

---

Postgraduate Certificate in Animal Assisted Therapy

# Assessment and Evaluation in Animal Assisted Therapy

---

Assessment and Evaluation in Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) are crucial components in determining the effectiveness of interventions and measuring progress towards therapeutic goals. Here are some key terms and vocabulary related to AAT assessment and evaluation:

1. **Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)**: AAT is a therapeutic intervention that involves the use of animals as part of the treatment plan, facilitated by a licensed healthcare professional. The goal of AAT is to improve the physical, emotional, cognitive, or social functioning of clients.
2. **Assessment**: Assessment is the process of gathering information about a client's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and goals. In AAT, assessment may include evaluating the client's relationship with the animal, observing their behavior and interactions, and measuring their progress towards therapeutic goals.
3. **Evaluation**: Evaluation is the process of determining the effectiveness of an AAT intervention. This may involve comparing pre- and post-intervention measures, using standardized assessment tools, and obtaining feedback from clients and healthcare professionals.
4. **Standardized Assessment Tools**: Standardized assessment tools are objective measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of AAT interventions. These tools may include questionnaires, rating scales, or observational checklists.
5. **Observational Assessment**: Observational assessment is a type of assessment that involves observing the client's behavior and interactions during AAT sessions. This may include measuring the duration or frequency of specific behaviors, such as eye contact, verbalizations, or physical contact with the animal.
6. **Goal Setting**: Goal setting is the process of establishing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for AAT interventions. Goals may be related to physical, emotional, cognitive, or social functioning.
7. **Outcome Measures**: Outcome measures are quantitative or qualitative measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of AAT interventions. These may include changes in behavior, mood, or physiological functioning.
8. **Reliability**: Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of assessment tools or measures. High reliability means that the tool or measure produces similar results when used repeatedly or by different raters.
9. **Validity**: Validity refers to the accuracy or truthfulness of assessment tools or measures. High validity means that the tool or measure measures what it is intended to measure.
10. **Ethical Considerations**: Ethical considerations in AAT assessment and evaluation include informed consent, confidentiality, and avoiding harm to clients or animals.

Examples:

\* A therapist working with a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may use a standardized assessment

tool, such as the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS), to assess the child's social functioning before and after AAT sessions.

- \* A therapist working with a veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may observe the veteran's interactions with a therapy dog during AAT sessions, measuring the duration of eye contact or the number of positive statements made.

- \* A therapist working with a patient with chronic pain may set a SMART goal of increasing the patient's physical activity level by 20% over the course of 12 AAT sessions, using a pedometer to measure progress.

#### Practical Applications:

- \* Healthcare professionals can use assessment and evaluation to tailor AAT interventions to the individual needs and goals of clients.

- \* Standardized assessment tools can provide objective measures of progress and help to establish best practices in AAT.

- \* Observational assessment can provide valuable insights into the client's behavior and interactions during AAT sessions.

- \* Goal setting and outcome measures can help to track progress and evaluate the effectiveness of AAT interventions.

- \* Ethical considerations are essential to ensure the safety and well-being of clients and animals in AAT.

#### Challenges:

- \* Standardized assessment tools may not be specific to AAT, making it difficult to measure the unique contributions of animal interactions.

- \* Observational assessment can be time-consuming and may require specialized training.

- \* Goal setting and outcome measures may be influenced by external factors, such as the client's mood or environment.

- \* Ethical considerations require careful consideration and ongoing monitoring to ensure the safety and well-being of clients and animals in AAT.

In conclusion, assessment and evaluation are essential components of Animal Assisted Therapy.

Understanding key terms and vocabulary can help healthcare professionals to provide evidence-based interventions, track progress, and establish best practices in AAT. Ethical considerations are paramount to ensure the safety and well-being of clients and animals in AAT. Despite the challenges, the use of standardized assessment tools, observational assessment, goal setting, and outcome measures can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of AAT interventions.