Animal Assisted Therapy in Relation to Mentally, Physically, and Sexually Abused Children
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The purpose of this research project is to discover the effects of animal assisted therapy in regards to physically, mentally, and sexually abused children.

Animal assisted therapy (AAT) is the incorporation of pets as therapeutic agents into the counseling process. Using animals in therapy is a widely used practice. AAT is used in many different settings. Most commonly therapy animals are used in hospitals, nursing homes, and counselors’ offices. Therapy animals are a great instrument for a therapist to use with their clients. The therapy animal is referred to by Dr. Chandler as a co-therapist (2006). AAT has several benefits, uses, and goals. Research Topic

Some of the benefits of AAT that Dr. Cynthia Chandler and Darline Hunter discussed in their articles are increased client motivation to participate in therapy, and enhanced mood of the client. Having a therapy animal in the room reduces emotional pain. This allows them to be more comfortable opening up about difficult subjects. Pet therapy helps the child form strong emotional bonds and develops empathy. Children also learn how to give and receive appropriate affection when interacting with a therapy animal. Simply the presence of an animal in the room can form a trust building bond between the therapist and the client. Animals can also relieve tension and anxiety. Some children find it easier to talk to the animal while the therapist is listening. The unconditional love and acceptance of animals promotes a strong sense of connection and belonging for the child. Emotional connections the children form with the therapy animal carries onto other humans (Hunter, 2005; Chandler, 2006, 2001).

Therapy animals are frequently used in schools because dogs provide an unconditional acceptance from the time the student enters the room until they leave. Students often come to see the dog but they will stay to talk to the counselor. When the school counselor uses a therapy animal, students often make up excuses to see the counselor and therefore counselors are able to interact with more students (Chandler, 2001).

Therapy animals have been incorporated into individual, group, couple, or family therapy and are used in a wide range of age groups. Therapy animals have proven to be beneficial to agencies, hospital’s private practices, prisons, juvenile detention centers, and developmental disability faculties (Chandler, 2006).

The goals of animals assisted therapy are to improve social skills, brightness of moods, and experience pleasure and affection. Also AAT is intended to improve memory, reality orientation, self-worth and self-esteem. It can also improve cooperation, problem solving ability, concentration and attention to a task. AAT can decrease manipulative behavior, improve ability to express feelings and ability to trust, reduce anxiety, and children are able to learn responsibility by caring for these animals (Chandler, 2001, 2006). Some exercises that can be used to help the children would be teaching the animal something new, playing with the animal, learning how to proper care for animal, and learning information on the animals (Chandler, 2001, 2006).

Some exercises which can be used to help the children would be teaching the animal something new, playing with the animal, learning how to proper care for animal, and learning information on the breed and reciting it for someone else. Taking the animal on a supervised walk, receiving and giving appropriate affection, and discussing how the animal might feel in certain situations are other exercises therapists use with clients (Chandler, 2001). Animal assisted therapy has so many advantages and has real results when counseling children. There are so many ways to use AAT, and so many exercises that can really assist a therapist in the counseling process. Therapy animals are used in a variety of ways and places and they have a positive effect on people they encounter.

The articles are lacking information on abused children. There has been very little research done with AAT involving abused children. Learning the background is helping me to learn the basics of AAT and I will conduct my research on abused children since there is a lack of research in that specific topic.