

## Book Review

### Animal Assisted Play Therapy

Rise Van Fleet & Tracie Faa-Thompson (2017)  
Professional Resource Press

Animal Assisted Play Therapy represents a collaborative effort by two noted practitioners in the field of Animal Assisted Interventions - Rise Van Fleet, Ph.D. a licensed psychologist and canine behavior consultant with over 45 years of experience and co-founder off the International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy and Tracie Faa -Thompson, MA a social worker with extensive experience in equine assisted interventions and is also co-founder of the International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy. There are two forewords in the text, written by noted authors Aubrey H. Fine and Patricia McConnell describing the importance of this watershed book.

This book is comprehensive and detailed and a must-read for practitioners of any form of animal assisted therapy. It is very well-written, organized and the authors do an excellent job of weaving together anecdotal evidence from their own extensive practice experiences with the current state-of-the literature in the field. The praise and reviews by many expert, well-known pioneers in the animal-human interaction field (included prior to the formal foreword) are testaments to the importance and quality of this effort.

The text is organized into four main sections: 1) Part 1: The Field of Animal Assisted Play Therapy (AAPT), which includes the evolution of the field itself along with definitions, theoretical principles and goals, with a special emphasis on relationships as a key cornerstone for the AAPT approach. 2) Part II: Preparation of

AAPT Work, which focuses on competencies required of both the therapists as well as the animals. Chapter 6 provides an overview of competencies and chapter 7 offers detailed examples of the need for species specific knowledge of ethology, behavior and body language. The authors note that often in AAT program photographs, animals are displaying signs of distress or disengagement. These signs are often overlooked due to the heavy emphasis on the human-centered viewpoint. Chapter 9 explores an often missing component of AAT work- the Therapist-Animal relationship. Ethics and welfare are stressed throughout this chapter as well as throughout the entire work itself. 3) Part III: Animal Assisted Play Therapy in Action, explores the foundational and theoretical aspects of the work with various client populations. It also includes the application of AAPT in directive and non-directive approaches in the development of empathy, attachment and relationship building, emotional regulation and problem solving. Chapter 14 is an excellent description on processing the AAPT experience. Chapter 15 on transitions and endings is critical - in particular the section on animal transitions- which is often left out and ignored in the literature. This section explores planned animal retirement as well as how to handle the complex grief associated with the death of a therapy animal. Section IV: Professional Issues, Ethics and Welfare, is very well-written and a welcome and much needed addition to the field in general (as this reviewer has noted in previous work). Matamonasa-Bennett (2015) found that in a

study of almost 100 EAT (Equine Assisted Therapies) practitioners, animal retirement and transitions were not areas of primary or even minor concern - due to the anthropocentric nature of current Western scientific thought. Faa-Thompson and Van Rise placed these issues front and center as ethical considerations for therapists, clients and most importantly, the animals who serve in therapeutic endeavors. Chapter 16, on Animal Welfare, is essential reading for practitioners - even those seasoned with years of experience. The authors use the 5 *Freedoms* (334) as a framework for ethical practice and address 'Blind Spots' (336) as well as the ways in which therapists are responsible for modeling empathy and ethical treatment of animals and others. They tackle specific health and training issues as well as addressing criterion for determining whether or not certain practices enhance and support the animal-human relationship. They explore the rather common practice of painting therapy animals to explore issues of whether or not an animal is enjoying rather than just tolerating an activity and also the dangers of any activity that might objectify an animal.

A number of works in animal assisted therapies rely on the use of anecdotes and stories as a means for supporting the power of the work (*see previous reviews in HAIB*). This has been a major criticism from outside

the field for obvious reasons. Other works have gone in the opposite direction detailing the empirical work that has been on-going over the last 2 decades. This work is a powerful blend of both approaches, offering practice examples with the current state of the literature. There are excellent resources offered within each chapter as well as a Resources Section at the end of the text. The authors are truly scholar-practitioners dedicated to the quality and rigor of this work from the most empathic, animal-centered perspective.

There are many strengths to this work and it is a must-read for students and practitioners in any area of animal assisted therapy interventions. The elements most appreciated by this reviewer, and critical to the advancement of the field from a professional and ethical perspective, is the consistent theme throughout the work that addresses the animal's point of view. "Perhaps the ultimate challenge in AAI is to develop the ability to see all situations from both the human and non-human animal point of view" (p 337). This work represents a major contribution to complex and multidisciplinary field of animal assisted interventions and is an excellent guide to the future of our field.

#### Reference

Matamonasa-Bennett, A. (2015). Putting the Horse before Descartes: Native American Paradigms and Ethics in Equine Assisted Therapies. *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*, 31(4).