

What is Animal Assisted Therapy?

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is a form of experiential therapy that utilises certified therapy animals in a therapeutic setting. AAT is more than simply spending time with animals; it involves specific strategies, experiences and therapeutic goals. AAT can be conducted with both individuals and groups.

Riverina Regional Psychology Practice (RRPP) follows the [Delta Society Code of Ethics](#), and [Best Practice Guidelines](#).

RRPP's AAT program works within the [Animal Assisted Intervention International Standards of Practice](#).

RRPP strongly believes dogs benefit from consistent and clear positive reward-based training methods. We do not support aversive or punishment-based training methods or equipment.



Who can benefit from AAT?

AAT can be beneficial to patients across the lifespan. Patients with the following conditions may benefit from AAT, subject to individual screening for suitability to access AAT:

- Adults with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Children, teens and adults with autism
- Patients of all ages with anxiety
- Depression
- ADHD
- Communication disorders
- Emotional regulation disorders





Risks associated with AAT

While some risks in engaging in AAT are outlined below, it is not possible to foresee all possible problems that may arise during AAT. Potential risks may include:

1. Dogs often use their mouths to play. It is therefore possible that, when playing with the therapy dog, light biting may occur. For example, when the therapy dog is playing with a toy, it is possible that he may miss the toy and lightly bite your hand/fingers. ring AAT.
2. The therapy dog is an animal, which means he has his own natural defences. While RRPP will do everything possible to prevent injuries, it is possible that you may get scratched, bitten, or knocked over. RRPP will not be liable should such an event occur.
3. While the therapy dog has been screened by a veterinarian before commencing work as a therapy dog, dogs do sometimes carry Zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic disease transmission is the sharing of diseases between animals and humans. People with weakened immune systems, young children, pregnant women, or the elderly may be at increased risk of contracting diseases through their interaction with the therapy dog.
4. Dogs communicate through barking, body language and licking, meaning that the therapy dog may sometimes bark, lean up against you or lick you. This could possibly startle you, push you off balance, cause bruising or transfer germs and diseases. As this is the nature of dogs, RRPP will not be held liable if such an event occurs.

Conditions for accessing AAT

1. Participation in AAT is not guaranteed. The consulting psychologist, in consultation with the principal psychologist, will assess the patient and determine whether she/he is a good fit for AAT.
2. Any fear of dogs must be reported before the commencement of AAT so that proper precautionary measures can be taken.
3. Just as patients have individual rights, so too does the therapy dog. Therefore, the therapy dog is allowed to determine if and when he participates with the patient and he should never be forced into any patient interactions.
4. The therapy dog should always be handled and treated gently. He should never be hit, yelled at, have his tail or any other part of him pulled, be carried



or treated in any other way that may cause him discomfort or pain. In the event that such behaviours exist, the therapy dog will be immediately removed from the session and any future sessions planned with the therapy dog will be evaluated for their effectiveness and safety.

5. The therapy dog has his own safe space in the office where he can rest, eat, sleep, or just take a break. He should not be disturbed while in this area.
6. If at any time the therapy dog shows fear, distress or irritation during the session, the therapy dog will be removed and put in his safe space. The therapy dog should not be touched at this time.
7. If the therapy dog acts or responds in an unsafe manner, the patient is to move away from the therapy dog and the psychologist will remove the therapy dog from the room.
8. The therapy dog will always be with his handler/psychologist during the session and will never be left alone with the patient.

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