

ANIMAL-ASSISTED Counseling



What is Animal-Assisted Counseling (AAC)?

- Is a goal-directed, evidence-based therapeutic approach in which a licensed mental health professional partners with a trained therapy/counseling animal
- Helps to support clients in mental wellness, personal growth, and overcoming emotional, behavioral, and psychological challenges
- AAC encourages & promotes animal-human interactions

Benefits of Animal-Assisted Counseling

- Increases and supporting psychological health (Fine, 2019 and Hartwig & Montemayor, 2020)
- Increases motivation, mood, and feelings of safety in therapy sessions (Lange, Cox, Bernert, & Jenkins, 2006/2007)
- Increases in nonverbal communication skills
- Groundedness in counseling session
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression (Hartwig, 2017)
- Decreases disruptive behaviors and enhances social skills (Binfet & Hartwig, 2019)

Animal-Assisted Counseling's Uses in Therapeutic Settings

- *Individual counseling with teens and adults*
- *Couples and family therapy*
- *Group therapy*
- *Play therapy with children*

AAC Training Requirements

- Canine Good Citizen Certificate
- 120 hours total training
- AAC interventions - which includes the AAC skills checklist
- A team evaluation - covers 18 AAC skills and set in clinical setting
- AAC Clinical Practice with Clients & Treatment Planning
- Supervision/consultation

How Animal-Assisted Counseling Works in Practice by Creating:

- A Therapeutic Bridge
- Empathy & Social Skills
- Somatic Regulation & Mindfulness
- Metaphor & Storytelling
- Responsibility & Mastery

Animal-Assisted Counseling:

- Often is combined with experiential and expressive interventions
- Counseling animals can be passively involved
- Can positively impact the therapeutic environment fostering emotional safety, connection, and calmness
- Sessions are tailored based on the therapeutic goals, the client's needs, and the type of therapy animal involved
- Helps clients build trust, confidence, and a stronger sense of self
- AAC animals are NOT Emotional support animals (ESA's) or Service Animals

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AAC Can Help With and Support:

- Anxiety and Anxiety Disorders
- Depression
- Trauma/PTSD
- Social Skills
- Self-Esteem
- Grief
- Neurodiversity (ADHD, ASD, etc.)
- Eating Disorders
- Self-Understanding & Exploration
- Overall Mental Wellbeing

DO YOU HAVE AN INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN ANIMAL-ASSISTED COUNSELING (AAC)?

- Follow this link to check your readiness/eligibility:
[ANIMAL-ASSISTED COUNSELING \(AAC\) READINESS](https://aac-academy.clas.txst.edu/potential-aac-teams.html)
- Other AAC Practitioners:
[AAC Practitioners - Animal-Assisted Counseling Academy](https://aac-academy.clas.txst.edu/potential-aac-teams.html)

If any of this resonates with you, or if you're curious about what it might be like to work with a certified AAC Team, we'd love to connect! Reach out to us—we're waiting, and we'd be honored to support you.

AAC Books

- *Comprehensive Guide to Credentialing Therapy Dog Teams* | Book by Elizabeth Kjellstrand Hartwig and John-Tyler Binfet
- *Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling* | Book by Cynthia Chandler
- *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy - Foundations and Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions* | Book by Aubrey H Fine
- *Animal-Assisted School Counseling* | Book by Elizabeth Kjellstrand Hartwig

References

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