

## Animal Assisted Therapy

By: Katie Rice, M.S.

### What is Animal-Assisted Therapy?

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a growing therapeutic approach where animals are incorporated into therapy with humans. Typically this is done with horses and dogs, but there are many other animals that are sometimes used (i.e., dolphins, farm animals, cats). AAT can take place in a variety of settings – like in a clinic, in a home, in a nursing facility, in a hospital, etc. – and can be conducted either individually or through group sessions.

AAT is performed by professionals or certified therapists who use documented goals and a specific treatment plan to address clients' needs. In order for an animal to be allowed to be used for AAT, both the animal and his/her trainer have to go through specific training. The process can take a long time and requires both completion of intensive training as well as a certain personality of the animal.

### What Can You Use AAT For?

The purpose of AAT is to help positively influence client's physical, social, or cognitive improvement. AAT can assist persons of all ages, including: children with behavioral disorders, individuals with

developmental disabilities, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, elderly people who have Alzheimer's or Dementia, residential program patients, rehabilitation in prisoners, patients with chronic illnesses, and individuals who may have difficulty socializing with others.

AAT can particularly be helpful for children in therapy, as sometimes children will feel more comfortable talking to a dog (or being able to talk sooner) than with a therapist alone. It can also help children feel more free to express their emotions. The animal can be a safe and helpful way to support children's emotional growth.

#### Uses:

- Socialization, relational training
  - Enhance trust, safety, and comfort in therapy
  - Modification of specific behaviors, and behavioral reward
  - Self-esteem building
  - Companionship, comfort, safety
  - Ease of emotional release, disclosure
  - Responsibility training
  - Relaxation
  - Physical rehabilitation
  - Increasing self-awareness, morale, life purpose
  - Inspiration, facilitating insight
  - Self control
  - Decrease levels of pain
  - Daily living activities
- ...Among many others!



### How do I Learn More?

The research supporting AAT is fairly new, with the majority of support occurring in the last 10 years. However, AAT has been used for a long time. The very first research studies on AAT were in the 1990s, but the very first use of animals in therapy was done as early as the 1940s. Currently, much of the research is focused on children using AAT, but the field continues to grow. If you are interested in learning more about AAT, you can do so at the following websites:

<http://www.eagala.org>

<http://www.americanhuman.org/interaction/programs/animal-assisted-therapy/>

<http://www.americanhumane.org/interaction/programs/animal-assisted-therapy/>

<http://www.petpartners.org>

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# Monthly Guidance

Dear MG,

I'm getting ready for the holiday season and am worried about some stress that always comes with family get-togethers. I love seeing everyone but I think I just need a few tips to reduce my stress and ensure I have a festive and enjoyable holiday season. Thanks for your continued guidance and support!

Sincerely,

Festive Friend

Dear FF,

What a wonderful topic to ask about! I think many people can relate to the excitement and stress that can come with the holiday season. For some families, individuals will be traveling from across town whereas other families may have members joining them

from across the country. Regardless of the distance between us, it is nice when our get-togethers are filled with love and support rather than stress and anxiety.

Some ways to help beat the stress of the holidays include:

- **Keep things in perspective.** Try to avoid blowing things out of proportion, whether the turkey got burnt, you can't afford to give gifts, or you need a little peace and quiet. Take the few moments that you need and a few breaths to keep it in perspective.
- **Remember to maintain relationships.** Sometimes it's easy to get wrapped up in family drama. Try to stay connected to close friends and other family who can support you and help alleviate that stress. Also, the holidays are a great time to reconnect with others who you may not have spoken with in awhile.

- **Take care of yourself.** Don't forget about your own needs this holiday season. Perform activities you and your family can enjoy together. Remember, keeping your mind and body healthy prepares you better to deal with stressful situations!

Monthly Guidance [MG] is here to answer questions about relationships and personal issues. If you would like to ask MG a question, you may call the Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic and leave an anonymous message for MG. Or, you may send your question in writing to the address on the back page of this newsletter. If you choose to ask MG a question, the identity of the person submitting the question will remain completely anonymous. Please keep in mind when writing your questions that space is limited. Due to time constraints, MG cannot answer all questions, but will try to choose questions that are representative of a broad range of issues. If your question does not get answered and you would like to discuss it, please call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047. Please be advised that MG is neither a crisis/emergency service nor a correspondence therapy service. If you need either immediate attention or ongoing therapy, call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047.

## Featured Youth Issue: Promoting Positive Qualities Through Pet Ownership

By: Rebecca Kinsey, M.A.

Deciding to get a family pet can be an exciting yet stressful time. Getting a new animal family member can be a great way to help children develop good qualities, especially if they are involved in care taking. It can also be a nice way for parents and children to work together to make sure the new furry friend is getting the proper care and love.

One way taking care of a pet can help children is by helping them understand another person's (or in this case, animal's) needs. Let's look more into what it would be like to take care of a dog. Children need to be aware their pet needs to go on walks to get exercise. Children also

need to know when it is time to feed their new dog and make sure it has plenty of water. This may help them realize this is another living and breathing family member that requires enough care and attention. As a result, children may learn the importance of taking care of someone else and the responsibility that goes along with that task. Another great benefit of taking care of a furry friend is that children could also learn what it is like to set a schedule. For instance, just knowing when to take their new family member for a walk and out to the bathroom are two very important daily tasks for all dog owners. Additionally, children will learn the importance of a regular feeding schedule and how it helps pets be healthy and strong.

With that in mind, all of these things can be quite a lot of responsibility for

children! It is important parents are also involved in the caretaking of a dog or other pet. Parents should especially help supervise the children to make sure they are giving the pet the attention he or she needs. This can be a great time for children to learn from their parents and work together. The more comfortable children begin to feel, the less the parent needs to supervise. As a result, this may help children feel like they are becoming more independent and capable of completing tasks.

Taking care of a pet can be a fun activity for families! However, it is important to make sure all family members understand their roles and responsibilities. We want to make sure our furry friends are being loved and cared for in the best way. For more information about adopting a pet, visit <https://www.akc.org/>

## Featured Mental Health Issue:

### Pets and Wellness

By: Alyssa Arnett, M.A.

For many, the loss of a pet is as painful as losing any loved one. Just because our friend was furry and walked on all fours does not mean the grieving process is any easier. Although our pet's lives may not be as long as a human's, pets have been with us throughout our childhood or seen us through difficult times. The connection we have with our beloved furry friends is meaningful, and we should allow ourselves to grieve the loss of this companionship.

Some people may feel "silly" if they become emotional when they lose a pet, or may feel that others do not support their grieving. If you feel that way, it can be beneficial to seek comfort from supportive friends who can help you move through the grieving process. The important thing to remember is that healing will come in various forms, and you and your family can decide together what form that will take for you.

Useful tips on coping with the grief of pet loss are provided by [helpguide.org](http://helpguide.org):

**Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't try to tell yourself how to feel.** Let yourself go through the grieving process. It is natural to be sad and expressing that sadness or loss looks very different for everyone.

**Reach out to others who have lost pets.** There are online message boards, pet loss hotlines, and pet loss support groups online.

**Rituals can help healing.** Funeral services can be very helpful with grieving, despite what others might say.

**Create a legacy.** There are a number of creative ways to create a memorial or personal memory token for your pet. Photo albums, a planted tree, or a backyard memorial are just a few of the ways this can be done.

**Look after yourself.** Try not to let the stress of losing a pet take you away



from taking care of yourself. If you know someone who has lost a pet, help them continue to take care of their self through this difficult time.

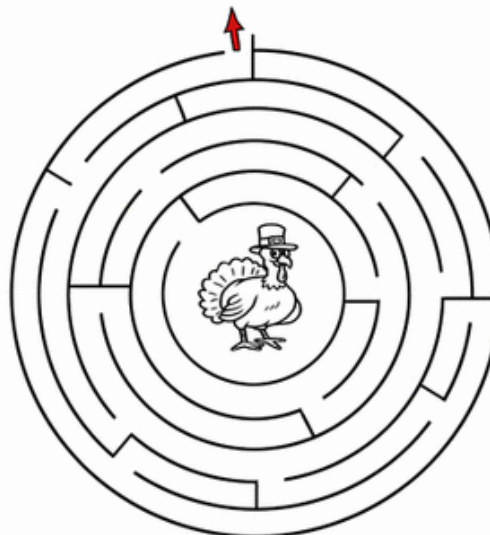
**If you have other pets, try to maintain your normal routine.** Pets may also experience distress or sadness when another pet dies. Maintaining their daily routines and making sure they are eating properly and getting enough food could help increase their outlook (and maybe even yours, too!)

If you think you may need help working through the loss of a pet, please contact the Ball State Practicum Clinic.

## Kids Corner: Autumn Maze!



Help this turkey to find the way out!



# Featured Profile

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## Frank Carr, M.A.

By: Lauren M Cunningham, M.S.

*This column is a way for the community to learn about the diverse talents, both master's and doctoral students, employed at Ball State's New Combined Clinic.*

Frank is currently a first-year doctoral student in the Department of Counseling Psychology. He is currently working in the Practicum Clinic but previously worked with veterans prior to returning to school. The following is a discussion with Frank, one of the many talented individuals employed at the Ball State University Combined Clinic.

### **How did you decide to pursue your PhD in Counseling Psychology?**

As I was pursuing a master's degree in counseling, I realized a PhD in counseling psychology would allow me to work in a more diverse environment. It would help me produce research, and to use a strength-based, developmental approach to mental health. I believe having such a diverse set of skills and a variety of job responsibilities prevents burnout and leads to higher job satisfaction. Because work is such an important part of our lives, I wanted a fulfilling, dynamic, and challenging career. A PhD in counseling psychology helps me achieve that goal.

### **What are your clinical interests?**

Psycho-social oncology, grief and loss, PTSD, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

### **Are you currently doing any research? (could you please describe past research too)**

I'm currently working on several projects! Currently, I'm completing a brief literature review of meaning making, help-seeking, and self-forgiveness among veterans with a colleague. We are also presenting our findings at a local conference in November. I am also investigating meaning-making following health-related traumas such as cancer and stroke. My objective is to better understand how survivors make sense of their experiences.

In the past, I have helped other researchers analyze how physicians in the VA system care for stroke patients. I've also done evaluation work on grant funded educational programs and have researched student athlete academic behavior.

### **What has been your most influential (or exciting, or enjoyable) work experience?**

My most influential work experience to date was working for a year at Cancer Support Community (CSC) in Indianapolis. CSC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help cancer patients and their families deal with the psychological effects of cancer. They provide a host of services including psychosocial support in the form of group and individual counseling.

### **Are there any populations that you especially enjoy working with in counseling?**

I enjoy working with adults who are dealing with adjustment issues related to physical health problems. I also enjoy working with veterans and military personnel.

### **What do you hope to do after you graduate?**

Eventually, I hope to teach and conduct research at a university. Before that, however, I would like to spend some time working in an integrated care facility alongside physicians, nurses, and other health professionals.



Frank Carr, doctoral student in the Department of Counseling Psychology

# Featured Wellness Issue

## Pets and Wellness

By: Alicia Brooks, M.A.

Did you know that owning a pet affects your health? It's no surprise pets can provide us with a sense of love and companionship, but new research is showing that owning pets can give us much more than that. Simply petting an animal can help lower blood pressure and heart rates! Think this effect only applies to creatures that are cute and cuddly, like cats and dogs? Think again! Research has demonstrated that looking at fish in a fish tank lowered stress levels. And good news for those of us who like to watch cat videos on YouTube - even seeing videos of animals can lower stress levels!



### Pets and Physical Health

Not only do pets relieve stress, they may actually prevent illness. Other research has found after just one month of owning a dog, owners experienced a decrease in the number of colds, hay fevers, dizziness, and headaches. Owning a pet may even decrease the likelihood of having heart problems, particularly if you are male. One study even found that those who owned a pet ended up visiting their doctor less often than those who did not own a pet.

### Pets and Mental Health

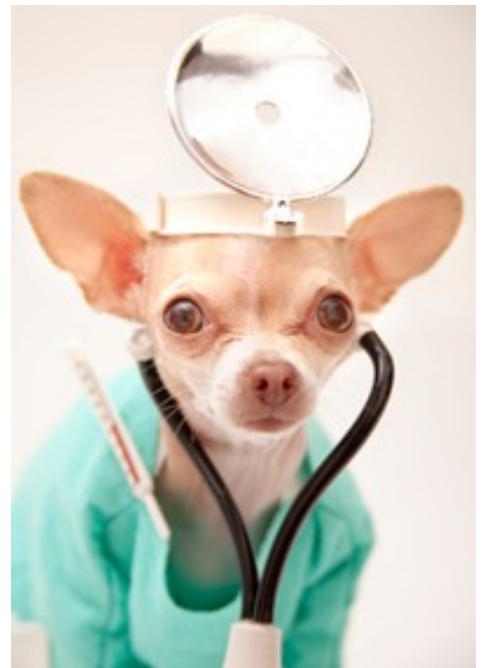
While the research on how pets can affect our physical health is just starting to come out, it has already been firmly established that pets have positive effects on mental health. One way pets can affect our mental health is that it creates more opportunities for social connections. For instance, one study found going for a walk with a dog increases the number of conversations someone has with strangers compared to when they go walking by themselves. Overall, pets can lower feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression as well as increase self-esteem.

Owning a pet is not always good for your health, though. Some studies show that there is an increase in falls and fractures in the elderly who own pets. It is also important to note that many people are allergic to pets and may end up having more health problems with a pet than without one! Moreover, some studies failed to make any conclusion as to whether or not owning pets was good for your health. So, if you decide to own a pet it is important to know both the positive and potentially negative sides to doing so.

Despite some arguments between researchers about the health effects of owning a pet, it is safe to say that there are several ways a pet can improve one's quality of life. Whether it is by helping us talk with strangers, providing a barrier against loneliness, or decreasing our stress levels, owning a pet can impact us in deep ways. Just remember to be aware of some of the concerns above,



like allergies and our own physical limitations. For many people, though, pets and animals can live long and healthy lives filled with support and love.



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# Mind Matters

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**Ball State University  
 Counseling Practicum Clinic**  
**Phone: (765) 285-8047**

**Teacher's College**  
**Intersection of Riverside and  
 McKinley Ave**

## Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic: Serving the Community Since 1969

**Mission**

- The clinic is a training and research facility for the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services.
- The clinic provides high-quality, low-cost psychological services to the Delaware County community and beyond.

**Service Providers**

- Over 50 graduate student counselors under the supervision of faculty.
- Faculty supervisors are licensed psychologists and counselors.

**Services Offered**

- Individual Counseling
- Couple Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Child/Adolescent Counseling
- Group Counseling with a focus on:
  - Parenting
  - Social skills
  - Anger control
  - Issues of concern to children and adolescents

**Hours of Operation**

- August-May (Spring & Fall)  
 9 AM to 9 PM M-Th  
 9 AM to 12 PM Fri
- May-August (Summer)  
 9 AM to 8 PM M-Th  
 Closed on Friday
- The clinic is closed during university vacations and holidays.

*All clients have the right to receive timely, competent counseling services consistent with the ethical principles and guidelines established by professional organizations. All counseling services provided at the Counseling Practicum Clinic are guided by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association, the American School Counseling Association, the American Rehab Counseling Association, the General Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services, and the Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Counseling Psychologists.*

**We're on the Web!**

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