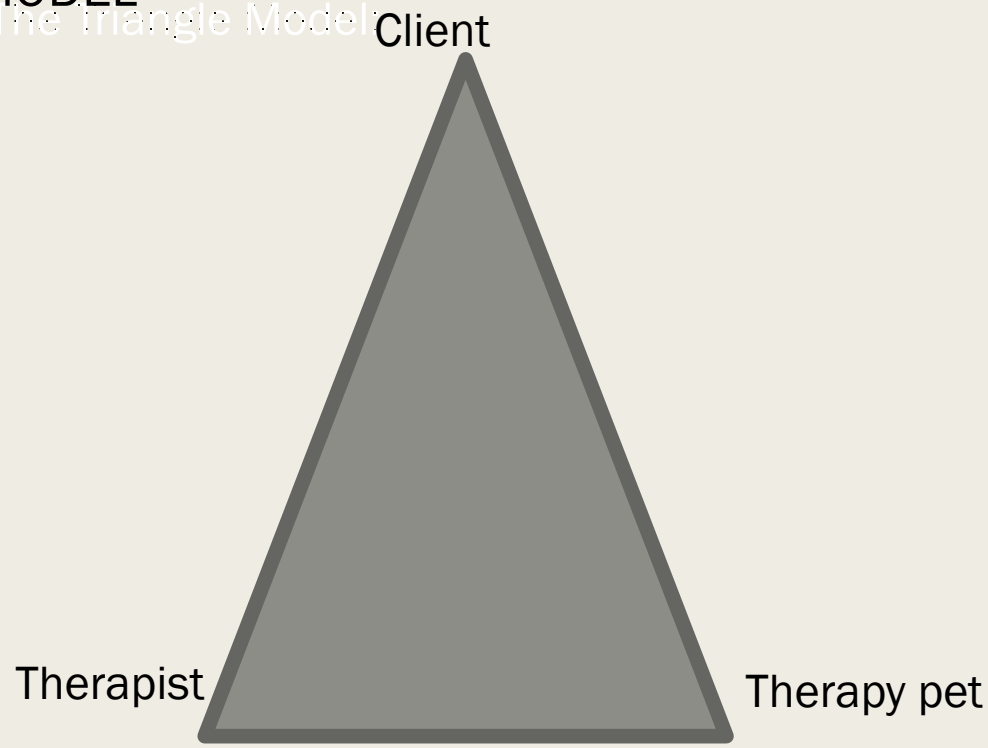
- They are gentle and docile animals, when properly socialized
- Clients can experience them “up close and personally” – they can be placed on a lap, petted and fed
- They are small and non-threatening
- They elicit fond memories for many from their childhoods
- Cultural norms may preclude a client from feeling comfortable with a dog
- Many people are afraid of dogs
- For children, they are a “kid-sized” animal
- They are VERY VERY CUTE!

Guinea pigs come in many shapes and colors!

2 models for animal-assisted therapy

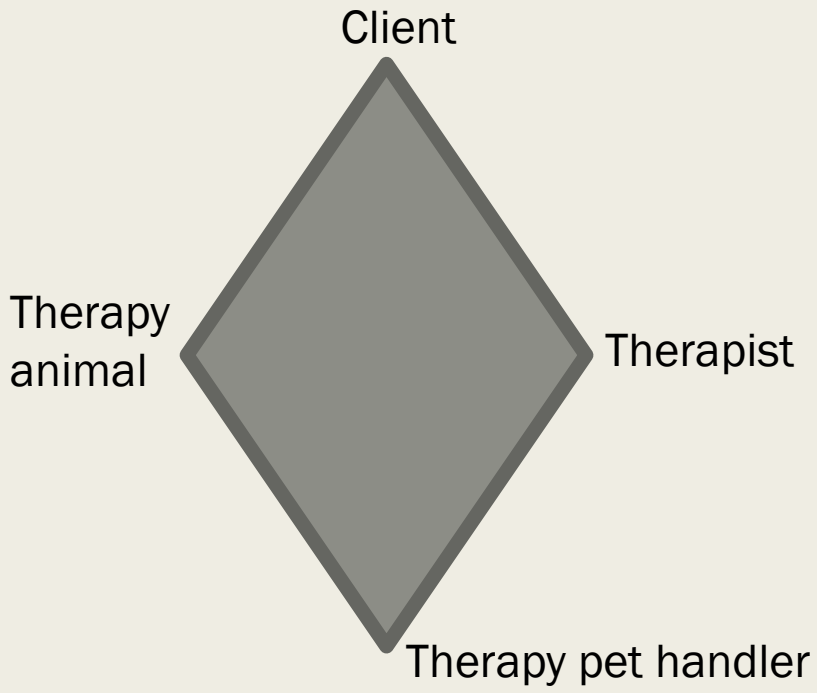
TRIANGLE MODEL

- The Triangle Model:



Second model for animal-assisted therapy:

DIAMOND MODEL:



Pros and cons of both models

Triangle Model:

Pros:

- The therapist is working with their own pet
- Confidentiality is not an issue

Cons:

- The therapist must own and train an experienced pet for therapy

Pro’s and Con’s of both models

- DIAMOND MODEL

Pro’s:

- The therapist does not need to own a therapy pet
- Opportunity to bring in different species for clients

Con’s:

- The therapist must identify pet therapy handlers who are insured and experienced with this model
- Therapist must clear HIPAA issues with client
- Client may not feel comfortable with a second person in the room

“Unpacking” TRUST: A topic well-suited to a cavy partner

- Trust is an important and difficult topic for many clients
- An exercise to make “trust” a more tangible concept
- A topic that is perfectly suited to exploring with a prey animal
- Using the example of building trust with an animal that is hard-wired to “distrust” a predatory species – humans
- Clients can interact with a trusting being

The Trust exercise: an example

Step 1: Offer Client(s) a “Trust Inventory”

Example: Circle all the words that answer this statement for you: “In my opinion, a person who is TRUSTWORTHY embodies the following qualities”; then prioritize the top 3 qualities

Reliable	Gets distracted	Gossips
Honest	Empathetic	Nonjudgmental
Patient	Secretive about past.	Respects boundaries
Easily angered	Affectionate	Obsessed with money

Trust exercise

- Discuss the answers; emphasize that different people have different priorities regarding what trustworthy means to them
- How to build trust? Why do we use the verb “earn” someone’s trust? How valuable & important is trust?
- Explain how I built trust with Calvin, who must not trust everyone, in order to survive
- How has anyone who had a pet built trust with that animal?
- Other topics related to trust, including a second inventory assessing the clients’ own qualities of trustworthiness

Calvin teaches mindfulness

- Each client who is willing gets to hold Calvin in his cuddle cup on their lap
- They are allowed quiet time to pet Calvin, feed him, and brush him
- After their time is “up,” we discuss what it felt like to be with Calvin in that way:
- What were they thinking about?
- What do they imagine Calvin was thinking about?
- What does it feel like to be “in the moment”?

DBT Mindfulness practices with Calvin

- Notice one feature of Calvin's face or body
- Observe the sensation of petting Calvin's body
- Make a statement to yourself about each sense you experience with Calvin: "I feel Calvin; Calvin feels me" etc.
- Describe Calvin in as much detail as you can
- Send Calvin Loving Kindness
- Be nonjudgmental towards Calvin

Guinea Pigs Are Autistic Child's Best Friend

BY JAN HOFFMAN

JUNE 29, 2015 11:14 AM June 29, 2015 11:14 am – New York Times

In summary…

- Small in size, guinea pigs can have an outsized and powerful impact on the therapeutic milieu
- Regardless of population, your clients are highly likely to have a very positive reaction to a therapy guinea pig
- And perhaps the guinea pig's greatest therapy attribute is that they can't help but make people smile!

CALVIN
VETTEL
PET THERAPY
Tufts Medi Cente
STUART
VETTEL
PET THERAPY
Tufts Medical Center

Unique AAI Species
A Guideline for Practitioners

Patti Anderson

Niki Vettel

Molly DePrekel

A free comprehensive guide for partnering in AAI with Unique Species (other than dogs)! Learn more about partnering with rabbits, guinea pigs, birds or miniature equines!

Questions?

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