How The Human-Animal Bond Heals
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What is the Human-Animal Bond? Well, that depends...
Permission was given verbally and in writing by the client's (their parents and or guardian's if they were underage) for their images, and participation in the video, be used in this presentation. The Horses and Dogs also gave their permission.

Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy (AAP)

AAP is a form of Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) or Animal-Assisted Counselling that places the relationship with the animal(s) at the heart of the change process. Rather than the traditional dyadic relationship, however, AAP involves at least a triadic, and often poly- and multi-directional relationships.
Why work with Animals?

• Pets have been shown to have a significant role in families (Boat 2010; Walsh 2009).
• They play a significant role in child and adolescent development, having an influence on the development of empathy, non-gendered care-giving skills, and attachment. Children bond quickly and closely to animals, and have a tendency to confide in them (CIAS 2004; Malon, 1992; Malon 1994; Melson & Fine, 2010; Menzies 2003).
• Many of the qualities of the Human-Animal Bond are in line with the qualities of Human-Human attachment (Green, Mathews & Foster 2009; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011)
• Biophilia and nature hypotheses – a genetic pre-disposition to be drawn to animals and nature (for mutual benefit)

Why bring an animal to therapy?

• Pets have been implicated in a myriad of health, social, behavioural and emotional benefits, and may have positive impacts on wellbeing and operate as psychological ‘assets’. Key areas of efficacy are;
  o Engagement, rapport & social lubricant effect
  o Physiological and health outcomes
  o Behavioural disorders
  o Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
  o Emotional wellbeing

How the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) heals: Neurobiology & the Oxytocin Hypothesis

Impact on Humans

- Reduction in stress physiology – Cortisol, BP
- Reduction in feelings of stress and anxiety
- Increases in ‘bonding’ & ‘affiliative’ responses including Oxytocin, Dopamine, Prolactin
- Autonomic down-regulation & co-regulation
- Bonding and the oxytocin hypothesis – opens up the relational space

Impact on Animals

- Dogs and horses may co-regulate with handler’s or owner’s cortisol
- Cortisol responses in dogs are mediated by a strong bond with their owner
- Dogs will produce oxytocin when bonding with their owner
- Dogs & horses have been known to display negative or stress-related behaviours in interactions with humans (e.g. AAT), but this is not always correlated with BP or Cortisol
- Freedom (e.g. no lead) and breaks improve dog’s stress responses to AAT
- Know your animal, know their behaviour

(Glenk, 2013; Haubenhofer & Kirchengast, 2006; Haubenhofer & Kirchengast, 2007; Odendaal, 2000; Schofer, et. al. 2012)
Animals as co-facilitators
Horses as co-therapists

- The power of the Herd (Hempfling, 1993)
- Embody Mindfulness (Vidrine, Owen-Smith, & Faulkner, 2002).

“There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.” — Winston Churchill
Animals as co-facilitators

Dogs as co-therapists

• Honest and open in their interactions (although NOT unconditional)
• Provide opportunities for touch and closeness
• Reflect interpersonal processes
• Live in the moment

Animals as co-facilitators

Dogs as co-therapists

• 8 year old girl ‘Mary’ from a background of family violence
• Questions (unsubstantiated) about sexual abuse
• Created a chasing game with large Therapy Dog, encouraging the dog to run behind her, right at her heels. After varying time periods she would turn suddenly and put her palm out towards the dog, yelling “stop!” The dog would stop as instructed, and Mary would laugh with surprise before beginning the game again. This continued every session for weeks, and ended at a time when Mary’s self efficacy and sense of control had improved significantly.
The meaningful inclusion of both horses and dogs into therapy. Broaden out the relational dynamics further to include multi-species – using the two most popularly used AAT animals Tails & Manes™

Case Study – Attachment Trauma

• ‘Jane’ 17yo female diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder in the context of significant childhood sexual, emotional and physical abuse
• Her behaviour was considered high risk (to self and others) and difficult to manage.
• Jane had a tendency to dissociate when distressed, and would typically become non-verbal
• Jane was able to manage a ‘rupture’ in the relationship with one of the Therapy Horses, aided by the support of the Therapy Dogs. With support, Jane ‘repaired’ the relationship with the Horse and was able to continue with therapy
Tails & Manes™
Therapy-Animal Welfare

- Balance the needs of the human client and respect for the Therapy Animals
- Follow best-practice guidelines for each species, for example 5 freedoms
- Thoroughly assess animals for temperament, training and behaviour
- Maintain physical and emotional wellbeing of animals and handlers, for example work-life balance
- Ensure species – specific and individual knowledge of each animal by their handler

References


References


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Questions?

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Special thanks to our Tails & Manes Equine Specialist
Tama Green