



A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTIONS AND STORYTELLING  
FOR CHILDREN WITH TRAUMA AND CHILD-ANIMAL HARM OR WITNESS TO ANIMAL MALTREATMENT

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**There is no psychiatrist in the world like a puppy licking your face - Bern Williams**

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# Why DO Child Trauma Narratives Matter in Healing in CAI/CAH



- In TF-CBT study the trauma narrative component seemed to be the most impactful in reducing children's abuse related fear and general anxiety (Deblinger et al, 2010)
- Pets are an essential part of children's attachment network, for both securely and insecurely attached children (Wauthier et al, 2022) - this lends itself for the need for more research and how biophilia theory, One Health framework and/or "multi-species kinship" (Charles, 2014) are contributing factors
- Developmental trauma considerations of sharing narrative with shame, presenting sense of false self, "implicit memory without context of explicit memory" -remembering unconscious without being aware of it ( Parrish-Plass, 2021)

# Theoretical Underpinnings in Animals in lives of children

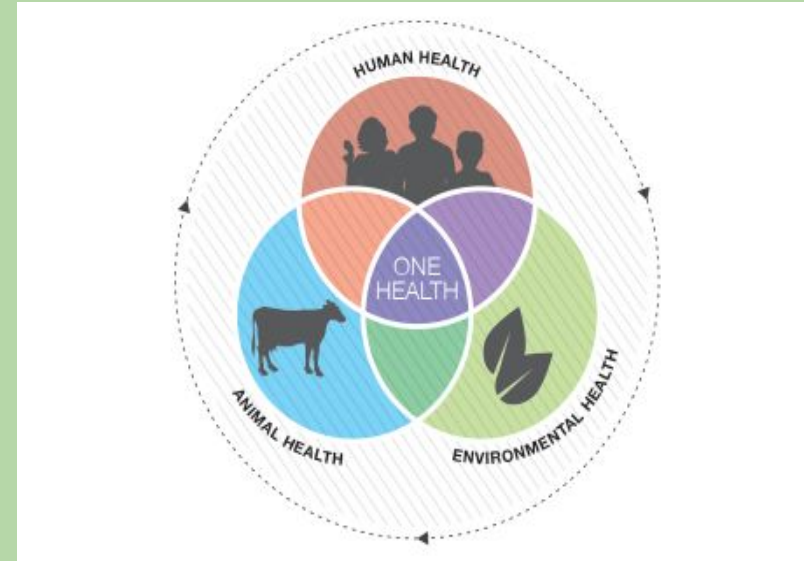
Biophilia to Biocentric Approach - the real and pervasive of real and symbolic animals in children's lives (Kellert and Melson)

Attachment Focused (Bowlby, Ainsworth)

Ecological perspective - interconnected web of nested relationships in children's lives (Bronfenbrenner)

Neurobiological - Corsons, Oodendal neurochemistry and mirror neurons, Parish-Plass psychodynamic neurobiology

ONE HEALTH - mutual benefit of human-animal bond - 87% feel emotional, physical and mental health better because of animal in their lives, Animal Abuse One Health model (Mota-Rojas et al, 2022)



# Positive Narratives of Child-Animal Interaction

- Positive Touch
- Empathic Connection
- Comfort
- Affect Regulation
- In the moment experiencing
- Sensory soothing
- Attachment (Barker, 1995, Wauthier et al, 2022, Wanser,2019)
- Secondary attachment through caregiving with families with stress and neglect (Whiteman et al, 2011)



# Child-Animal Harm : Definition and Considerations

Definition: “any behavior, either intentional or unintentional, where a child negatively impacts an animal’s welfare ( Wauthier & Williams, 2022)

- established as a predictor of later life violence (Macdonald, 1963)
- Psychopathic tendencies and a diagnostic consideration in conduct disorder and added to Child Behavior Checklist
- The trifecta of animal abuse, fire setting and bedwetting ( a narrative of harm for many children)

## MORE CURRENT CONSIDERATIONS

- Early intervention including humane education ( Nicoll et al , 2018) important factor for prevention
- Children caught in web of intergenerational trauma and violence (Knight, et al, 2014)
- Victims of abuse themselves ( Lee-Keeland et al, 2018) and use animals as a source of support more than parents (Beetz et al, 2012)
- Children with Animal Harm have psychological/emotional and intellectual struggles, particularly with affect regulation and executive functioning

# Wauthier & Williams (2021) Important Considerations in Language and Treatment

An Approach to Animal Harm That is Not Stigmatizing or Pathologizing: Focusing on pathological outcomes (e.g., violence or psychopathology) may prevent conceptualizing animal harm as a spectrum, with a range of developmental pathways. This in turn may reduce the incentive to develop evidence-based interventions for children. Furthermore, therapists argue it is important not to stigmatize animal-harm behavior during treatment (Gupta, 2019). The harm associated with making pathologizing or stigmatizing assumptions about childhood mental disorders is well established and can include: not seeking help or treatment, lower self-esteem, and discrimination or devaluation through stereotyping, especially mental disorders associated with “dangerousness” (Mukolo et al., 2010).

Developmentally Appropriate Definitions: Terminology referring to cruelty in childhood is dissociated from childhood development theory. Although there have already been calls to stop referring to CAC and instead adopt the term childhood animal abuse (Ascione, 2011; Parfitt & Alleyne, 2018), the terms abuse and cruelty are problematic, and the term CAH should be adopted unless there is clear evidence of intentionality. We propose the following definition of CAH: “Any act, of commission or omission, where a child negatively impacts an animal’s welfare, intentionally or unintentionally.” Cruelty might be reserved for behaviors that are both intentional and purposefully harmful (i.e., the primary intent is to cause harm to the animal), while abuse might be used for any intentional behavior, even if harm is not the primary intent (e.g., punishment). As children are still developing emotional regulation and executive functioning (Anderson, 2002; Lévesque et al., 2004), and have incomplete knowledge about animal welfare needs (Muldoon et al., 2016), it seems especially important t



# Negative Narratives of Child-Animal Interaction

- Injury, trauma or death
- Animal as victim, retraumatization
- Hyperarousal/Fear
- Affect dysregulation
- Flashbacks/Re-enactment
- Sensory Overload
- Peer Pressure



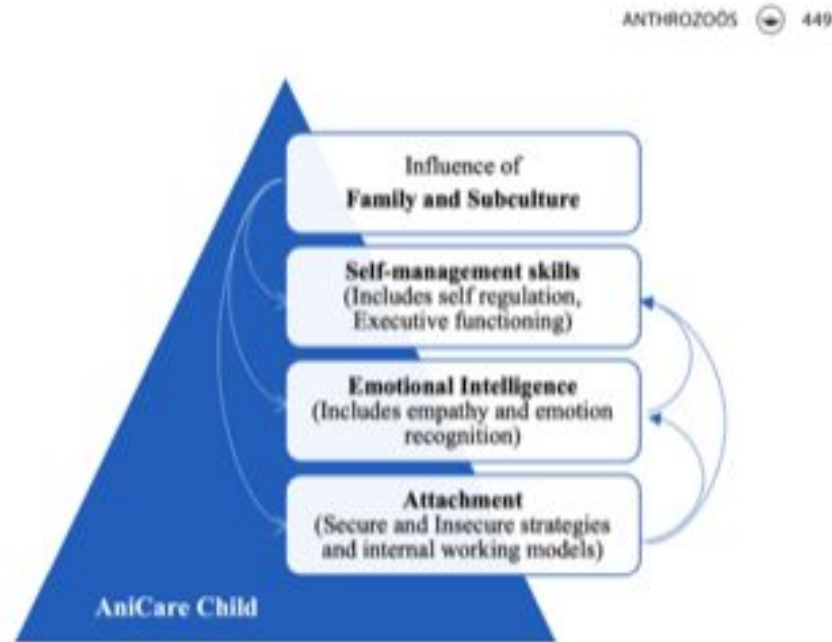
# Statistics of Child-Animal Harm

- Children exposed to domestic violence are three times more likely to be cruel to animals (Currie, 2006)
- 26% to 32% of children in homes with abuse are cruel to animals
- Self-reported animal harm in 4.7% of “normal children”, 13% in children with sexual abuse, 24% in physically abused children and 34% physically and sexually abused
- Children who only witness animal abuse by family members or peers are more likely to perpetrate animal harm ( Baldry,2003, Henry, 2004, Thompson & Gullane, 2006)
- Children who harm animals are likely to long-standing negative symptoms and continue to be upset for some time. (Flynn,2000) 95% who witnessed animal abuse were upset and five times more likely to have “severe problems “ (McDonald, 2015)
- 78% of those children in McDonald’s study of 242 took action to protect the animal or provide care
- Ascione (1998) 32% of women in a domestic violence shelter reported that their children killed or hurt a pet

# Statistics Behind the Narrative

- In a recent study (Campbell et al, 2022) 20% of animal abuse caused by children
- In (Hartman et al, 2019) study of 290 American children who witnessed interpersonal violence against their mothers, 16% shared at least one incident of animal harm - suggest empathy and callous behavior may be a predictor of risk of animal harm
- Risk factors include witnessing animal abuse and interpersonal violence, drug using parents, victim of physical or sexual abuse, behavioral problems
- “We suggest that childhood animal harm may arise due to lower empathy, lower self-regulation, or a combination of both factors, underpinned partially or entirely by attachment style” (Wathier et al, 2023) in study of exploratory evaluation of theoretical principles of Anicare Child in 27 children.
- Offord et al (1991) Canadian study parents and guardians seriously underestimated cruelty to animals, with boys self-reporting at 3,8 times the rate of parents, girls 7.6 times the rate
- Play therapy has a particularly important treatment consideration for children with animal harm as it addresses attachment struggles, as well as parental support and training

# Anicare Child Approach - revised (Wauthier et al, 2022)



**Figure 1.** Schematic showing the different psychological factors informing the AniCare® Child approach. Attachment is the basis of the approach and interacts with additional psychological processes through top-down and bottom-up processes. Adapted from Shapiro et al. (2013) with permission from the authors.

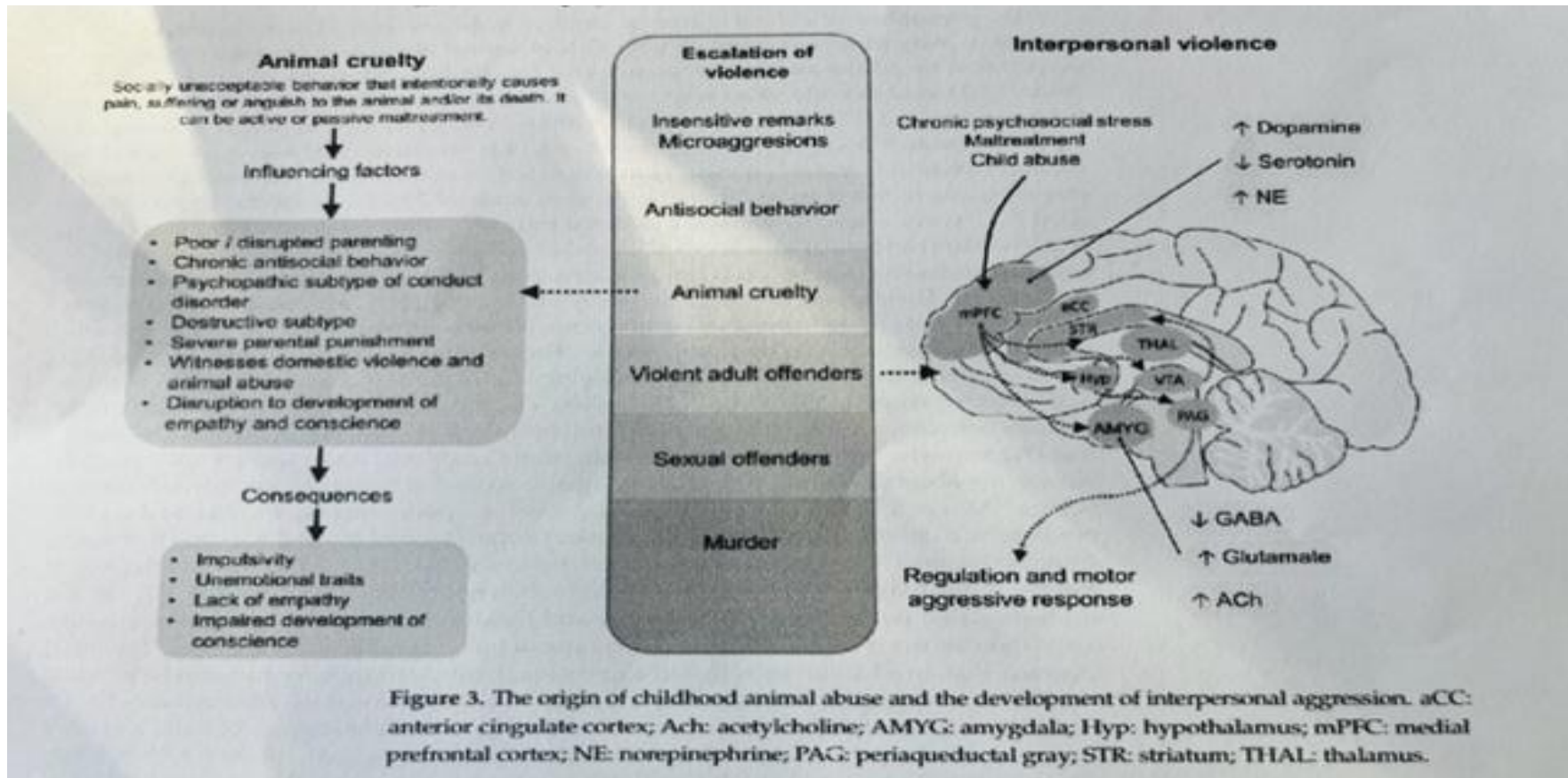
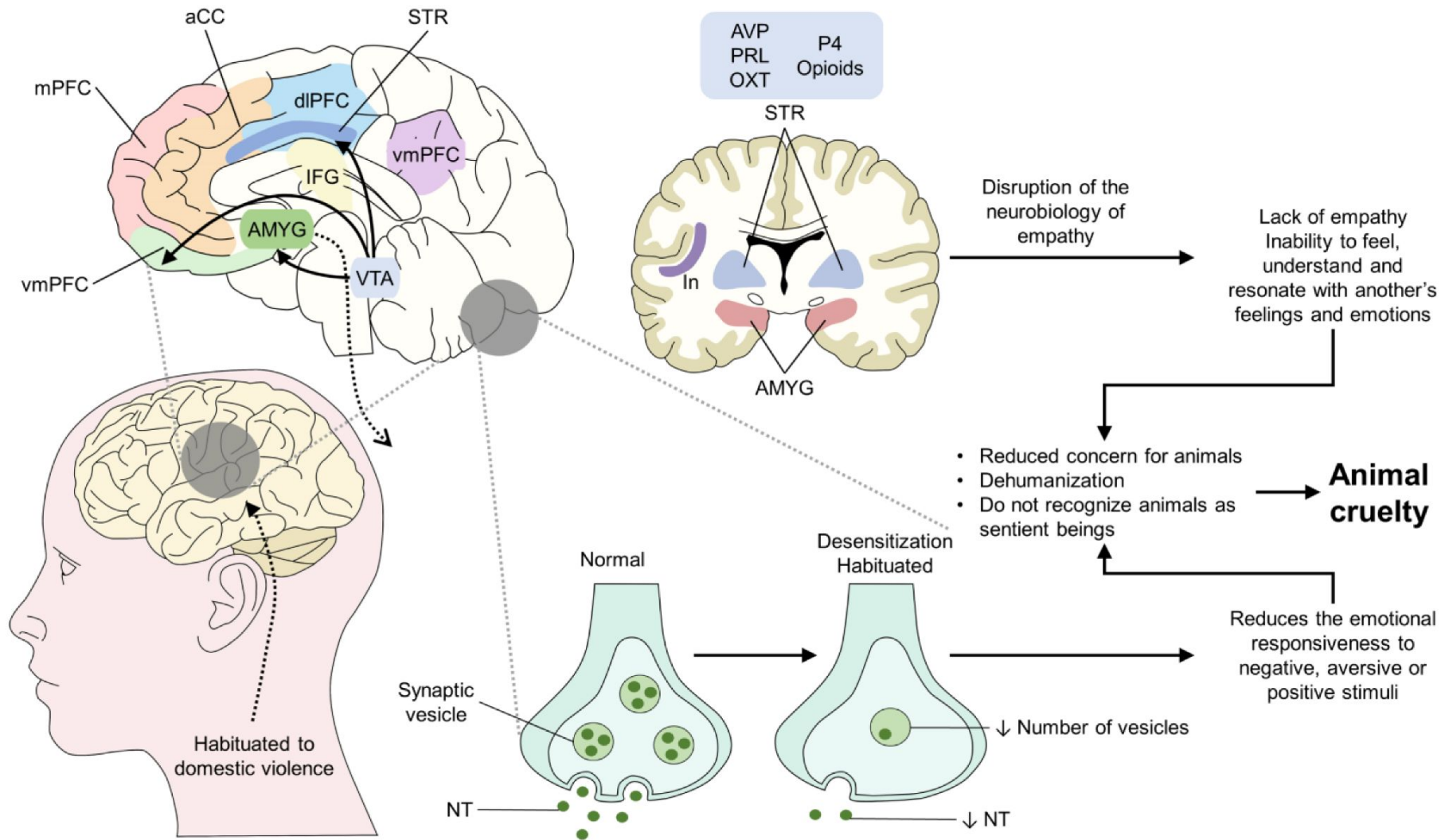


Figure 3. The origin of childhood animal abuse and the development of interpersonal aggression. aCC: anterior cingulate cortex; ACh: acetylcholine; AMYG: amygdala; Hyp: hypothalamus; mPFC: medial prefrontal cortex; NE: norepinephrine; PAG: periaqueductal gray; STR: striatum; THAL: thalamus.



# Factors to Explain Why A Child May Cause Animal Harm

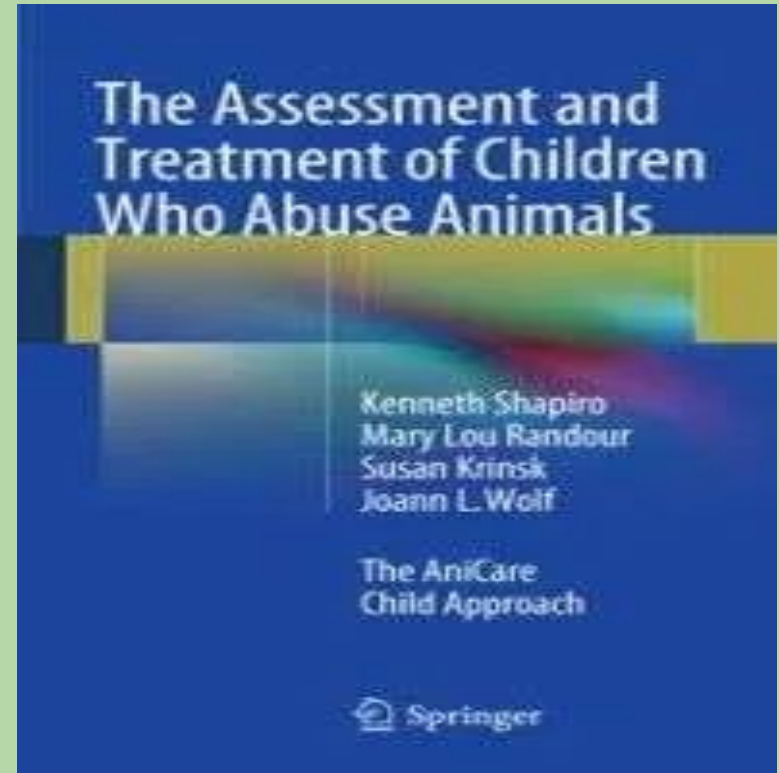
- To have control of them
- To get revenge on them
- To satisfy prejudices against a specific breed or species
- To show aggression
- To impress others by showing what they are capable of
- To amuse bystanders
- To retaliate against other people
- To avenge a personal aggression by harming someone else's pet
- To satisfy sadistic tendencies
- Rehearsal for interpersonal violence
- Post-traumatic play
- Animal phobias

(Keller & Felthous, 1985; Ascione, 1997)



# Assessment of Animal Harm - Anicare

- Severity (degree, frequency, # of species, intimacy of injury)
- Culpability ( age/developmental age, degree of planning, alone or in a group)
- Psychodynamics/Motivation ( curiosity, reaction to fear, to coerce, to retaliate against a human, peer pressure, sadism, narcissistic rage)
- Attitudes and Belief ( unaware of psychological needs of animals, animals as instruments, prejudice against species)
- Emotional Intelligence (capacity of empathy, reciprocity)
- Family History (domestic violence, child abuse)
- Mitigating circumstances





## Williams & Wauthier Interactions Model Important Considerations (2023)

- Important consideration of assessing the impact of culture and norms/mores in child-family HAI
- Helps to identify the impact of the HAI on the animal's welfare
- Includes and assessment of developmental issues impacting the interaction
- Impacts the issues of poverty/lack of resources and social justice on the CAH
- Identifies the family relationships to the CAH including intergenerational trauma, animal neglect, lack of psychoeducation on the emotional lives of animals



# Diagnostic Considerations

- ADHD- aggressive patterns often set in by age 8, case example - grabbing and squeezing chickens “they run, I move”
- RAD- entrenched patterns of maladaptive attachments include animals with disruptions in affect regulations - 94% of toddlers in foster care meet criteria for RAD ( Zenah, 2004) - Children with early neglect, may have behaviors of scheming to get animal alone or seek excessive comfort from an animal impacting animal stress, issues of jealousy ( case example jealousy toward dogs then force fed to choking) **PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION KEY**
- PTSD/ ODD/Conduct Disorder



# WHERE TO START?



# Non-pathological Reasons for Child-Animal Harm

- Curiosity or exploration
- Peer Pressure
- Mood enhancement (related to boredom or release or mental state)
- Animal phobia/fear ( hyperarousal response or reaction)
- I am adding sensory overload

(Ascione (2001); Lee- Kelland & finley (2018))



# Pathological Motivation for Child-Animal Harm

- Sexual Abuse
- Forced Abuse (coercion by more powerful other)
- Identification with the child's abuser (victimizing a less powerful other)
- Post-traumatic play (re-enacting abuse and violence with an animal victim)
- Imitation (copy someone else's behavior)
- Self-injury (provoking the animal to cause injury)
- Rehearsal for interpersonal violence
- Vehicle for emotional abuse (harming animal in retaliation for someone who cares about animal)

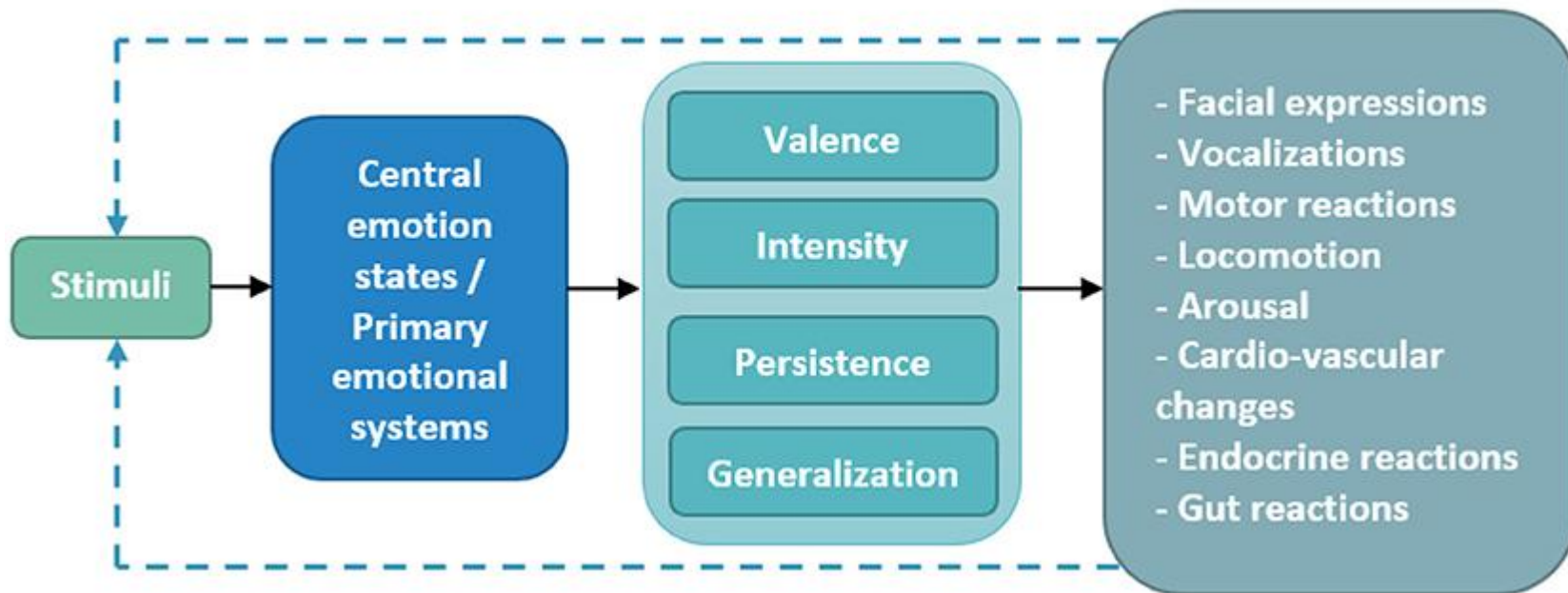


## Panksepp 7 Emotional Shared States Human-Animal Bond (One Health)

- Seeking - equine sniffing the ground, in HAI child wanting to engage
- Panic/Grief - activation of “separation distress” - horse vocalization, child seeing out support person or therapy animal “dragon wings’ story
- Care - activation of caregiving center - nurturance, mutual grooming - story of family interacting with horses mutually grooming
- Play - strengthens social learning and connection “horses playing tag”
- Lust - seductive behaviors in human or animal (horse offering for butt rub as activating for child with trauma history)
- Rage - activation of anger - fight response
- Fear - protect against predators/ reduced response to pain

## Multi-feature

## Multi-modal



# Trauma and Attachment Informed Principles

“ The legacy of trauma and attachment failure , with their consequential neuropsychological deficits, constrains our body, inhibits development on our movement, constrains embodiment and restricts a fluid response to novelty” and the “spirit of play” (Cannon, in press) from (Marks-Artlow, et al, 2017)

Human-Animal Interactions are somatic considerations in reparative work i- to hold, to soothe, to yield, to regulate and co-regulate, to reciprocate, to create a distance and the notion of proximity(rapprochement), developmental consideration of “quite love” (petting, grooming) vs more “active love” (play a game/observe in herd) in interactive activities



## ***Theoretical Considerations in AAI***

Bowlby/Ainsworth : secure base and safe haven - attachment considerations. “Attachment systems are malleable- they can be shaped” (Robyn Gobbel)

Kellert & Wilson (1993) - biophilia hypothesis - an innate connection and affiliation with animals

Vygotsky: the importance of social interactions, culturally sensitive, zone of proximal distancing ( a skill just out of reach but more knowledgeable other support to master skill) and scaffolding (building on skills and the “more knowledgeable other” fades support)

Perry (2008) dysregulation leads to struggles with self-soothing, resilience tied to the development of healthy relationships; reason, relate, regulate: neurosequential model of care - “relational elements are evocative ( and I would add visceral) cues

Seigel ( 2012 -2021) 4 S’s - Safe, Seen, Secure and Soothed and SIFT : Helping children pay attention to sensations, images, feelings and thoughts ; Connect and Redirect, Name it to Retame it, play can lead to integration

Porges (2011-2015) – Polyvagal theory- connections with emotional and autonomic response, animals may decrease HPA axis and reduce fight/flight response, social engagement leads to emotional regulation

Geller and Porges( 2014) - ***mutual relational presence*** “that promotes relational depth, safety and therapeutic change” in Parish-Plass & Pfeiffer chapter in Transforming Trauma ed Tedeschi & Jenkins (2019)

# Narrative Theory Tenets in Play Therapy

Stories have cultural, historical, metaphorical, religious/spiritual undertones - it is not as simple as “externalizing a problem”

Language is LOADED with cultural and social bias :  
“within every single word, even every single utterance is a large ancient collection of ideas, motives and intention” (Hoyt, 1992) - for example “the terrible twos” “black cats are evil”

“People’s narratives no matter how personal, have a shared narrative resource” (Frank, 2010) “from the mouth of babes” - that children will tell the truth is a shared narrative and particularly powerful in the narrative of foster and adopted children, both in pre-verbal memory and remembered experiences



# Narrative Theory and considerations in Children

- The power of bibliotherapy - think of your favorite childhood books, old fables and stories including animals
- Family stories about animals - often children's experience in death is with a pet
- Intergenerational trauma narratives - my aunt peggy story
- Narrative theory tenets - viewing people separate from their problem, problem seen as its own separate identify for example "My anger pushes people and makes me unlovable" instead " my anger is a trickster that leads to my action" (White& Epston)
- Identifying the stories of our lives we give the most attention to, yet exploring what other stories have been dismissed, forgotten or yet undiscovered" - peeling through the layers of an onion. "Sally is a shy child" or the narrative of "Sally was bit by a dog and hides behind her parent on walks in the park"

# Brain/Body Science Understanding incorporating into life narrative

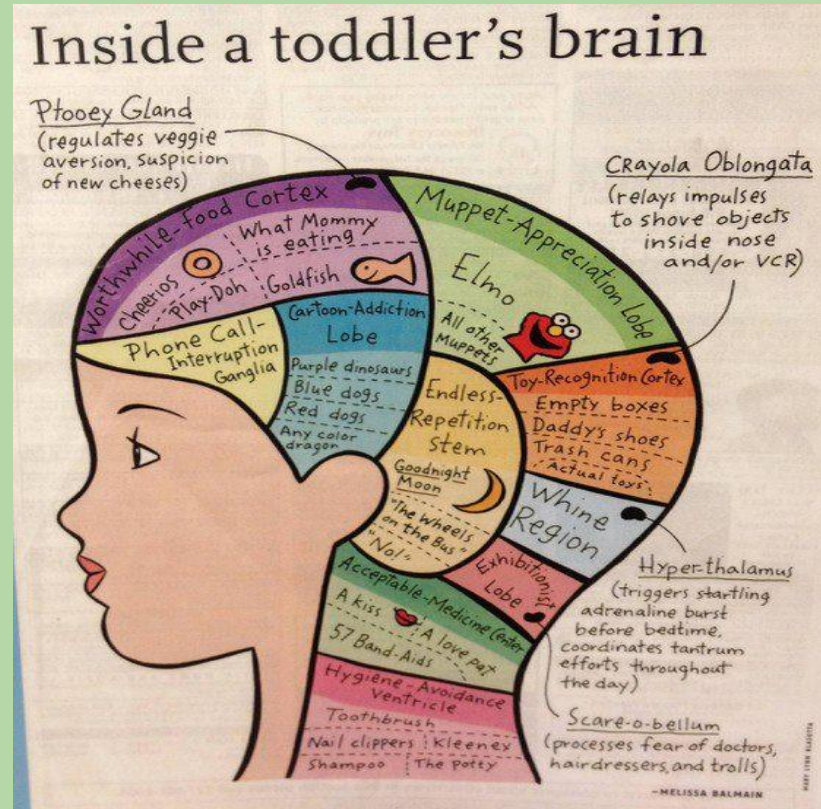
Brain development hinges on complex interplay of experiences we have and the genes we are born with. “Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart: Winnie the Pooh

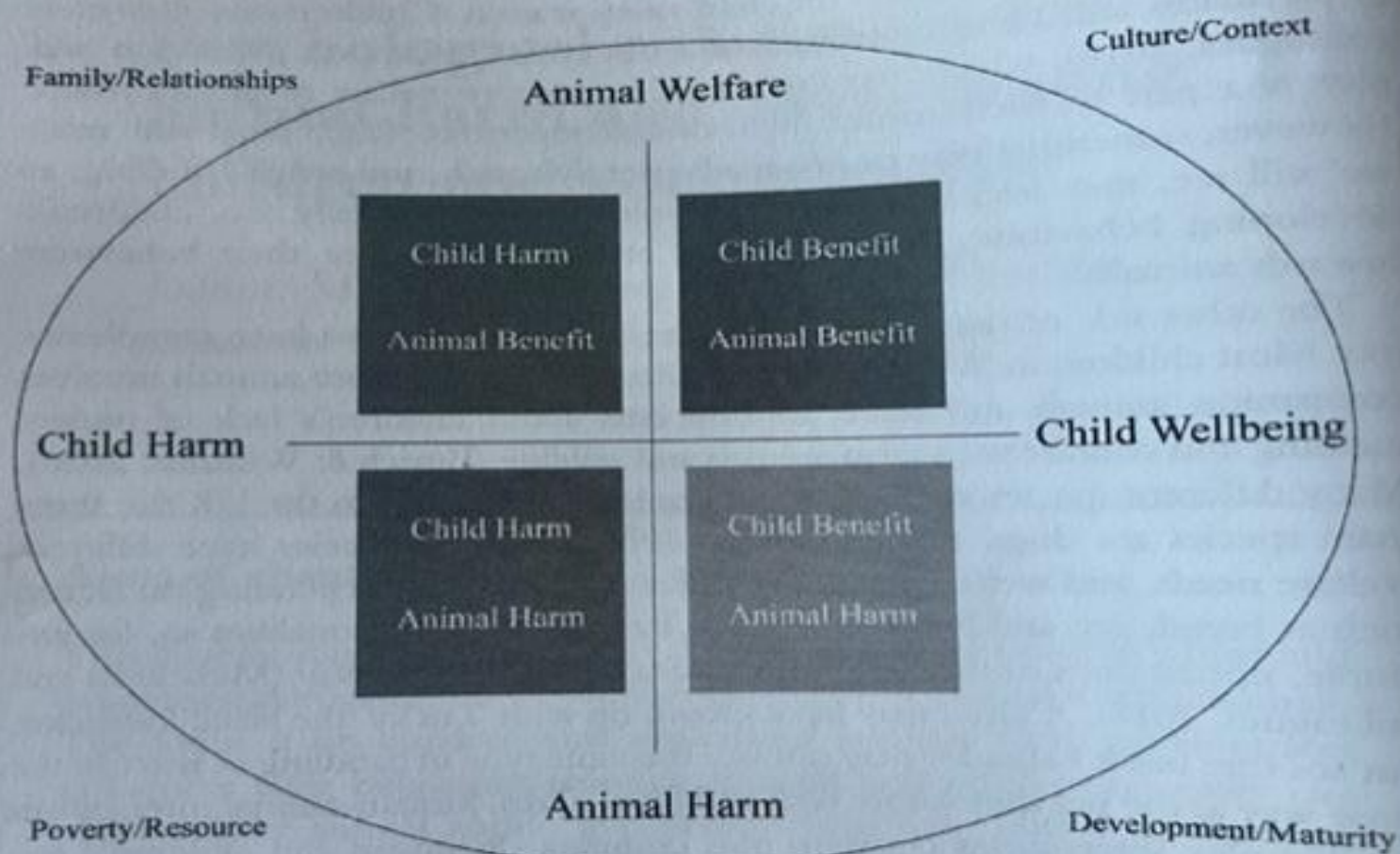
Early experiences shape the architecture of the brain- but does NOT make it DEFINITIVE - NEUROPLASTICITY “Weeds are flowers once you get to know them” Winnie the Pooh “I wonder how much wishes a star can give” Pooh

Early experiences can direct the way the brain develops - sensory sensitivities “I’m so rumbly in my tummy” Pooh

Brain development is nonlinear - prime times for development of knowledge skills throughout life “How do you spell love, you don’t, you feel it” Pooh

(Shore, 1997- Rethinking the Brain)





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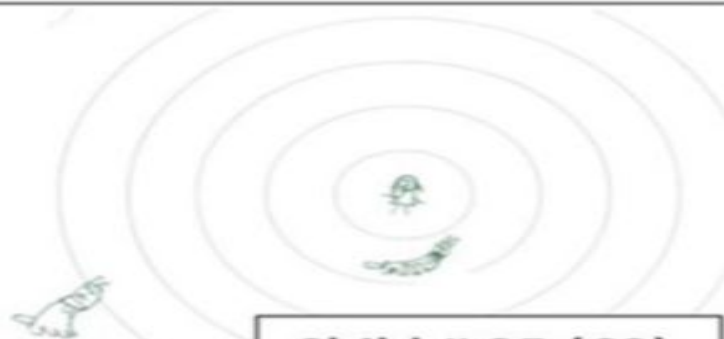
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**Child # 11 (A1)**

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**Child # 25 (C2)**

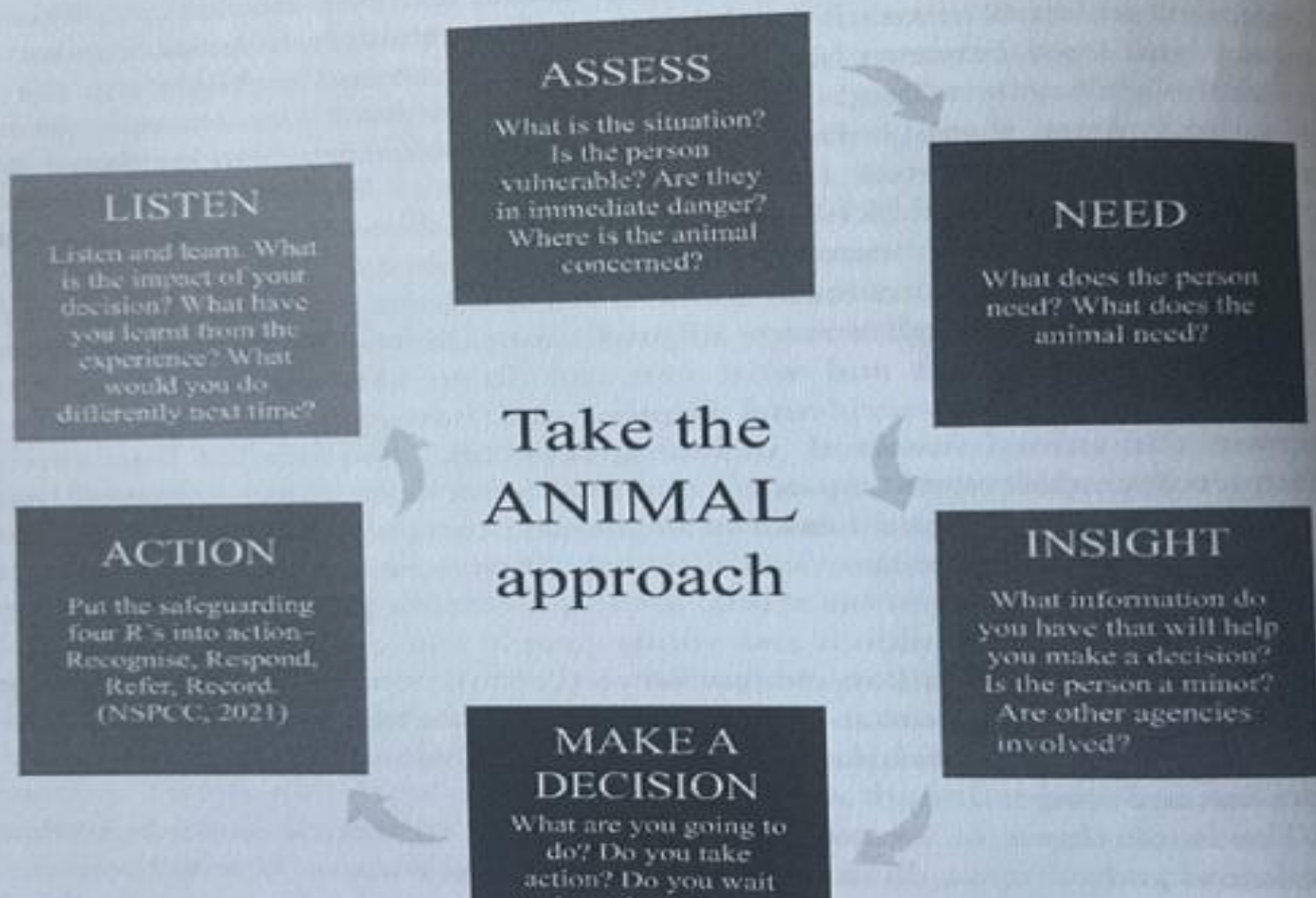
**Child # 7 (A+)**

*Excluded as outlier*



**Child # 4 (C1)**

\* Dog drawn by child



# Narrative theory in Wonderland (Marsten, Epston, Markham, 2016)

Language and Culture - therapist or parent may say: “children need structure” or “teens always rebel”. Experience is shaped by language and socially constructed. Create a sense that all words/descriptives are truisms/Emmett always..

Characterization - children identifies as “worrier” “troublemaker” “he’s an animal abuser” - explore as a co-author , not expert “Emmett will never pass therapy test” from child with attachment struggles, separate the person/animal from the problem. Make it fun, interactive and engaging. Favorite characters and explore why ( themes of heroism/survivorship; detective/problem solver)

Linking Events in Sequence- “one thing happens in consequence of another” (Frank, 2010) with meaning. Map the effects and history of the problem Child may identify abandonment/loss as defining event in relationships even in a supportive setting.  
Animals as attachment figures/characters



## Narrative in Wonderland...cont.

Persuasive Narratives - “narratives can take hold and live through us” - example, foster child “ I always fixed the adults in my lives problems” so in parent-child connection or in child-animal connection - reflect/externalize/deflect these powerful stories - offer solutions for other outcomes. How do you teach an old dog a new trick” or “he’s the bad kid, not wanted”

Resonance - Vitgosky’s scaffolding “ direct teaching of concepts is impossible and fruitless” - not “parroting” a response, engage in HAI to have a visceral feeling like touching fur, feeling a lick and ask “how can we make it different “embodied simulation”. Stepping stones to an animal's life story.... First this, then that

It all started when Bear was about 2 weeks old. He was taken from his mother and taken to some place far away. He felt really lonely. He felt lonely in his heart.



# Narrative Theory in wonderland.... cont.

Temporality - problems can have “rich-storied” lives like “she was vulnerable from day one” and “he was always out of control” ; stories make us “time travellers” and in case of foster/adoption you can see themed/rich storied/problem saturated stories created in front of you and as a foster parent you have no context, or sense of meaning. Identify yourself as a “detective” or “explore” trying to make meaning together in the moment- HAI can help here for projection purposes so you can create “backward-looking stories” and then “forward-thinking stories” NOT forcing metaphor, exploring it in their relationship with animals in their lives. “Mabel knows how to protect herself” “calm down”

# NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES CONT...

Landscape of Action Questions:  
Asking probing questions that clients may have done or considering doing that would not be expected - HAI example : “Given Emmett has a lot of energy on approach what could we consider doing to help him with the problem?”

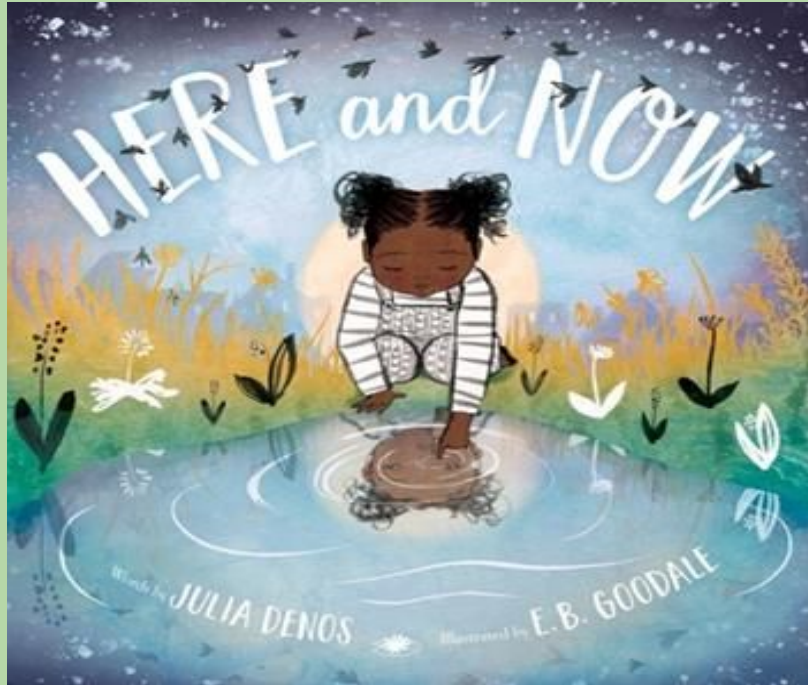
Landscape of Consciousness/Meaning Questions : reflecting on their own sense of agency and how they considering doing that, What preparations have you done for next step? - ie, Joey in rainstorm

Landscape questions explore clients’ values, beliefs, desires, intentions and competencies - alert to several “sparkling moment” considerations in : action, thoughts, intentions to act, moments when the effect of the problem don’t seems so strong areas of life that remain unaffected by problem, special abilities, knowledge about how to overcome a problem, problem-free responses from others, relationships that defy the problems persuasions (Winslade and Monk, 1999, pg 42)

It all started when Noah was a baby.  
He got taken away from his parents. He was  
then taken to a puppy mill. He felt sad. When  
he got a little older he didn't know how  
to control himself. Now he is getting a little  
bit better. We are trying to help him in some  
different areas.



# BiblioTherapy : Exploring Themes of Loss and Connection



Identifying present moment experiences

Curiosity of how others process BIG feelings

Subtle considerations of externalizing a problem

Normalizing of experiences of loss and connection - The Dead Bird

Post-modern concept of some words have more force : “she was grieving” or “her heart was broken”

# Family Stories of Animals: “The Bad Dog”

Think of a title for this picture

Think of the power of labeling an animal as “bad dog” for a child, particularly if child feels love and connection to the animal

Bear - Therapy dog story as a narrative for adopted children and children in foster care

The “bad dog” as a narrative projection/externalization



# NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES CONT

Therapeutic Note Taking:

Journaling, Comic Strips ( past, present and future)

Certificate and Awards

Videotaping.

What happened first? What happened in the middle? What happened in the end?

Happiest Memory  
Scariest Memory  
Upsetting Memory





# WORKBOOK INSPIRED BY ANICARE CHILD - (NICOLL, 2018)

- Sometimes our first memories with animals can tell a lot about how we feel when we spend time with animals and how we treat them today . It may be that the first memory is happy, or it may be sad or it may be scary. It's okay to write it down or draw a picture of your first memory of an animal in your life. If the memory is scary or sad, remember to use your relaxed breathing or "stop sign" if your thinking gets too fast ( see appendix). There are no right or wrong answers because you know best about your own experiences with animals.

Animals send messages to us without words. They use their bodies and their eyes, like a wag of a tail or a bark from their mouth. We communicate too without words. Look at your body map, with the feelings colored in and think of how you communicate without words.

List three ways you communicate, or send messages, without words

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

List three ways an animal in your life communicates with their body

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

If we took a picture of you having an enjoyable time with an animal, name three things we might see:

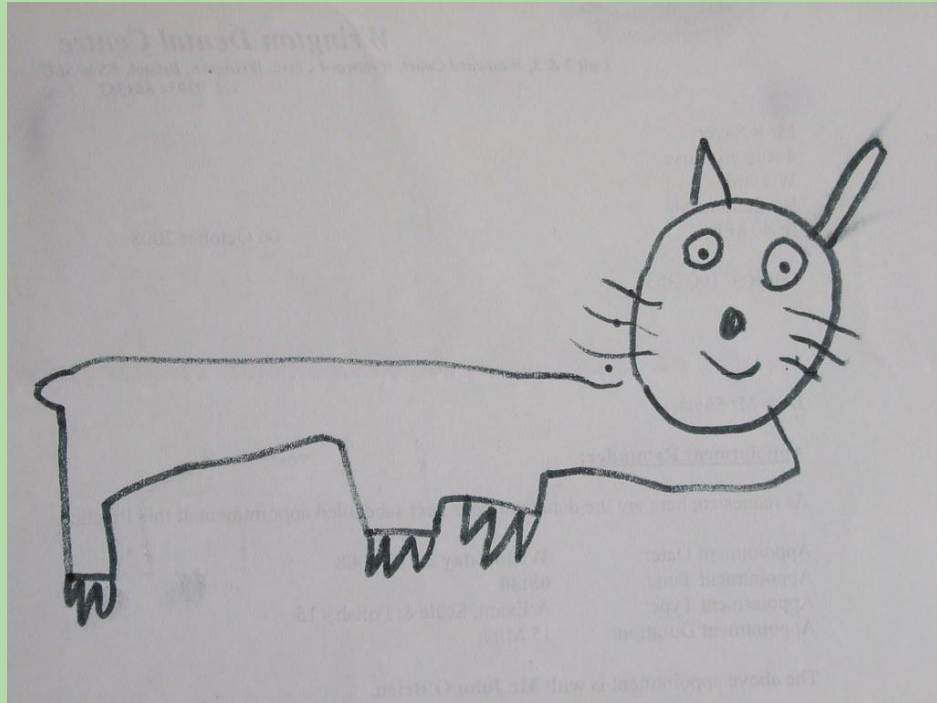
1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# WORKBOOK INSPIRED BY ANICARE CHILD (NICOLL, 2018)

Think about a television show, book or video game that includes people and animals. You can draw a picture or tell a little bit about it here....

What is the animal's name? Does it fit to its personality? Can you describe the animal's personality? Their strengths, and things to work on?

What sort of activities would you do with an animal? Where would you be? How would it feel to be with, play with, sit with.... The animal....



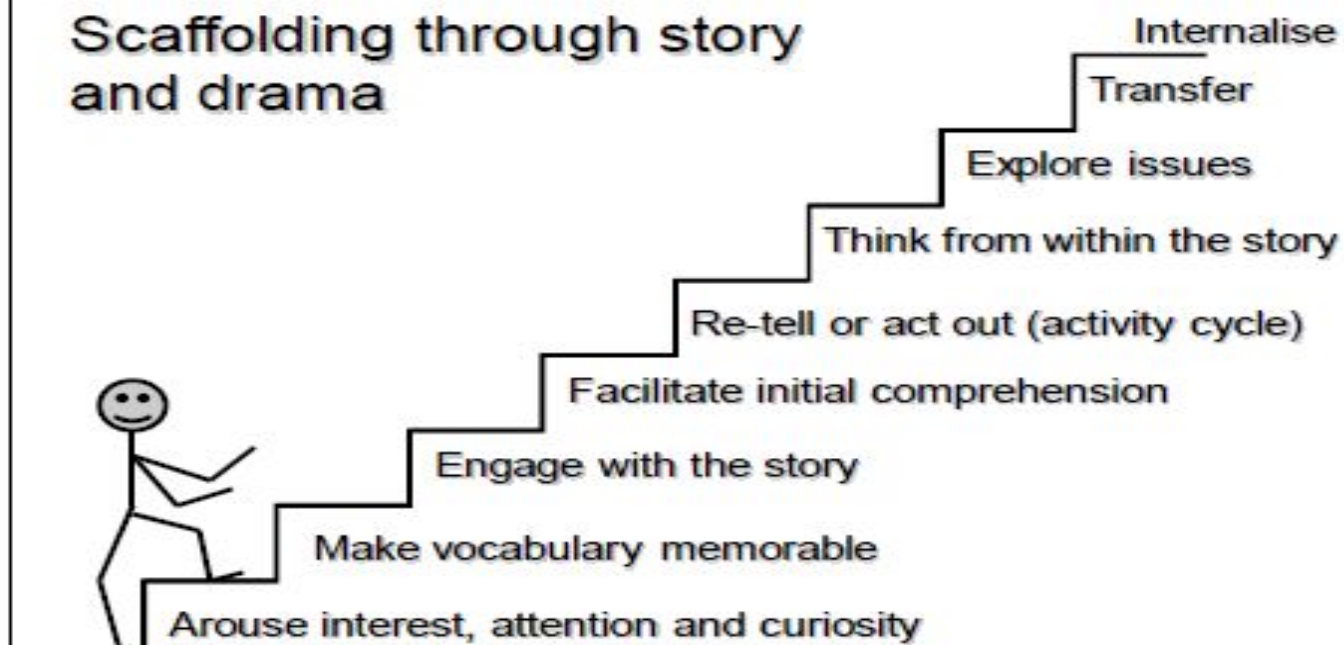
# WHEN ANIMALS IN HOME: NARRATIVE THEORY AND ITS ROLE IN PARENTING

“Today’s parents must often finding themselves battling two fronts. The **outside** world for possible dangers, while also paying close attention to the **inside** world of the child. It is the language of vulnerability (outside world) and the dysfunction ( inside world)”  
Animals are sentient beings with also an outside and inside world.

(Marstan, Epston & Markham,2016)



## Scaffolding through story and drama

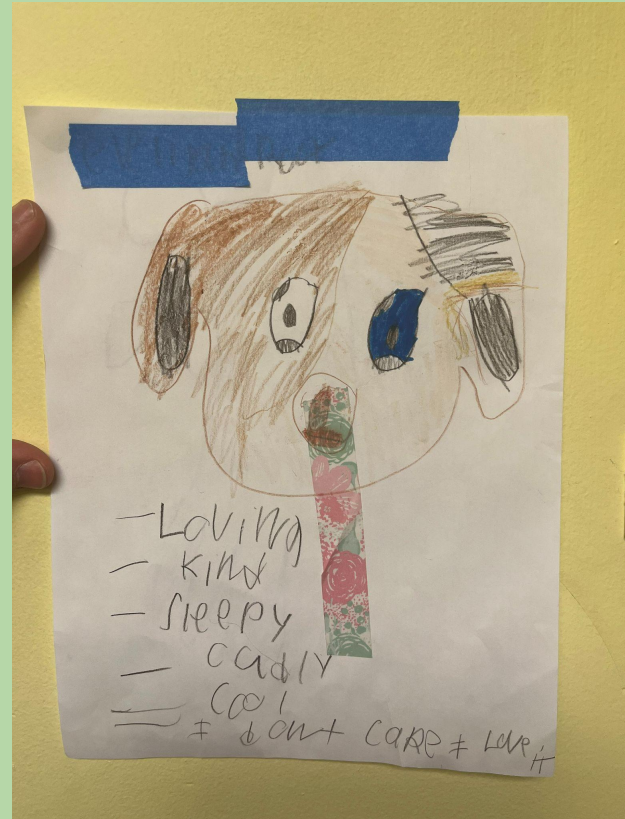


*Figure 1: Scaffolding through story and drama*

# Narrative Techniques to incorporate in CLINICAL AAI/HA!

Externalizing Conversation : “the sadness” “the anxiety” giving the problem its own name- Joey, “the aggressor” Sweetie “kick-ass girl”

Mapping the Influence of the Problem - investigating the nuance and subtlety of the problem - “When did you first notice the problem” “When has it been at its strongest/weakest time” “Where in your life is the problem having the most influence? The least?”



# AT-HOME NARRATIVE STRATEGIES FOR CHILD-ANIMAL INTERACTIONS

The SOLVE strategy: Sometimes problems seem so big that we can't solve them on our own. It is helpful then to break it down into a strategy to even cope with really sad or upsetting problems, both with people and with animals.

**Select the problem:** My dog doesn't do what I want him to do.

**Options (What can I do?):** I can ignore it or try my friendly voice.

**List (What will happen if...? Pros and cons)** If I ignore my dog, I will still be mad.

If I offer my dog a treat, he or she will come to me but then I don't know what happens next. Maybe dog training would be good.

**Verify (What is the best solution?)** I think I'll try a dog training class. I could learn a lot.

**Evaluate outcomes (How did it work?)** I learned a lot; maybe I could teach my sister how to work with our dog. I can use what I learned with our dog with people, too.

From Anicare Child Model

# OUTCOMES AND LIMITATIONS OF NARRATIVE THEORY

- A study looked at the effectiveness of narrative therapy in boosting 8-10-year old's social and emotional skills. The results showed that the children showed significant improvements in self-awareness, self-management, empathy, and responsible decision-making (Beaudoin et al., 2016).
- A study explored group narrative therapy for improving the school behavior of a small sample of girls with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).  
Posttreatment ratings by teachers showed that there was a significant effect on reducing ADHD symptoms one week after completing the therapy sessions, and this was sustained after 30 days (Looyeh et al., 2012).
- Soul Friends narrative based animal assisted therapy group with high schoolers in an anger management group therapy in inner city school demonstrated that the results were positive with this very small pilot test. On the Empathy Index, all 8 students increased their total score, with increases ranging from 1-11 points, with an average 4.63. On the Hopefulness Scale, all students but one increased their total score, from 2 points to 5 points increase, and the one student's total score remained unchanged. The average increase was 2.63 points. The results seem to indicate that the program enhanced with the new workbooks may be effective in positively impacting empathy and hopefulness in the population of adolescents who are in residential mental health treatment programs in Connecticut. Continued testing with larger numbers of students is recommended.
- Limitations - not enough research, listed as an “evolving theory”, does not have a model more of a conversation exploring areas of language, knowledge, power and self-exploration

# Trauma-informed care is based on core elements of positive developmental and therapeutic experiences

Knowledge of the neurobiology of trauma informed professional practice

Rhythm in therapeutic alliance, horse, MH, ES and horse with “pinging”/dynamic of animals in pairs

Relationship is the vehicle for change, tertiary relationship in the human-animal bond, in equine work 4 connections simultaneously

Relational (safe)

Relevant (developmentally-matched)

Repetitive (patterned)

Rewarding ( pleasurable)

Rhythmic (resonant with neural patterns)

Respectful ( child, family, culture)

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# Human-Animal Narratives in therapy

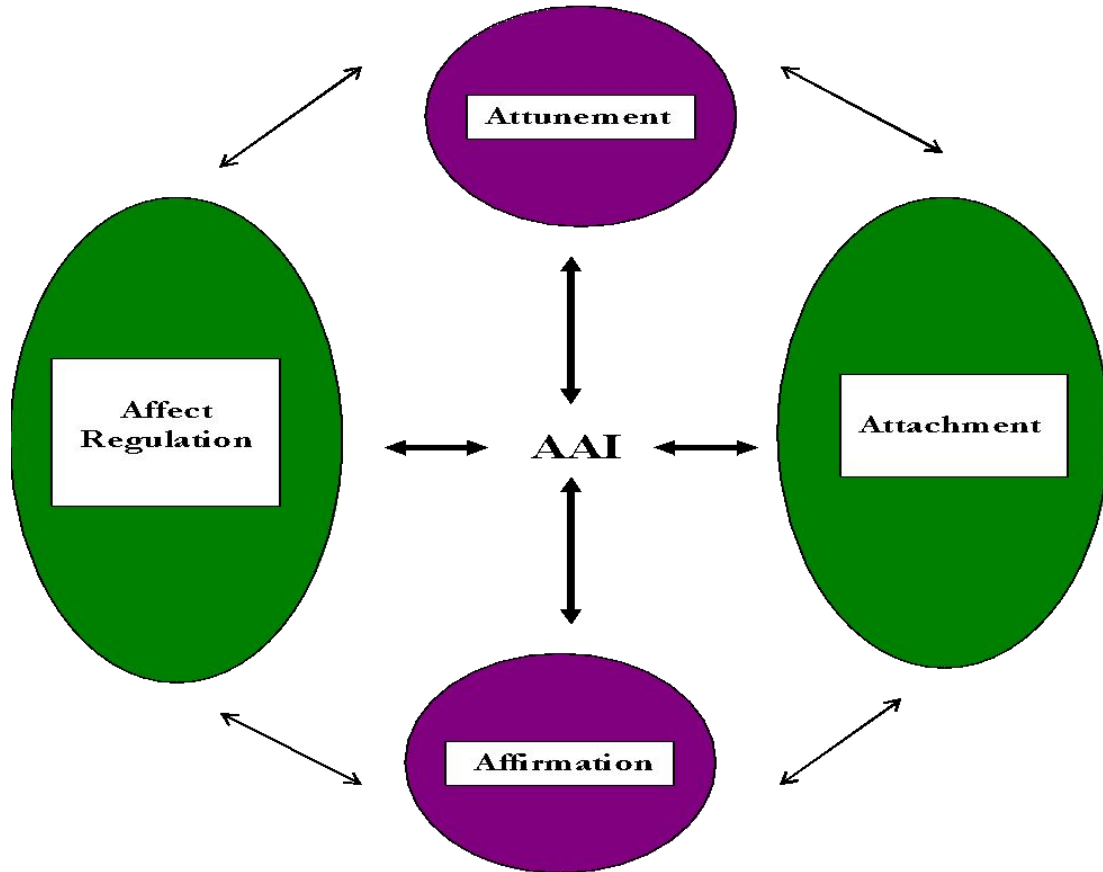


Mama Cow taking care of babies



“You are genuinely touched by what others are going through”

# Nicoll Model for Animal Assisted Interventions in Therapy



# Affirmation

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Catching the positive in the moment experiences

Bear is a good dog and I am a good boy

Self-reflection and reaction to human-animal interaction –

command given and dog provides “sit”

Body affirmation in nonverbal communication

calm body means listening dog

force the unconscious to avoid or reappraise “negative self talk”

“I am a survivor”



# Attunement

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Process of communion and unity of interpersonal contact, beyond empathy

Kinesthetic and emotional sensing of others with reciprocal affective and/or resonating responses – “the look” and positive touch

Mirroring of feeling states -breathing together

Provide sense of safety and stability

That was then and this is now....



# Hughes (1998)/Natural Lifemanship Guidelines for Attachment

Accepting

Curious

Empathic

Loving

Playful

Active engagement

Mutual Attunement

Presence

Cooperation by choice

Affective Attunement

Eye contact - look, aware of site  
distance for safety

Holding - touch

Reciprocity – the dance of  
proximity and space

Rituals –brush, feed

Paradoxical reactions – use of  
humor/ change it up/do overs

In AAT – “you’d never know he is  
barrel racer, as so calm”

# Affect Regulation

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Schore -the ability to flexibly regulate psychobiological states of emotion with another human (animal) in interconnected way

Stern – RIG's – Representation of the Interaction are generalized for future interactions and its use in AAT ... Muffin always....

Shared regulation vs autoregulation (roll over, take a nap)

Stories of therapy animals helping to regulate affect

## A case unintentional harm due to issues with emotional regulation and low welfare knowledge (Williams & Wauthier, 2023)

Suzy is a 14 year old girl with autism in foster care. She has a history of being impulsive with behavioral outbursts prior to her placement in a new home. The foster mother reported “she just loves all are animals”, Her foster parents were two moms with 4 dogs, a cat and two guinea pigs. In initial assessment the foster mother reported that she had suffocated and squished two newborn kittens in a sofa when left unattended. She was referred for assessment of her safety to be in the home with animals and create a treatment plan of humane education/psychoeducation to foster parents.

### TARGETED NARRATIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR TX PLAN

1. Identified that kittens “came to close”, she “didn’t like the noise they were making” and she “wanted them to stop”
2. She shared that she felt sad “that they died” but “didn’t want them near her again”
3. She initially had no remorse as well as limited cognitive understanding that her actions directly led to their death
4. Foster parents needed psychoeducation regarding animal welfare and safety and adjust their notion of “she LOVES animals”

# Clinical Areas of Exploration and Outcomes

- Attunement - we first worked on drawings of understanding kitten body language, verbal and non-verbal. In a story book with pictures we were able to identify using comic strips the before their noise irritated her ( so she was able to pay attention to that), how the noise made her feel ( so we did body maps of her with anger and frustration in her hands and head). - With psychoeducation completed in affect regulation, we wrote a narrative where she understood how the noise made her angry in her hands and instead of squishing them in the pillows, she asked for foster mom's help.
- Attachment - as a foster child in a story book we explored a history of different animals that she had lived with. She was able to say when living with bio parents they had "lots of animals" and "it was confusing and scary - like when a dog tried to bit her. She did say she did have a favorite dog that made her "feel good". She also identified in a new foster home she loved that attention from her new foster parents, and that the kittens "took time away" from her. With her foster parents we were able to make a plan where she felt she could get her needs met but live with and share time/attention with the many animals



# Clinical Areas of Narrative Exploration and Outcomes

- Affect Regulation - Suzy was able with support able to identify that the angry and frustration for sharing with the kittens and their noises went down to her hands and led to her squishing them. She wrote a letter of apology to the kittens for not controlling her anger and body -and “not using my words to ask for help”, She was able to identify sensory experiences with all the animals that led to uncomfortable feelings in a picture book she made, and we were able with her foster parents to go through each animal and her relationship and worries about being with them, and the strong need for supervision

Affirmation - Suzy was able to share with foster parents “ I am sorry I got mad and used my hands to squish the kittens in the couch. I am sorry because I know you loved them and I feel bad”. She was able to share through pictures of animal nonverbal communication that she had an increase understanding of when animals needs space, or she needed to take space or ask for adult help when interaction and bonding with the animals. Her foster parents accepted the apology, and they apologized for not understanding she needed more help - she was able to maintain her placement and live with dogs and guinea pigs with supervision and started caregiving by feeding the guinea pigs

# A case of intentional harm to do re-traumatization

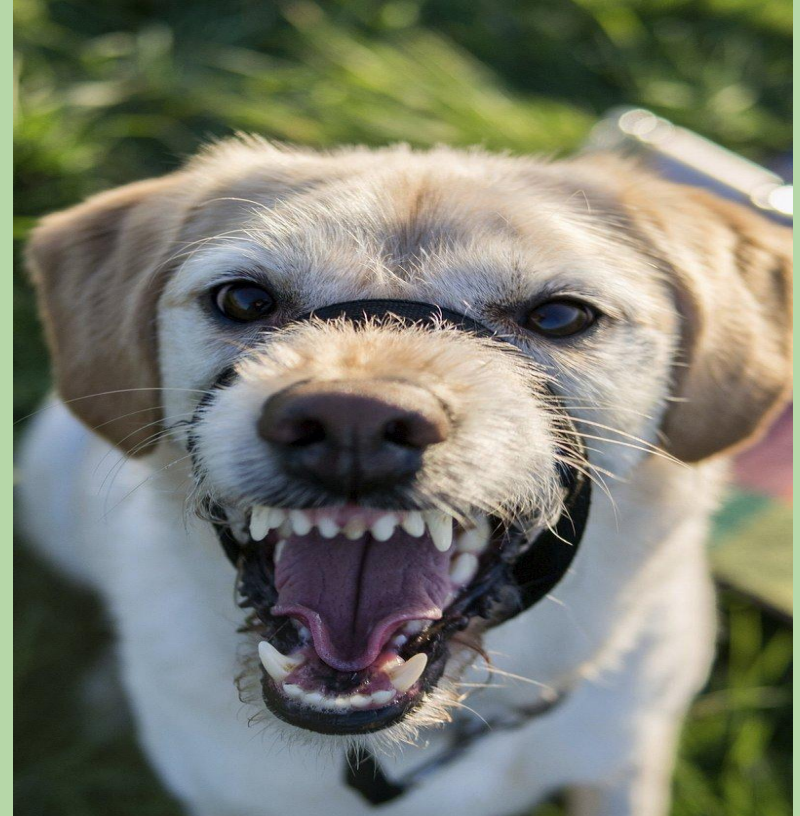
Brian is an 10 year old twin who lives mostly with mom and his brother in low-income housing. His birth father had been recently arrested for interpersonal violence toward mother “smashed her head in” and “choked her”, both boys were witnesses and saw police come and arrest dad. Mom initially referred for animal assisted therapy as “Brian loves our dog” and the dog, Max “helped him cope with the witnessing of violence. Brian had an intake and assessment and complained more about his mother “constantly yelling” and “putting me down”

On 4th visits, I learned that Brian had picked up his dog Max a small shih tzu after his mother had yelled at him and “threw him against the wall” and mom reported he broke his leg. They did go to veterinarian and were truthful about the events, at that time there was no cross-reporting laws, but veterinarian did reach out to me to make sure we had an active plan.

TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS : Assess and plan for dog’s safety at home, did discuss re-homing, explore narrative of what led to the indication of post-traumatic response, explore empathy and remorse, psychoeducation regarding canine non-verbal communication, address underlying trauma and recurring stressors

# Following our Model to Create Narrative Clinical Plan

Attunement - Brian was able to identify that there was just something in the way the dog looked that just “made him boil over”. We did a detail drawing of the dog’s face prior to him picking him up - and incorporating some EMDR techniques and very specific narrative exploration of animal welfare and humane education ( like how his face looked, what did Brian see in his face ( thinking of mirroring - mirroring neurons) and he said he that when he saw Max “curl his lip up in a certain way” and that reminded him of “how his mom looked before she yells at him - and how that makes him feel like a bad kid”. He was praised for making direct attention and connection to the visual in the dog’s face and how he attuned to his own feelings and reactions



# Following our Model to Create Narrative Clinical Plan

Attachment- Brian expressed ambivalent connection to both of his parents because of their history of interpersonal violence and identified verbal abuse with his mom particularly. He expressed feeling a warm connection and “being loved most” by his dog, Max. He was able to very specifically with stories/comic strips, supervised animal assisted interventions that showed his positive and caring interactions with Max. He was able to demonstrate connection with my therapy dog, Bear. Practice empathy, work through guilty feelings about breaking dogs leg and “would Max ever love or trust me again”

Affect Regulation - This was a struggle as Brian and his mom still had active verbal abuse, and that was triggering. Mom was unable to seek her own treatment or try to take an attachment style parenting (Dan Siegel). Since mom was often in an angry, hyperarousal position out of windows of tolerance - this lead to either Brian being in a shut down mode or very angry and yelling back. He was through AAI able to somatically feel what affect regulation was like with our therapy dog, and he then was able to carry it over with his relationship to Max. We shared videos of him having comforting regulated interactions with Max at home.

# A case of re-traumatization, unidentified disability and over-emphasis on sociopathic tendencies

Kevin is a 14 year old teen boy referred from inpatient psychiatric hospital for assessment of “animal abuse secondary to killing two birds and choking a cat” and after long hospital stay concerned about lack of empathy and “sociopathic tendencies” Kevin experienced corporal punishment since birth until when in elementary school his father died by suicide, Kevin was home and a witness. Mom had given up parental rights for concerns of his aggressive behaviors and multiple hospitalizations and severity of his psychiatric symptoms as a tween. Kevin had difficulty sharing his experiences of

The animal harm, but was excited to have animal assisted therapy as he “loved it” while in another institution. Referral requesting assessment of safety with animals in home.

## TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS:

Assess safety with animals, particularly small animals, as well as animals in movement. Identify impact of pre-verbal trauma on connections with animals and possible threat of recurring injury to animals in our care or in a future foster home. Psychoeducation regarding trauma and how somatic experiences such as AAI provides a different insight into understanding actions, coping and connection

# Following our Model to Create Narrative Clinical Plan

Attunement- At intake by video in the hospital, Kevin was very interested in watching my therapy dog, Emmett in motion - asking him to do a few tricks or just come into the screen - he gave big smiles, which surprised psychologist. First session in the office with two guinea pigs ( he had guinea pigs growing up) he was attentive, respectful, looked for direction, asked questions about their behavior, and smiled. Subsequent visits at the farm, amazing session with seeing birth of ducklings - very aware of what all animals needed to feel understood and “cared for”, Clear communication when animals movement, smells or space issues became “too much and he “needed a break”



# Following our Model to Create Narrative Clinical Plan

Affirmation - Since this family had a continued cycle of interpersonal violence, mostly with yelling however, with drop-off eventually with dad things at times got physical between the parents. Brian struggled with identifying himself or if he could call himself again a “dog lover” after doing “something so so terrible”. He received in the moment affirmations for Bear, our therapy dog and his own dog Max when he started approach without fear, and they day the built up to Max kissing him again with a lick Brian announced “it was the best day ever as he had been forgiven”



# Following our Model to Create Narrative Clinical Plan

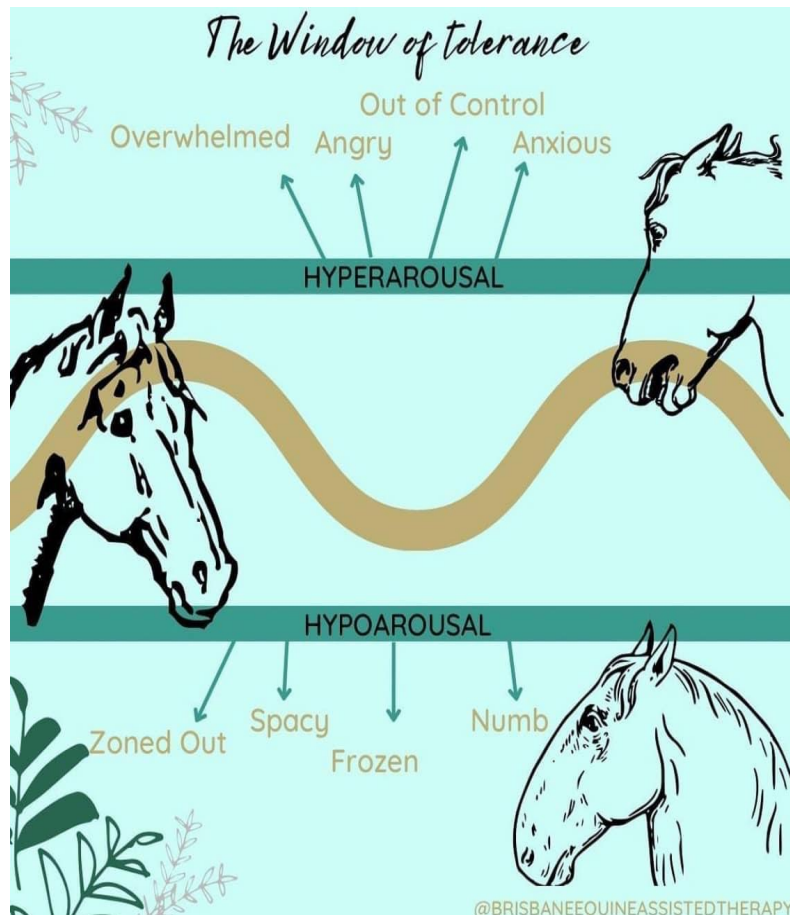
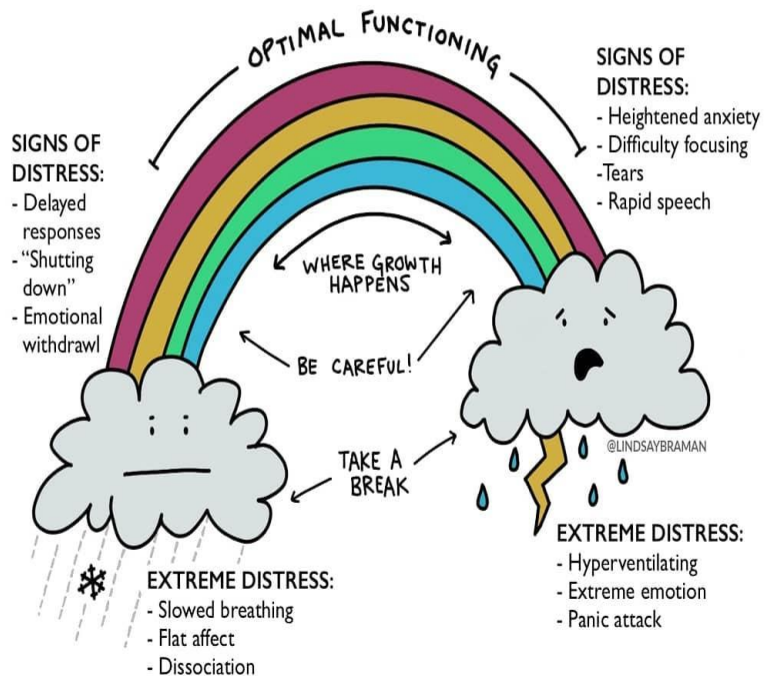
Attachment - Kevin was very clear that attachment was a struggle for him particularly with movement or proximity. Will discuss this more with affect regulation. And a very powerful narrative of watching the mother duck push away the ducklings a few hours after birth he said “she’s done with them” and when asked about the ducklings he said “they hope she’ll take them back”, I felt at first session, but definitively at second that his struggle with attachment was not solely a lack of empathy but that he had autism spectrum disorder. In a team meeting weeks later, mom said that her struggle with caregiving for him was that he “lacked remorse” though she said she had been suggesting he had autism “for years”. Disruption in service because of my health and he said “it’s ok I know Kate really cares about the kids she helps”

Affect Regulation - In initial session with guinea pigs, Kevin was very mindful of how they moved and how he controlled his body in a respectful way - very concerned he would “hurt or scare them”. In a session with a horse, very respectful and then in third session with Sweetie struggled with anger surfacing up when she pulled toward the grass, he was able to tolerate a conversation when “things don’t go my way” and “respect the choice” of the horse. The week he was being discharged after two years, the movement of the horses led to a dissociative episode and sensory overload, also had learned grandmother had died, so we sat side by side quietly in the barn for 30 minutes. He self-soothed with fidgets and his airpods



# WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

(IN RAINBOW FORM!)



# Following our Model to Create Narrative Clinical Plan

Affirmation - Kevin shared that the psychoeducation about the prey response and seeing it action was “amazing and helpful”. Identified he lived through a very scary thing with lots of sounds, movements and sensory experiences and that when birds moved and came into his space, he sought them out to hurt them because of fear. And he shared remorse. He was also interested in how the mother duck made choices to leave the ducklings and be with the father instead and she shared “that’s her choice, maybe she will see something good in them”. He also validated that Sweetie had choices to take care of herself - eat grass, even if he didn’t like it, she still had choice



# Animal Wisdom - from Meg Kirby (2023)

- Being in the moment, living in the here and now
- Regulate the nervous system and using calming signals
- Feelings as Information and self-regulation
- No judgement
- Unique talents
- Belong to herd/mob/flock
- Instincts and sensing
- Experimenting - there are no mistakes
- Play





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