

SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH SYSTEM
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND RECOVERY SERVICES

DATE: April 8, 2009

BHRS POLICY: 09-01

SUBJECT: Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Animal Assisted Activities (AAA)

AUTHORITY: Divisional

AMENDED: January 14, 2015; October 19, 2015

ATTACHMENTS: **A. AAT/AAA Session Preparation Checklist**
B. Application to Provide AAT and/or AAA

POLICY APPLIES TO:

This policy applies to all BHRS staff, interns, volunteers, and contracted providers. It does not apply to outside agencies (*e.g.*, SPCA, Furry Friends, etc.) Those entities must follow their own certification guidelines for the provision of Animal Assisted Therapy or Animal Assisted Activities while working at BHRS-affiliated sites.

BACKGROUND

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) have been found to be beneficial ancillary therapies for youth and adults in diverse client settings such as acute medical facilities, skilled nursing facilities, psychiatric facilities, geropsychiatric facilities, detention facilities, counseling centers and substance abuse treatment programs. This policy is developed after review of literature from Therapy Dogs International, the American Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA) and other established Animal Assisted Therapy resources.

Conditions for the use of personal service animals as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) take precedence over this policy (09-01). The Americans with Disabilities Act and State laws permit service dogs to accompany their handlers anywhere that the general public is allowed, including taxis, buses, restaurants, theaters, stores, hotels, apartments, and office buildings.

Staff members and clients may not bring pets into the clinics, or work place, other than under the specific conditions of AAT and (AAA) as described in this policy (09-01).

Clients who bring pets (other than service animals) into the clinics, or work place, will be seen for their appointments at the discretion of the clinician, based on clinical need,

assessment of risk to staff and other clients, animal health and behavior issues, and the ability of the client to control the animal. The client will be told at that appointment that the animal may not accompany the client for any subsequent appointments unless staff clinician and their supervisor agree that it is therapeutically beneficial and assists in the treatment process. Clinicians should consult with supervisors about any issues that arise in following this protocol. A specific plan of action may need to be developed for any situation that does not resolve itself with general guidance to the client about animals being excluded from the sites.

PURPOSE

To establish that AAT and AAA may be utilized as an ancillary therapy for clients served at behavioral health outpatient treatment sites, Youth Services Center, Camp Kemp, Camp Glenwood and Canyon Oaks Youth Center.

- To ensure that AAT and AAA are conducted in such a manner as to protect the health and safety of clients and staff.
- To establish certification/registration expectations for the animal, and
- To assure that the clinician/animal handler involved are appropriately trained.

DEFINITIONS

“Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. AAT is delivered and/or directed by health or human services providers working within the scope of practice of their profession. AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning. AAT is provided in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. The process is documented and evaluated.” (AVMA Policy statement – 1/06)

“Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) provide opportunities for motivation, education, or recreation to enhance quality of life. Animal assisted activities are delivered in a variety of environments by specially trained professionals, paraprofessionals, or volunteers in association with animals that meet specific criteria” (AVMA Policy statement-1/06)

POLICY

Animal Assisted Therapy and Animal Assisted Activities may occur at county behavioral health outpatient sites, including Youth Services Center, Camp Kemp, Camp Glenwood and Canyon Oaks Youth Center, under the following conditions:

Dog handlers must attend an AAT/AAA orientation or show written certification of past experience prior to being allowed to participate in AAT/AAA at San Mateo County BHRS. This applies to bringing in dogs/puppies prior to AAT/AAA certification.

1. Application to Provide AAT and/or AAA

- A successful proposal to introduce AAT and/or AAA at a treatment site must be

- supported by the Unit Chief of that site. Prior to implementation, it shall be discussed with all staff at that site. When needed, the Unit Chief shall attempt to resolve staff concerns about the implementation of AAT and/or AAA. Concerns may include fear of, or allergy to the animal requiring the skilled handler to use a leash, confine the animal to a specific area, or use other techniques. Any staff member may ask the Unit Chief at any time for reconsideration of the decision to allow AAT and/or AAA.
- The Youth or Adult Services Deputy Director must approve the implementation of AAT and/or AAA at a treatment site and is responsible for coordination and evaluation of the program, including the number of active therapy animals serving the program at one time. The applicant must also submit the application to Quality Management for final review and approval.
 - Each application will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

2. Certification/Registration Requirements and Health Standards

- The Pet Partnership (clinician/animal handler and animal) will be certified or registered by a recognized AAT and/or AAA institution such as Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society), the Assistance Dog Institute, Therapy Dogs International, Inc., Canine Companions for Independence, or another organization approved by San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services.
- Therapy animals shall be under the care of a veterinarian, determined to be free of communicable diseases, and be up to date on appropriate vaccinations. The therapist/animal handler must assure sound sanitation practices and be aware of any possible allergic response by clients who are receiving AAT and/or AAA.
- The Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society) has written material addressing AAT and AAA. The attached checklist should be used as a suggested guide to help clinicians/animal handlers prepare for successful AAT and/or AAA sessions.

3. Treatment Issues

- The fact that a clinician/animal handler/animal team is/are certified does not, of itself, allow the animal to be brought into the clinic or work site. AAT and/or AAA must be a planned component of a general treatment milieu, or may be provided to serve the documented emotional needs of a specific youth, adult, family or program.
- Client participation in AAT and/or AAA is voluntary; clients shall be asked if they want to participate in AAT and/or AAA. Alternate treatment modalities shall be provided as appropriate to meet the clinical needs of the client, family or program.
- The clinician/animal handler will use the animal as a component of their own professional/paraprofessional specialty and within scope of practice standards.
- AAT and/or AAA can be used prior to the identification of client goals. AAT and/or AAA can be of paramount importance in establishing and setting goals, in particular with clients who have trouble with thought process and anxiety. The use of AAT and/or AAA will facilitate goal setting as well as facilitate the reaching of those goals. Once desired objectives for the individual client or program are identified they will be included in the Treatment and Recovery Plan

or added to Progress Notes as a modality used to reach client goals and or program goals.

- AAT and/or AAA shall be documented in the client record in sufficient detail that evaluation of its effectiveness is possible.
- AAT and/or AAA may be claimed as a billable therapeutic activity, using activity codes that are within the clinician's/animal handler's scope of practice. For example, non-licensed clinicians (other than trainees) should use activity code (07) Rehabilitation, and not use activity code (09) Individual Therapy.

4. Management Issues

- Animals shall be well behaved and under voice control by the handler at all times.
- On a site by site basis, the handler and the Unit Chief will define those areas which will be off limits to the animal.
- All animals must be consistently "housebroken"; animal wastes shall be disposed of promptly and appropriately. Any therapy animal that has repetitive "accidents" will be excluded from the treatment site.
- An animal exhibiting aggressive behavior toward any person, while being used in AAT and/or AAA, will be excluded from further visits. Any aggressive incidents will be reported to Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Administration and documented in an incident report.
- Any complaint about AAT and/or AAA will be reported immediately to Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Administration and documented in an incident report.

5. Puppy in Training Guidelines to Follow

- A puppy in the process of certification for AAT and/or AAA must have the full consent of the Unit Chief prior to being brought into the work environment. The rationale for bringing a puppy into the work place is to facilitate, at the earliest possible time, the training and development of social and obedience skills which are prerequisites for a working therapy dog. It is essential that a potential therapy dog be exposed to a wide variety of situations, people, sounds and smells in the earliest months of their life in order to be emotionally and physically prepared to do AAT and/or AAA work.
- Puppies that are not yet certified/registered as trained therapy dogs must be under the control of experienced handlers only. A handler must show documented proof of handling and training experience.
- Handler has to provide an appropriate, confined area when puppy in training is not with the handler.
- Handler is the authority on handling and socialization with puppy in training and will manage interaction time with clients, programs and staff.
- Handler and Unit Chief will evaluate the appropriateness of puppy's emotional control based on age and experience.
- Puppy in training will be free of parasites and be up to date on all vaccines.

Approved: (Signature on File)
Stephen Kaplan, LCSW
Director, BHRS

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