



THERAPY ANIMAL TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION

Promoting Open Communication in
Therapy/Facility Animal Teams



WHO WE ARE

Dr. Gina Caldwell

- Background as an animal behaviorist and adjunct professor
- Doctorate in Teaching Psychology
- Pet Partners/AAAIP Subject Matter Expert and team evaluator

Dr. Taylor Chastain Griffin

- Background in animal training and mental health counseling
- Doctorate in research psychology
- National Director of AAI Advancement, Pet Partners
- Executive Director, The Association of Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals (AAAIP)

AGENDA



Relationship Building

Training Methods

Approaching and Avoidant Behaviors

Applied Examples

Additional Resources

TELL US ABOUT YOU

**What best describes your work with
therapy animals?**

**A) Currently partnered with a
pet**

**B) Hoping to partner with a pet in the
future**

**C) Partner with third party volunteer
teams**

**D) Animal-lover just looking to learn
more**

WHAT MAKES A GOOD THERAPY ANIMAL?



- Affiliative = approaches new people
- Reliable and predictable
- Quickly recovers from stress
- Shares a language with their handler
- Free from pain/discomfort
- Enjoys the role!

RELATIONSHIP- BUILDING

- 1st priority = building trust
- Focus on activities that the animal enjoys
- Short visits in public settings
- Avoid flooding at all cost
- Practice directing interactions



PARTICIPATING IN TRAINING



- Secondary to relationship-building
- Fear-free, force-free training methods only
- Caution against “send away” training camps
- Interview your trainer
 - What do you know about therapy animals?
 - What would you suggest I do if my animal showed avoidance at a new facility?

RESEARCH ON TRAINING METHODS

- Punishment is associated with an increased incidence of problematic behavior (Hiby, Rooney, Bradshaw, 2004).
- Aversive methods correlated with canine stress (de Castro et al., 2020)
- E-collar training is not more effective (China et al., 2020)
- Time spent training predicts success (Stevens, 2020)





**A COMMITMENT TO POSITIVE
TRAINING METHODS IS
CRITICAL FOR ANIMALS
INVOLVED IN AAI**



CUES

**a shared
language**

**asking for a
known behavior**

COMMANDS

**a one-sided
expectation**

**demanding a
known behavior**

COMMON CUES FOR THERAPY ANIMALS

- 1 FOCUS
- 2 SIT/DOWN/STAY
- 3 TOUCH
- 4 LEAVE-IT
- 5 LOOSE LEASH WALKING

**Thoughts on using
treats in AAI
training/sessions?**



APPLIED EXAMPLE

Setting: Counselor partnered with their therapy dog in a private practice setting

Situation: Dog is taking space from client even though the client is very interested in petting the dog.

Decision Point: Ask the dog to approach and interact or allow for the dog to take the space?



APPLIED EXAMPLE

Setting: OT working with a young client on a series of tasks.

Situation: Client attempting to teach the dog a new trick. The client is struggling to get the dog to follow through.

Decision Point: Assist the client in luring/rewarding the behavior?



**Avoidant behaviors:
the desire for separation
or seclusion**

**Approaching
behaviors:
the desire for
proximity**

**All dogs
demonstrate
both kinds
of behaviors**

**Consider
setting,
treats used,
and state of
the dog**



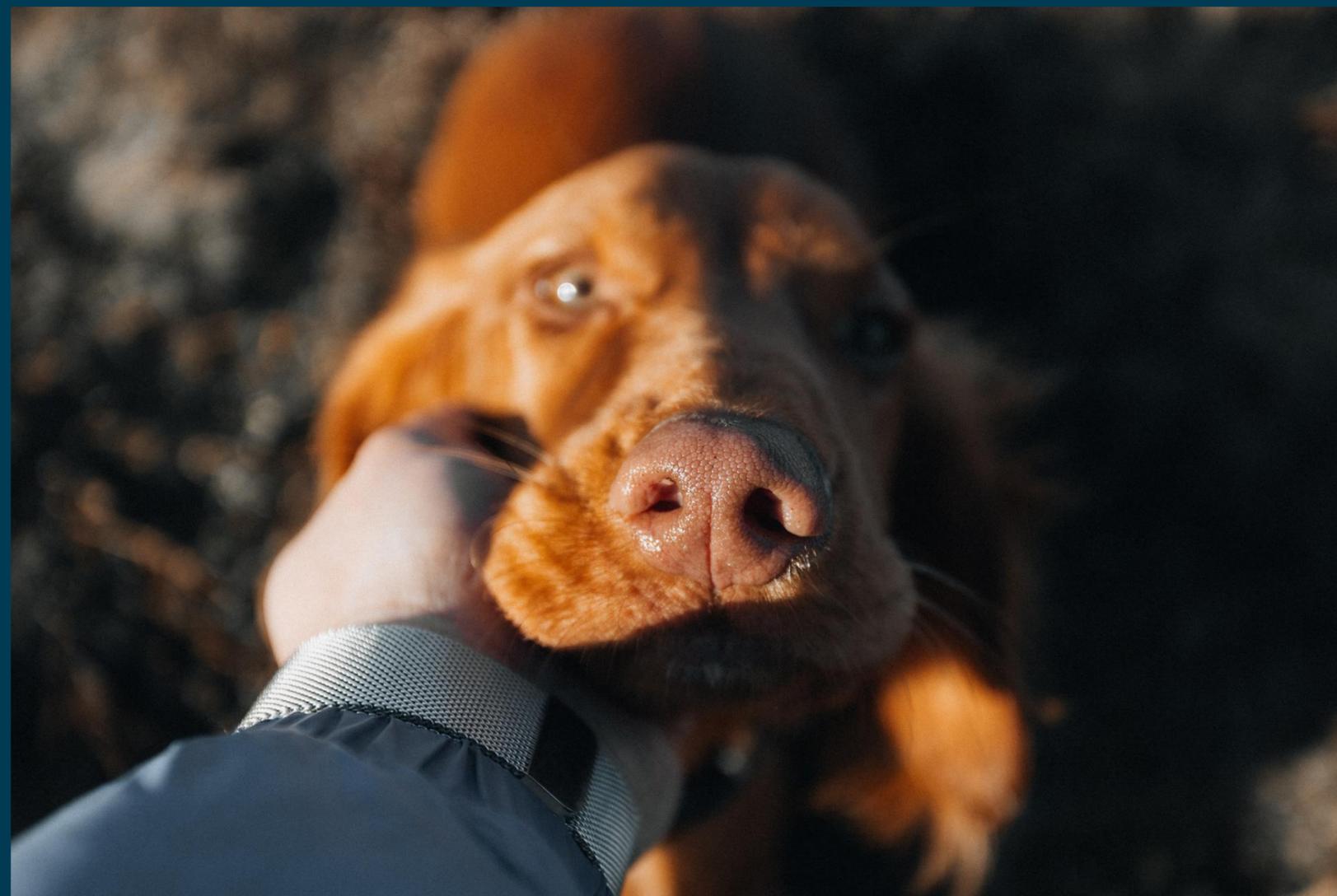
APTITUDE

**a natural
affinity to do
something**

TOLERANCE

**the capacity to
endure
continued
subjection to
something**

PETTING CONSENT TESTS





MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

BODY LANGUAGE INVENTORY FOR THERAPY ANIMALS



Understanding what your animal is communicating through their body language will help you to know when to apply techniques to support your animal, including removing them from a situation, if necessary. Each animal's cues will vary by species and individual.

Complete this inventory to help you recognize how your particular animal looks and behaves when they are in each of the three zones.

Comfort Zone	Body Zone	Observation
Green Zone 	Head	
	Core	
	Hindquarters	
	Behavior	

Comfort Zone	Body Zone	Observation
Yellow Zone 	Head	
	Core	
	Hindquarters	
	Behavior	

Comfort Zone	Body Zone	Observation
Red Zone 	Head	
	Core	
	Hindquarters	
	Behavior	

EMOTION RESPONSE TRACKER FOR THERAPY ANIMALS

Use this chart to monitor how your animal responds to human emotions, noting that they may respond differently to these feelings as displayed by their handler/owner as compared to other people with whom they visit.

Human emotion displayed	Animal's response to owner	Animal's response to other people (not owner)
Sad, crying	Lots of licking, wagging tail, forcing paw as a sign of worry and affection.	No response, uninterested/unaffected.
Happy, joyous	Immediately becomes excited, wagging tail	Similar response (excited, wagging tail) but a little timid and keeps distance.
.....
.....
.....



Insert other emotions and animal's response!

REWARD SYSTEM TRACKER FOR THERAPY ANIMALS

Use this chart to monitor how your animal perceives the rewards that you offer them both inside and outside of sessions.

Reward	Observed Behavior	Meaning
Plush toy	Initial interest, sniffed toy, put in mouth for a few seconds, walked away	Somewhat rewarding
Smelly treat	Interest as soon as bag was brought out, got into a sit position staring at the bag, tail wagging, took treat, remained seated and focused on the bag.	Very rewarding



Insert other rewards, behaviors, and meanings!



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Association of Animal-Assisted
Intervention Professionals



Animal Training Record

List all formal training programs the animal has completed along with any titles/certifications the animal/handler have earned.

Course	Trainer	Focus:	Date of Completion:
Puppy basics	Jane Smith, CPDT	Puppy behaviors and socialization	1/15/23
Basic obedience	Jane Smith, CPDT	Cues such as sit, stay, down, come, leave-it, touch	4/15/23
Therapy Animal Prep Course	Jane Smith, CPDT	Approaching new people, handler advocating for therapy animal, comfortability with novel stimuli	7/15/23

Title	Details:	Date Earned:
AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy	This program focuses on responsible pet ownership and evaluates puppy behaviors such as treat taking, leash walking, and core training cues	4/12/23
Canine Good Citizen	Includes 10 test items focused on practical, functional behaviors for dogs	6/15/23
Registered Therapy Animal Team, Pet Partners	Therapy animal team evaluation mimicking an AAI environment	7/21/23

Animal Health Record Template

Professionals should maintain records of all documentation related to their therapy animal's health. This should include a folder with updated vaccine records, medication lists, and copies of any veterinary visit reports. At the front of this folder, veterinary contact information and a log such as the example shown below might be created for quick reference of the animal's health status over time.

DVM Name:		
Clinic Name:		
Clinic Website:		
Clinic Address:		
Phone #:	Email Address:	
Signature of DVM:		Examination Date:

Date:	Event:	Notes:
1/10/23	Annual vet visit	received annual rabies, DHPP, and bordetella vaccines. Fecal run: no parasites. Heartworm test: negative
1/15/23	Monthly preventatives (repeats on the 15 th of each month)	Receives trifexis pill to prevent fleas and heartworms
5/28/23	Vet visit: suspected ear infection	Antibiotics for 14 days. No AAI until recheck

Working Log

Date	Hours Worked	Population Worked With	Therapy Animal Activities	Therapy Animal Behaviors Observed
2/15	9:00-10:00: Resting in Office	Single child, age 8	Rex was eager to greet the client and engaged in a game of fetch.	After about 10 minutes, Rex was tired and chose to lay at the feet of the client quietly after getting a drink of water.
	10:00-11:00: Client Session			
	11:00-1:00: Resting in Office	Group of young adults	Participated in grounding activities.	Rex greeted clients as they entered. Sat at the feet/received petting from the clients.
	1:00-3:00: Client Session			

AAAIP RESOURCES



- Monthly events including educational sessions and mentoring circles
- Self-paced online coursework
- AAIS Certification
- Liability Insurance
- Resources and Professional Community
- Subject Matter Expert Opportunities



AAAIP

**Association of Animal-Assisted
Intervention Professionals**

TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION ONLINE COURSE



- Receive 50% off the course self-paced learning
- Work through applied examples
- Earn certificate of completion

CODE = apahaiweb3 valid through 8/20/24

Get the Zoomies

Quick bursts of therapy animal learning!



AAAIP

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June 24 at 7 pm ET/4
pm PT

Special Guest Colleen
Pelar

Avoiding burnout on
both ends of the leash





QUESTIONS? DISCUSSION

Let's Stay in Touch!

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 Connect with me on
LinkedIn

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THANK YOU!