

The Right Stuff:

Canine Physical & Mental Wellness for
Animal-Assisted Services

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Learning Objectives Today

- Identify key components of canine mental wellness
- Identify key aspects of canine physical wellness
- Explore foundational physical wellness exercises
- Explain how physical and mental wellness relate to animal-assisted services (AAS)

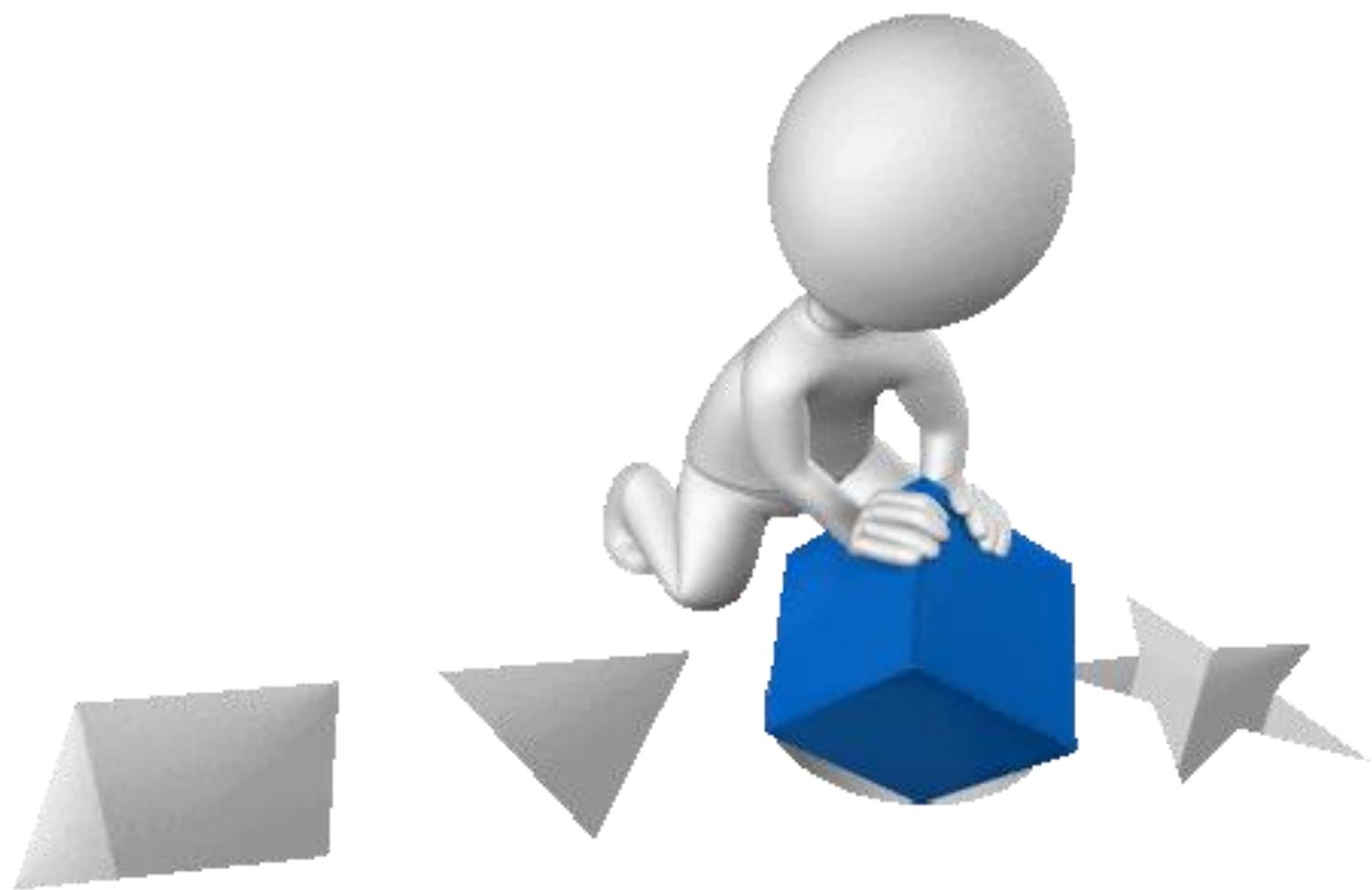
Why Consider Mental & Physical Wellness?

- ▶ Dogs who feel capable have greater behavioral consistency, confidence, and flexibility
 - ▶ Mentally/emotionally
 - ▶ Physically in their bodies
- ▶ Each dog is an individual
 - ▶ Cognitive bias (“You know how terriers are!”)
 - ▶ How dog old are you? (Suzanne Clothier)
- ▶ We need *compassionate objectivity* about each dog’s functionality
 - ▶ Are they struggling? Are they capable?
 - ▶ <https://caninearthritis.co.uk/>



One
Size
Fits
All







Mental/Emotional Wellness



Safety First!

Does your dog feel safe?

“Disruptions to safety include:

- Sensory stimulation
- Restraint
- Handling
- Inconsistency
- Unpredictability
- Illness, injury, inability, or pain
- Lack of coping skills
- Being conspicuous”

-- Suzanne Clothier





OPTIONS
JUST AHEAD



Choice:

How much freedom of choice in AAS does your dog have?

Your dog's opinion matters:

- On or off leash?
- Enough physical space?
- “Forced” (mandatory) or optional client interaction?
- Dog-friendly furniture?
- Stacking stressors?
- Client-free zone in office?

What kind of dog do you have?



Robust

Hummer photo by Dustan Woodhouse,
sedan photo by Hanson Lu, and
Porche photo by Dekler Ph on Unsplash.



Durable



Fragile



Ways to Foster Mental/ Emotional Wellness

- High-quality nutrition
- Regular and appropriate physical exercise
- Mental puzzles
- Varied activities beyond work
- Adequate rest
- Social interactions
- Handler gives at least equal attention to the dog as to the client
- Keep asking your dog, “How is this for you?”
- Client-free zone in office with choice

Physical Wellness





What Might Interfere with Your Dog's Physical Abilities?

- Muscular weakness
- Skeletal stress (long nails, weight)
- Lack of body awareness
- Habitual movement and posture patterns
- Injuries or surgery with possible after-effects
- Poorly fitting equipment
- Fatigue (mental or physical)



Photo by Fatty Corgi on Unsplash.

How Can I Know Something's Wrong?

- **Standing** – is your dog's weight evenly distributed front to back and side to side?
- **Sitting** – does your dog habitually sit on one hip?
- **Lying Down** – does your dog keep one or both legs straight?
- **Touch** – does your dog flinch when you touch him in certain areas?
- **Gait** – does your dog have an uneven gait when walking or trotting?

Listen to your dog!



Listen to Your Dog

Watch right rear leg.



February 2015 to March 2016.



What are some Physical Demands of AAS?

- Jumping on/off couch?
- Looking up?
- Lying down?
- Sitting?
- Eating treats?
- Being active?
- Remaining still?
- Responding to direction



Jumping Up on Couch?

Rock Back Sit: Rear and Core Strengthening



Looking Up

Cookie Stretches Up & Down: Neck Flexibility



Lying Down

Down to Stand: Core Strength, Front and Hind Balance



Sitting

Sit to Stand: Core and Hind Strength



Standing

Weight Shifting with Lifting Front Legs: Hind strength, balance, proprioception



Being Active

Figure 8 Around Legs: Flexibility



Being Active

Cookie Stretches to Sides: Flexibility and Balance



General Movement

Cavalettis: Balance and proprioception

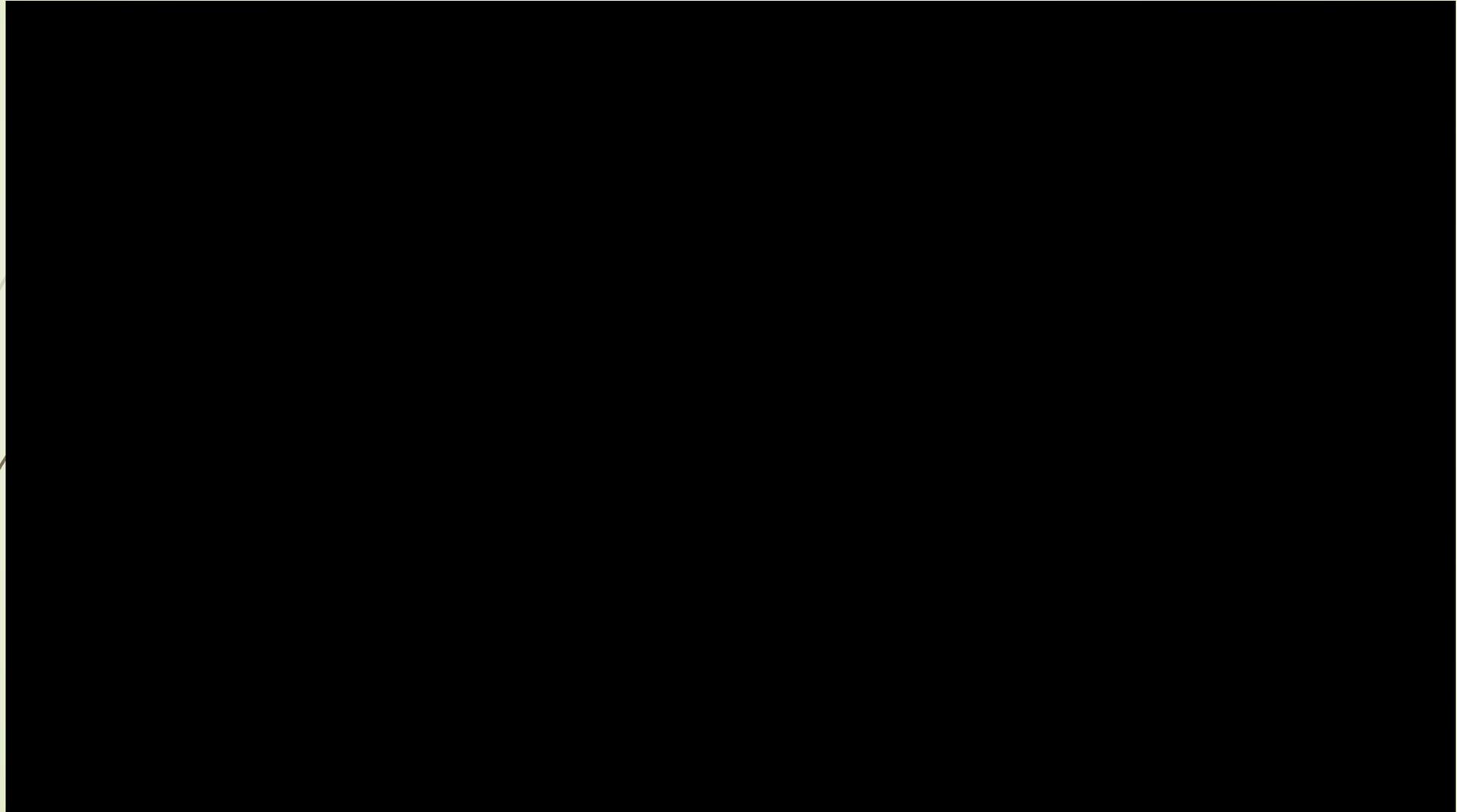


General Movement Standing w/Front End Elevated: Rear Strength

Essential for all dogs!



Advanced Work: Balance & Core Strength



Handout



Located
on HAI
website



A few
foundation
exercises –
for **healthy**
dogs



Warm up
dogs
before
doing
exercises



Watch for
signs of
fatigue or
pain – and
stop!



Many methods for
teaching – please be
gentle and
respectful

Love is Not Enough

“Dogs also need us to be **realistic** and **respectful** of their needs and preferences, and to understand their capacity to adapt and to remain functional.”

--Suzanne Clothier



Image by freepik.



Thank you!

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