



PETS IN OLDER ADULTHOOD: ENGAGING AND SUSTAINING THE BOND

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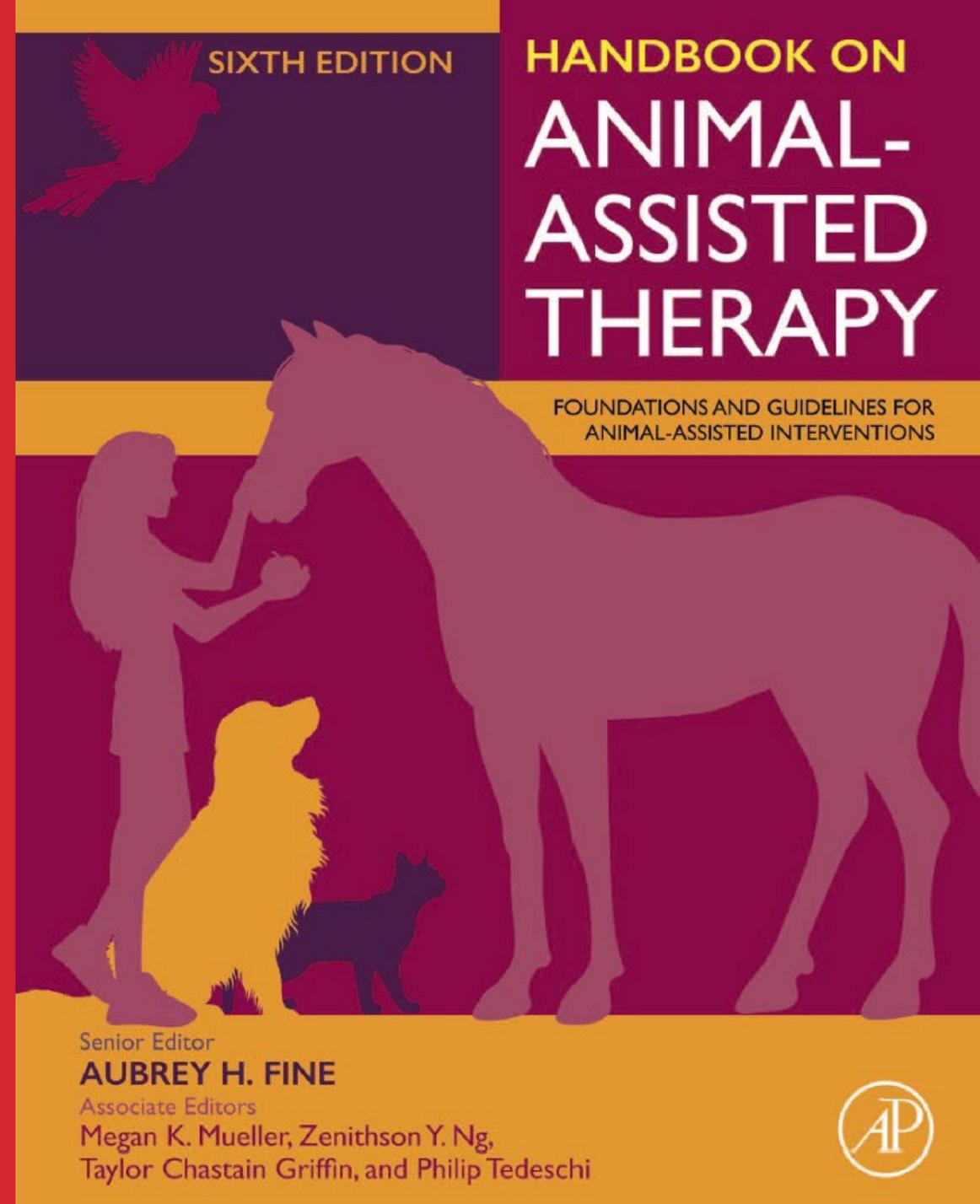
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Agenda

1. Pet Ownership in Older Adulthood
2. Engaging the Bond: AAI for Older Adults
3. Sustaining the Bond: Challenges and Promising Solutions



An Aging World

- In 2018, people 65 and older outnumbered children under 5 for the first time ever, expected to be twice as many than under 5 by 2050
- Older adults were 10% of world-wide population in 2022, expected to be 16% by 2050, and people over 80 is expected to triple in that time
- A lot of those people will be living healthier and longer without significant disabilities
- We will need more in-home care and services
- Pets can be part of support, but may also raise challenges to aging in place





Pets and Healthy Aging



The process of developing and maintaining the **functional ability** that enables **wellbeing** in older age.

-(WHO, 2024)





Pet Ownership in Older Adulthood



Physical Health

- Emerging longitudinal results
 - Slower declines in physical functioning
 - Maintained cognitive health
 - Cardiac health
- Dog walking has most established link to physical health



Psychological Health

- Companionship
- Sense of purpose and routine
- Coping with adverse life events
- Loneliness
 - Quantitative evidence is mixed
 - Self-report supports pet reduce loneliness



Social Well-Being

- Increased social interactions (with other humans)
- Sence of community
 - Neighbors



Health Behaviors and Decisions

- Pets are motivators for healthy behaviors
 - Daily routines
 - Managing chronic illness and pain
 - Recovering from sudden illness
 - Maintenance of mental health and wellbeing



Health Behaviors and Decisions

- Areas of concern
 - Delay or refusal of necessary medical treatment
 - Remaining in unsafe housing/situation



Caregiving for Pet Owners

- Pets impact caregivers
- Instrumental experiences
 - Number of task, time spent providing care
- Emotional experiences
 - Burden
 - Shaped by relationship with loved one

Table of Contents

- 1. Your Pet and Home Care**
What to consider
- 2. Communication Tips**
How to start a conversation about your pet
- 3. Why Pets are Important!**
The benefits of having your pet
- 4. Your Pet's Wellbeing**
Tips for ensuring your pet's welfare
- 5. Support Options**
Different types of support available for your pet
- 6. SAFEpet@home checklist**
To record agreements about your pet
- 7. Farewell**
Guidance on rehoming or coping with the loss of your pet
- 8. A New Pet?**
Advice on getting a new pet
- 9. Useful websites and search tips**
Tips for finding more information online
- 10. Appendix: Agreement Poster**
To share agreements about your pet with others

SAFEpet@home (www.scas.org.uk/downloads)

- Information and advice for people with pets receiving home care
 - Checklist care plan discussions
 - Discussion cards
 - For professional caregivers:
 - Communication tips
 - Animal welfare





Long-term Care within a Facility Setting

- For older pet owner
 - A continued relationship and aspect of identity
 - Can ease and facilitate transition



Long-term Care within a Facility Setting

- For older pet owner
 - A continued relationship and aspect of identity
 - Can ease and facilitate transition
- For facility staff
 - Increase in workload
 - Potential risks
 - Negative impact on other residents
 - *Need for clear and comprehensive policies*



Dementia and Pet Ownership

- Pets can continue to be
 - A source of companionship
 - Add to quality of life
 - A way to connect to others
- Dementia service dogs
 - Trained to assist with specific tasks
 - Need to be placed in a home with a caregiver

A woman in a pink vest is smiling and holding a small, fluffy white dog named Bubbles. The dog is wearing a red collar and a tag that says "BUBBLES". The woman is standing next to an elderly man with white hair who is lying in a hospital bed, looking up at the dog with a smile. The setting appears to be a hospital room with a window in the background.

Engaging the Bond: AAI for Older Adults



AAI in Residential Care

- Impacts on Residents
 - Improved health and wellbeing
 - Particularly impactful for people living with dementia
 - Emotional, psychological, and behavioral
 - Engagement



AAI in Residential Care

- Importance of the handler
 - Safety concerns
 - Residents' limitations
 - Interpersonal interactions



Care Farms

- Prioritize engagement
- Varied spaces and activities
- Residential and day programming
- Associated with higher quality of life and feeling of contribution
- More common in Europe



Sustaining the Bond: Challenges and Promising Solutions



Pet Ownership Declines with Age

- Concerns about providing care
 - Death
 - Changes in functioning
 - Changes in resources (housing, income)
- Financial resources
- Housing
- Living alone





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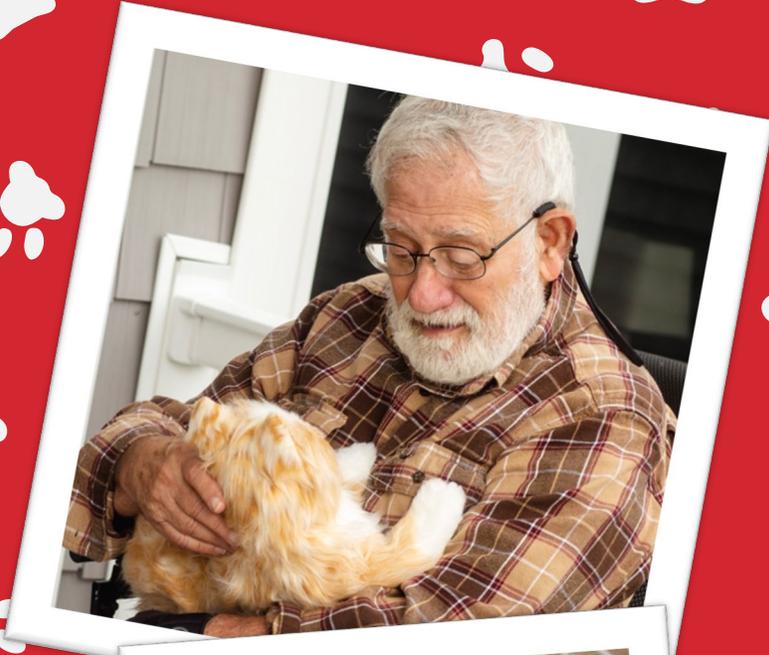
Volunteer-based Support Programs

- Provide basic pet care
- Opportunity for social interactions
- May also provide connections to other organizations



Animal Welfare

- Must be considered in *all* situations
- There may be situations when pets are no longer appropriate



Alternatives to Pet Ownership

- Shared or communal pets
- Volunteering
 - Caring for working people's pets
 - Animal shelters
 - Fostering
- Robotic pets

Checklist Care Plan Discussions

Key considerations for clients with pets,
to be used during care plan discussions



SAFEpet@home
When the pet's owner needs care

Pet owner: _____ Phone number: _____
Type of pets: _____ Pet's date of birth: _____
Pet's breed: _____
Pet's names: _____
Contact person: _____ Phone number: _____
Vet practice: _____ Phone number: _____

Take the SAFEpet@home booklet to the client and go through it together. Discuss that the responsibility for the pet lies with the client. Regularly evaluate whether the arrangements are still up to date.

- The SAFEpet@home booklet has been provided to the client and gone through
- Responsibilities have been clearly communicated

The points below are included in the digital care plan:

- The presence of the pet
- Specific details about the pet
- Contact person (other than the client) for the pet

The Importance of Planning

- Essential for sustaining the bond and ensuring well-being of people and pets (and caregivers)
- Anticipating changes in functioning
- Expanding care network
- Emergency planning
- Planning for transitions

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Aging & Animals: Research and Conversation

- Hosted by the Gerontological Society of America's Human-animal Interaction Special Interest Group
- Open to all!
- Next session on May 1st at 3 PM Eastern

