



Force-Free Training in Animal-Assisted Interventions

Why is this essential to the safety of our work?



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Credentials

MS - Mental Health Counseling

PhD - Research Psychology

ABC Certified Dog Trainer

Experience

National Director of AAI Advancement, Pet Partners

Executive Director, Association of Animal-Assisted
Intervention Professionals (AAAIP)

Pet Partner Team Evaluator

Professional Dog Trainer for 13+ years



AAAIP

Association of Animal-Assisted
Intervention Professionals



Pet Partners™



Adherence to Force-Free training methods in AAI is no longer a suggestion, it's a competency for ethical practice.



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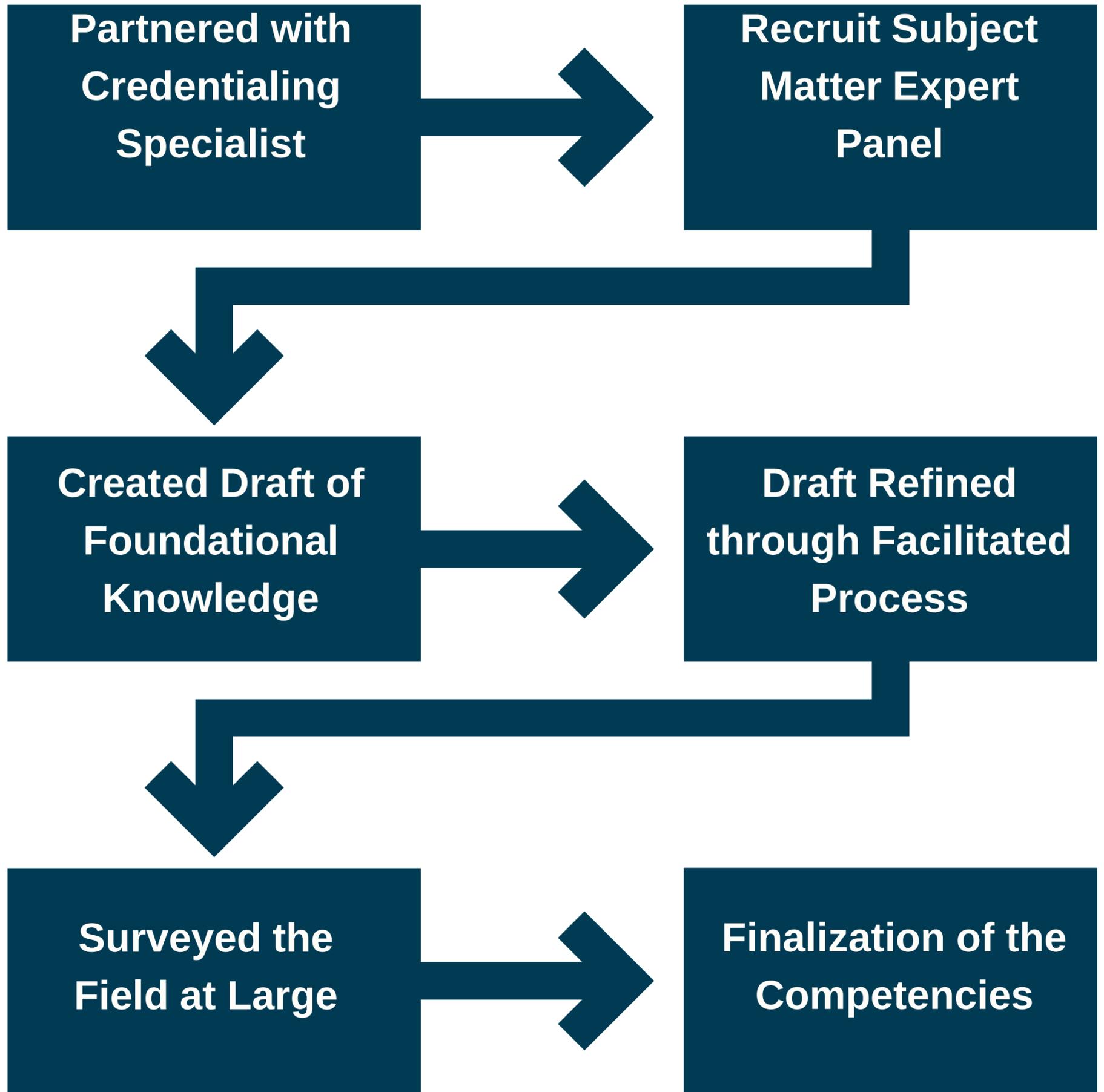
Association of Animal-Assisted
Intervention Professionals

**Competencies
for the Ethical Inclusion of
Therapy and Facility Animals**

Guidance for the Certified
AAI Specialist, Therapy Animal Team,
and their Assessor

2. Positive Training Methodologies (~23% of domain)

- a. Distinguish between compulsive training methodologies as compared to positive/relationship-based methodologies.
- b. Classify training techniques as appropriate or inappropriate.
- c. Recognize positive training methodology perspectives.
- d. Recognize the rationale for always using positive training methods and avoiding fear-based or coercive training methods.
- e. Distinguish between reactive, proactive, and inactive/passive handling.



It's Impossible to Determine Animal Aptitude without a Force-Free Approach



Therapy animal traits:

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



aversive equipment: prong collars, shock collars, choke collars



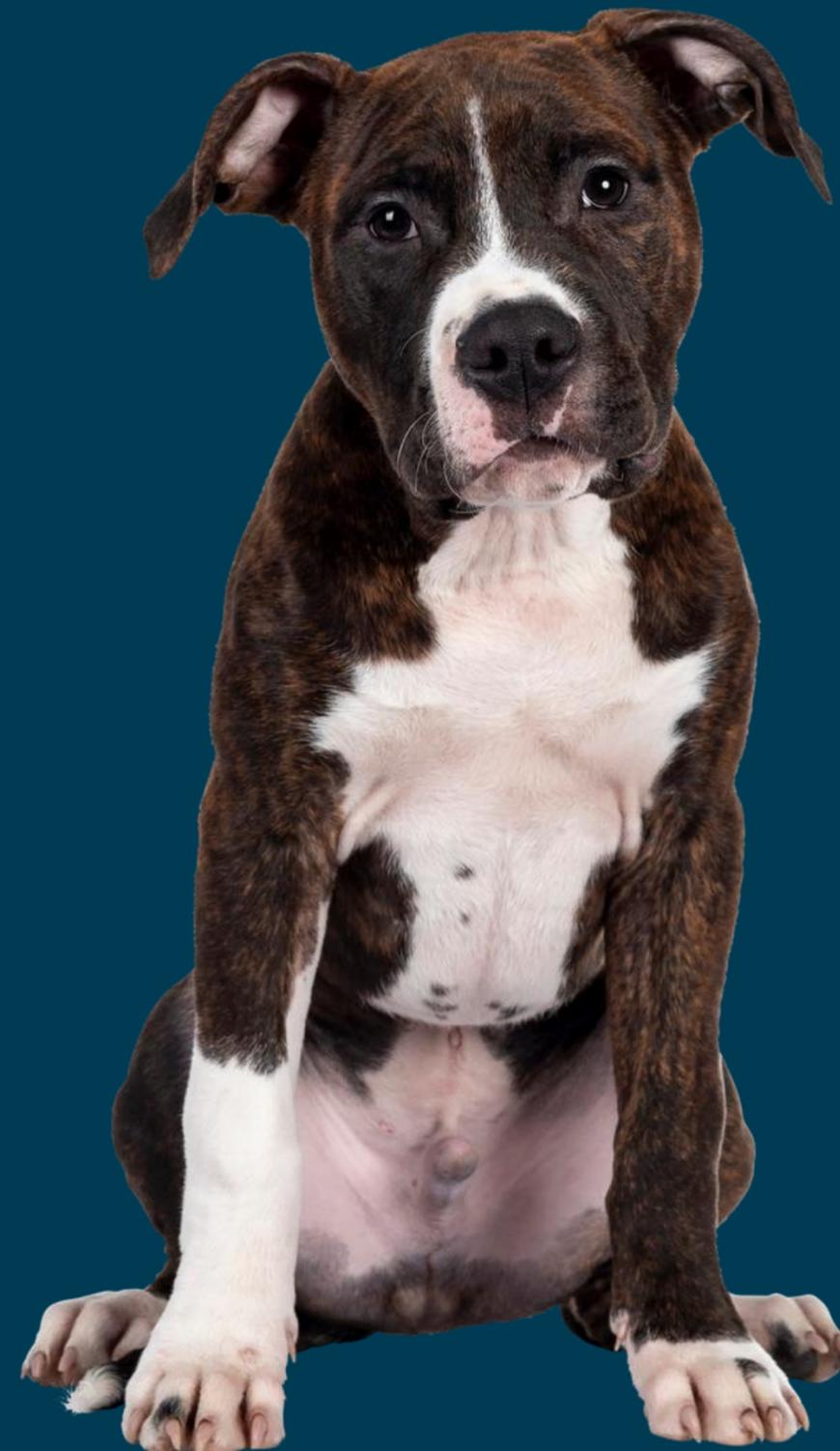
reliance on commands rather than cues



the use of too many cues



intimidation or coercive behaviors



Training's Impact on Handler/Animal Relationship

- 1st priority = building trust
- The human tries to be the voice of the animal
- Dogs are prone to trying to please us
- The training process should be fun!



PARTICIPATING IN TRAINING



- 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?
 - What kind of equipment do you suggest?
 - Education, certifications, and references

COMMON CUES FOR THERAPY ANIMALS

1

FOCUS

2

SIT/DOWN/STAY

3

TOUCH

4

LEAVE-IT

5

LOOSE LEASH WALKING

Let's Look at Some Examples

Case 1:

My client is upset and wants therapy dog, Lucy, to sit in her lap. The client taps her lap and invites Lucy up, but Lucy doesn't move from her bed.

Case 2:

The client's mom has entered the session, and she is fearful of dogs. Lucy would like to go and greet her.

Petting Consent

Tests

- **Extremely useful for modeling choice**
- **Puts the responsibility on the dog to communicate their needs**
- **Prepare for complex responses!**



Modeling Healthy Human-to-Human Relationship Skills

What can we demonstrate to our clients by expressing our commitment to positive training styles?



Risk #1: Incidents



- Behavior deteriorates under stress
- If any animal cannot freely express their preferences, we can't adequately respect their needs
- Incidents can involve physical harm, mental anguish, and damage to property

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	

Risk #2: Burnout



- Just like humans, dogs need breaks throughout their day/week
- Dogs who are overworked have shorter careers (and shorter lifespans!)
- Therapy animal self-care should be taken seriously

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!



Risk #3: Robotic Behavior



- AAI loses therapeutic value when animals are acting robotically
- Animals who are empowered to present as they naturally are add so much to the AAI environment!

What other risks can you think of when it comes to using coercive training methods with therapy animals?

DISCUSSION
POINT





Our Moral and Ethical Obligation as AAI Providers

AAAIP RESOURCES

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



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**Association of Animal-Assisted
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Discount Code:

30offAAAIP

\$30 off membership



QUESTIONS? DISCUSSION

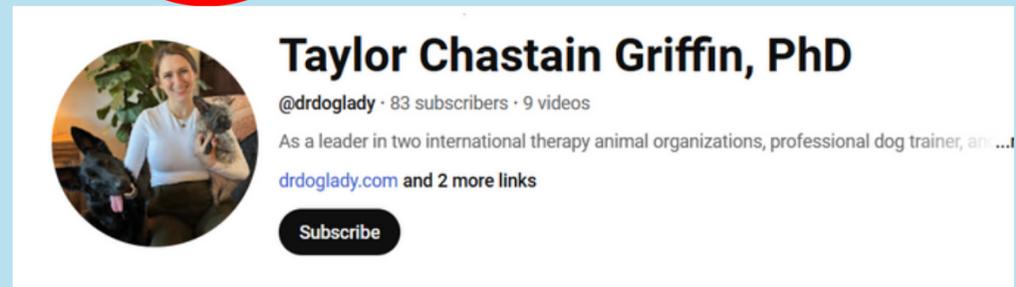
Let's Stay in Touch!



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