



**Standards of Practice
for Animal Assisted Intervention:
Animal Assisted Therapy**



animal
assisted
intervention
international

These Standards of Practice are designed to help and encourage individuals, organisations, institutions and health and human service providers who are interested in or are implementing an animal assisted therapy (AAT) programme. These standards are a minimum of what is needed to conduct an AAT programme for Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII) members. All programmes are encouraged to work at levels above the minimum standards, and should also meet any standards or regulations that are required by governing bodies for their region, and their home organisation. It is expected that organisations that become members of AAII will adopt these standards, policies and procedures in addition to any existing organisational standards, policies, and procedures.

This document is used in conjunction with the *Standards for Health and Welfare of Dogs Working in a Range of Interventions and the General Standards of Practice for all interventions*. This document specifically refers to dogs. Please refer to Glossary of Terms for definitions.

An AAT programme intervention assumes the participation of four equally valued parties:

- The client – therapy beneficiary
- The dog handler – an individual who has training and experience in dog handling, training and behaviour
- Healthcare/therapy provider - in some cases, the healthcare/social service/therapy provider and the dog handler may be the same person; or they may be two separate people
- The therapy support dog

These standards are arranged in three parts covering:

1. Standards of practice for the professional healthcare/human service provider or dog handler
2. Standards of practice for the therapy support dog
3. General public issues

PREPARATION

Prior to any intervention, the dog handler must visit the facility and the people it serves without the dog. Specific AAT working areas, and emergency and evacuation plans must be created and documented prior to programme starting. A dog handler must have at least 40 hours contact with the dog involved, within 3 months of the planned intervention, to develop and maintain a working relationship with the dog.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

AAT sessions must be practiced within the ethical guidelines of the professional disciplines represented. The AAT therapy provider (individual who is conducting AAT program, or is named by the professional healthcare/human service provider) must have completed a college level course in a relevant discipline, or equivalent, in line with AAll Membership Requirements.

All information and documentation obtained and produced during the conduct of an AAT programme must remain confidential.

If a dog is being placed with a health/social service professional, the placement organization and recipient are expected to meet the training and welfare standards laid down by Assistance Dogs International (<http://www.assisteddogsinternational.org/Standards/>).

COMPETENCIES

Healthcare providers, who handle their own dogs must be able to provide documentation to show they have undertaken a minimum of 5 hours formal dog-specific continuing education every year.

MENTORING AND SUPERVISION

Dog handlers and healthcare/social service/therapy providers who are new to AAT must identify and collaborate with an experienced AAll mentor.

Dog handlers participating in any AAT interventions will work under the direction and supervision of the qualified healthcare/social service/therapy provider.

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation relating to the dog handler and the dog must be produced, updated and retained. This should include health and behaviour evaluations, summaries of the sessions undertaken, length of sessions, outcomes and any relevant incident reports.

The dog handler must make the health/social service provider aware of any dog-related health related issues so that appropriate precautions can be taken to protect the clients.

GOAL DIRECTED ACTIVITIES

The dog handler and healthcare/human service provider must ensure that the interventions are goal-specific and measurable. The activities may or may not include direct contact with the dog. The focus of any treatment must be on both the therapeutic process and the outcomes. This will include the setting up, planning, and organizing of the activity, as well as the completion of the task.

Standards of practice with the therapy support dog

TERMINATION OF SERVICES

AAT services must be discontinued if the intervention is no longer benefitting the client, there are any health concerns relating to humans or dogs, or there are any changes to the environment, dog handler, or population that are not conducive to the development of the dog's skills or well-being or that of the client.

General public issues

LIABILITY INSURANCE / LEGISLATION

Therapy professionals will obtain and maintain liability insurance as required by their professional associations and local and national laws. In no circumstances must they jeopardize the implementation of the service as a result of any violation of the law.