Requirements

Excellence in Animal Assisted Interventions

The International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy® was developed to advance the development of Animal Assisted Play Therapy (AAPT) through training, supervision, standards, and credentialing. The mission is to ensure the highest quality of professional practice of this approach.

The IIAAPT supports the use of theoretically grounded and empirically supported methods. The welfare of human clients as well as nonhuman animal assistants is of critical importance, and the certification program described herein is designed to ensure that all participants benefit from involvement in this approach.

The certification program is rigorous and requires substantial work and dedication on the part of professional practitioners to achieve. The IIAAPT believes that stringent credentialing based on demonstrated competence is more meaningful as a statement of the professional’s commitment and achievement in the highest quality practice of AAPT with clients while preserving the humane treatment of the animals involved.

If you have any questions about this certification, please contact us:

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Animal Assisted Play Therapy™ (AAPT)

AAPT is a powerful and effective tool for mental health clinicians, educators, and allied health professionals to use to assist clients in achieving a wide range of individual, interpersonal, and family goals. The presence of an appropriately selected and trained animal can facilitate the relationship and working alliance between client and practitioner as they overcome problems and achieve therapeutic goals.

AAPT is the integrated involvement of animals in the context of play therapy, in which appropriately-trained therapists and animals engage with child, adult, and family clients primarily in play interventions aimed at improving the client's psychosocial health, while simultaneously ensuring the animal's well-being and voluntary engagement in the process. Play and playfulness are essential ingredients of the interactions and the relationship. (VanFleet, 2008, 2013, 2015).

AAPT is beneficial for psychotherapy and family therapy clients across the lifespan. The combination of nonhuman animal therapy partners with the therapeutic use of humor and playfulness creates a unique therapeutic environment that reduces stress and builds connections. This approach is applicable to a wide range of psychosocial challenges. The principles and methods used in AAPT can readily be applied to other forms of Animal-Assisted Interventions, such as in educational settings, medical settings, and for allied health professionals as well as other forms of counseling/psychotherapy. The lightness and use of play and humor can also be relevant to Animal-Assisted Activities and various visitation and reading programs.

Photographs in this manual depict workshop participants, not clients, and are used with permission.
Primary requirements include:

- Education, credentialing, and competence in play therapy and other forms of psychotherapy relevant to the client groups served
- Adherence to ethical standards of mental health practice (or the profession in which licensed)
- Work within one's scope of practice
- Adherence to AAPT guiding principles and humane guidelines
- Ability to select, conduct, and process therapeutic interventions in the service of client goals
- Ability to use humor and playfulness appropriately to facilitate therapeutic processes
- Knowledge of appropriate selection and socialization of animals
- Ability to carry out appropriate and positive training and preparation of animals
- Knowledge of two species' body language; competence in reading and responding to these communications in real time
- Ability to focus on the well-being of clients and the animal assistants at the same time
Certification Levels Available

Professional Level:
- Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapist
- Certified Professional Practitioner of Animal Assisted Play Therapy
- Certified AAPT Supervisor
- Certified AAPT Instructor

Paraprofessional Level:
- Certified Associate in Animal Assisted Play Therapy

Support Level:
- Certified Canine Support Specialist for AAPT
- Certified Equine Support Specialist for AAPT

The types of certification differ primarily in the academic and professional credentials held by the candidates. All of the professional and paraprofessional level certifications require the same core requirements, including the training courses, supervision, and successful completion of all areas of demonstrated competence. The support level certifications require AAPT specialty training and demonstrated competence in their areas of expertise, such as animal behavior, ethology, and relationship-focused training. The Supervisor and Instructor professional level certifications and all support level certifications are covered in separate documents.
Certification Based on Demonstrated Competence

This certification program, at all levels, is based on the demonstrated competence of the human handler. While therapy animals must be shown to be appropriate to the job, the responsibility is placed firmly on the human therapist to gain knowledge and real-time skill in all of the complexities of conducting AAPT. The International Institute for AAPT believes that certification based upon the designated competencies of the professionals involved is likely to be more stringent and lead to the type of working interaction between the human and animal therapy team that provides a model of healthy relationship for clients. This certification is designed to place utmost importance on the well-being of both the client and the animal. It is also designed to reduce risk to all involved.

There is strong emphasis placed on candidates learning to read and respond to the body language/communication of two different species (canine and equine, currently, although candidates working with other species will need to show understanding of that species as well). Learning about at least two species builds the skills more fully. This focus enhances the safety of sessions for all involved without unnecessarily restricting the activities that can be beneficial. This emphasis is considered of great importance to the model of collaboration and relationship that is provided for clients.
Animal Assisted Play Therapy™ Philosophy and Guiding Principles

For this document, the term "animals" will be used to refer to nonhuman animals.

Whenever nonhuman animals are asked to perform tasks under human direction, their welfare needs to be considered. Too many therapy animals are exposed to debilitating levels of emotional stress or exhaustion without any recognition by their owners (therapists/handlers), a state of affairs that disregards the animal’s welfare and presents a very poor model of caring to clients. Similarly, when therapists bring dogs into the playroom or take clients out to work with horses, they must think about additional factors that impact the client and the therapeutic process. To ensure the physical and emotional well-being of clients and animals as well as the therapy itself, the following principles have been developed (VanFleet, 2014; VanFleet & Faathompson, 2010).

**Respect.** To the greatest degree possible, AAPT ensures the equal and reciprocal respect of clients and animals. The needs of humans and nonhuman animals are considered equally important.

**Safety.** AAPT activities must be physically and emotionally safe for all involved. The therapist places a limit upon, or stops immediately, any activity that is not safe. The therapist maintains the safety of all participants in the session.

**Enjoyment.** AAPT sessions must be enjoyable and pleasant for the animal as well as the client. Clients or therapy animals always have the option of nonparticipation; i.e., they may opt out of any activities they wish. Tired or bored dogs can lie down. Children can choose to play without the dog. Client and animal decisions are respected within the boundaries of safety. The therapist facilitates the session to ensure its therapeutic value regardless of these choices.

**Acceptance.** In AAPT, the therapist accepts the clients and the animals for who they are. The therapist accepts and works with clients’ needs, feelings, and processes without pushing them in a different direction or at a faster pace (within accepted practice). Similarly, the therapist does not expect the animal to become something he or she is not. For example, AAPT dogs are not expected to become so docile or controlled that their individual personalities and interests
are suppressed or denied. While therapists need to assess and train their animals for good behavior and ability to tolerate diverse clients and activities, they do not over-train them to relinquish their essential species and individual natures. Similarly, animals' basic needs, such as food, water, or sleep, are not withheld for the sake of the therapy or training. Some dogs are more suited to nondirective play therapy while others are better candidates for directive or family play therapy approaches, and therapists consider this and act accordingly. The same principle of acceptance also applies to other species involved in play therapy.

**Training.** Therapists train their therapy animals using positive reward-, play-, and relationship-based methods. Aversive equipment or procedures, such as the use of whips, spurs, and bits; choke, prong, and shock collars; or the use of pressure or physical corrections of the animal, have no place in the training, the therapy sessions, or the lives of these animals. This principle serves the welfare of both animal and client.

**Relationship.** The AAPT process focuses on relationship, not control. Just as the animals are taught to behave politely and respectfully with clients, clients learn to treat the animals with tolerance and respect. The therapist helps clients, including children, learn to recognize and respond to the animal's feelings while developing a healthy relationship with the animal. All interactions with the animal follow the same principles for the development of humane, empathic, healthy human relationships. The essential playful nature of interactions during AAPT permits this to happen readily.

**Process.** AAPT is a process-oriented form of therapy. While sessions might focus on specific tasks or goals, such as teaching something new to the dog or horse or other animal, the process of getting there is considered of much greater importance than achieving any single outcome. The therapist knows how to facilitate and use the process to help clients overcome their difficulties or develop new skills. Unexpected events during interactions are woven into the texture of the session so that client and animal needs are met.

**Foundations.** AAPT is grounded in well-established theories and practices in terms of child development, clinical intervention, play therapy, family therapy, and humane animal treatment. Adherence to these foundations and the other AAPT principles is designed to ensure a positive, relationship-oriented, best-practices approach to each client and each animal involved in the therapeutic process.

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Certification Requirements: Professional & Paraprofessional Levels

- Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapist
- Certified Professional Practitioner of AAPT
- Certified Associate in AAPT

These 3 certifications differ only in the mental health requirements and the play therapy requirements. The AAPT training requirements, the supervised practice requirements, and the practical assessments are the same for all 3.

Certified Supervisors and Instructors must first become certified as an Animal Assisted Play Therapist or as a Professional Practitioner of AAPT. The additional requirements for these certifications are covered in a separate document.

MENTAL HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

[These apply for both of the professional-level Certifications: the Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapist and the Certified Professional Practitioner of AAPT.]

Master’s or doctoral degree
- in a mental health or education field, or in an allied health field
- from an accredited university program

License to practice
- mental health license to practice independently, or teaching certificate/credential, or allied health license or certification issued by the appropriate governmental agency
- under the jurisdiction of a licensing board or credentialing body that has the authority to revoke license for ethical or scope-of-practice violations

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For those in education or allied health professions, a significant background in mental health-related education must also be demonstrated.

Equivalents of these requirements will be considered where a country’s educational or licensing procedures differ, but an equivalence must be clearly demonstrated.

Those who do not meet the requirements in this section will be considered for the Certified Associate in AAPT credential.

Certification at one level can be upgraded to the next higher level when the requirements for that level are met and demonstrated.

**PLAY THERAPY REQUIREMENTS**

To become a Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapist, candidates must have one of the following play therapy credentials, current and in good standing:

- RPT or RPT-S with the Association for Play Therapy (U.S.)
- Qualified Play Therapist with the British Association of Play Therapists
- CPT with the Canadian Association of Child and Play Therapy

Those wishing to be certified as a Professional Practitioner of AAPT or as an Associate in AAPT, and who are not credentialed in play therapy, must have the following:

- Documentation of completion of specialized training requirements in essential play therapy theory and methods as determined on an individualized basis (depending on coursework, training programs, and other play therapy experiences; online courses are provided specifically for this requirement by the IIAAPT and/or its affiliates)

Equivalents will be considered, but the same level of training, supervision, and experience must be demonstrated.
All of the remaining requirements apply equally to the professional and paraprofessional level certifications (the 3 covered in this manual).

AAPT TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

In-Person Skills Building Courses (~60 hours)
- AAPT, Level 1: Theory, Research, & Practice
- AAPT, Level 2: Applications & Interventions

Each of these small, 4-day, in-person intensive courses focuses on hands-on skill development in all aspects of AAPT.

Online Courses (~50 hours)
- Introduction to AAPT
- Canine Communication in AAPT
- Equine Communication in AAPT
- Essentials of Canine Behavior & Training
- Ethical Considerations and Humane Treatment of Animals in AAPT

Candidates must successfully complete these 5 online courses by obtaining an 85% or higher on the written course assessment.

Each of these in-person and online courses are required of all candidates, even if they plan to specialize in just one species.
SUPERVISED PRACTICE

- Approximately 40-50 sessions of actual AAPT practice (~5-8 client cases)
- Minimum of 18 hours of supervision (case consultation) with at least 10 hours supervision of the candidate's own ongoing cases

Supervision or case consultation must be with a mental health supervisor qualified in AAPT (Certified AAPT Supervisor). Distance supervision is permitted, as long as actual observation of most client sessions is made via video review. Supervision provided any time after the AAPT Level 1 course may apply, although at least 30% should occur after the Level 2 in-person training.

Group supervision is permitted, but candidates and supervisors must track the number of hours of (a) actual supervision of the candidate’s cases and (b) observation of other candidates’ cases. Each candidate must meet the minimum requirement of 10 hours of supervision of his/her own cases, and a total of at least 18 hours overall. Supervision groups must have 6 or fewer supervisees. Distance supervision groups are recommended to have 4 supervisees.

Supervisors may require more than the hours specified to ensure that competencies are developed. At least half of the supervision hours must be completed with the same supervisor.

Supervision is conducted using a positive, skill-building process throughout. Supervisors provide a written report during the candidate’s application phase.
DEMONSTRATED COMPETENCIES: PRACTICAL ASSESSMENTS

Candidates participate in a series of practical assessments of their competencies, completed in-person and through video submissions. In-person segments will be provided during the Level 2 AAPT training or made available with individuals who are approved to administer them by the IIAAPT Certification Program.

Practical Assessments:

- Animal-Specific Evaluation
  -- Animal Appropriateness Scale© for each animal
  -- Evidence of specific trained behaviors for each animal
  -- Therapy Involvement Plan for each animal involved (therapist articulation of capabilities, limits, & appropriate work for each animal partner)
- Therapist ability to read and respond to animal body language in real time with two species (live)
- Therapist ability to teach new behaviors using positive, non-aversive training methods (live or video)
- Quality of therapist-animal relationship (Scale of Therapist-Animal Relationship Strengths©, STARS)
- Therapist ability to conduct Animal-Assisted Play Therapy (video, live role-play)
- Written case study (demonstrating several competencies, including ethics)
RENEWAL

Evidence of continuing education in AAPT and related topics will be required at specified intervals. Conferences, webinars, and online courses will be offered or approved to fulfill this requirement. AAPT certification will be revoked if any of the core requirements are negated, such as a license being deemed inactive, ethical complaints that are found to be valid, scope of practice violations, or violation of written agreements pertaining to the AAPT credential.

Individuals who qualify at one level and later meet the requirements for a higher level may upgrade to the appropriate level.
Candidate Checklist

Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapist (CAAPT)
Certified Professional Practitioner in Animal Assisted Play Therapy (CPP-AAPT)
Certified Associate in Animal Assisted Play Therapy (CAassoc-AAPT)

Name_________________________________________ Email__________________________

Application for
_____ CAAPT
_____ CPP-AAPT
_____ CAassoc-AAPT

Education & Licensing
(Check one -- CAAPT and CPP-AAPT only)
_____ Proof of master’s or doctoral degree in mental health or education field
_____ Proof of current mental health license to practice independently (or equivalent)
_____ Proof of education or allied health license/credential at the highest level

Attestation Letter (CAassoc-AAPT only)
_____ Signed attestation letter for restricted supervised use of AAPT

Signed Agreement
_____ Agreement to adhere to AAPT Philosophy and Principles
Play Therapy Requirement
(check one)
_____ Proof of current RPT or RPT-S (APT)
_____ Proof of current Qualified Play Therapist credential (BAPT)
_____ Proof of current Certified Play Therapist (CACPT)

or

_____ Documentation of specialized play therapy training requirements (certificates)
(for CPP-AAPT & CAssoc-AAPT candidates only)

In-Person Skills-Building Courses (certificates)
_____ Animal Assisted Play Therapy 1: Theory, Research, & Practice
_____ Animal Assisted Play Therapy 2: Building Relationship, Applications & Interventions

Online Course Completions (certificates)
_____ Introduction to Animal Assisted Play Therapy
_____ Canine Communication in AAPT
_____ Equine Communication in AAPT
_____ Essentials of Canine Behavior & Training
_____ Ethical Considerations and Humane Treatment of Animals in AAPT
Supervised Practice (forms)

_____ Documentation of Required AAPT Practice
_____ Supervisor Reference Form/s

Demonstrated Competencies:
Practical Assessments

_____ Animal-Specific Evaluation (for each animal)

_____ Animal Appropriateness Scale©: _____ Live _____ Video
_____ Demonstration of Animal’s Trained Behaviors
_____ Therapy Involvement Plan

_____ Ability to Read & Respond to Body Language in Real Time
_____ Dog _____ Horse _____ Cat _____ Other: __________________________

_____ Demonstration of Positive Animal Training Skills

_____ Assessment of the Therapist-Animal Relationship

_____ Scale of Therapist-Animal Relationship Strengths© (STARS)

_____ Demonstration of AAPT Skills:
_____ Video of AAPT Session _____ Live Role-Play

_____ Written Case Study (several competencies)
SUPPORTING MATERIALS
Practical Assessments
Three Components

The Animal-Specific Evaluation is designed to determine how well-suited the animal is to AAPT work. This part of the certification process must be completed for each individual animal who is involved in AAPT. When new animals are brought into service, the practitioner completes this segment of the process again. The Animal-Specific Evaluation should be completed 30 days prior to the animal's first formal session. Failure to do so may be grounds for revocation of the AAPT certification.

There are three components to the individual Animal-Specific Evaluation for certification:

(1) animal appropriateness
(2) trained behaviors
(3) therapy involvement plan

Each of these components is described below.
Component 1: Animal Appropriateness

This evaluation is of the animal's general personality and his/her suitability for AAPT. Animals who are fearful or anxious are generally not appropriate, nor are animals with poor self-regulation (e.g., are easily aroused and difficult to calm down). Animals with unresolved problem behaviors, such as aggression toward other animals or people, should not be involved in therapy work until their problems are resolved.

AAPT provides considerable latitude in terms of animal personality characteristics. Different therapeutic interventions provide opportunities for animals with different temperaments. AAPT uses a goodness-of-fit model to assure the best match-up between the animal's preferences and personality features and the requirements of the job, just as is done with job interviews for humans. Stable animals who enjoy the work are most suitable. Some broad features of AAPT animals are below. Some variation is permitted based upon the Therapy Involvement Plan.

- **sociable**—likes and readily approaches people of various ages
- **playful**—enjoys playful interactions or engaging with toys
- **interested/easily engaged**—curious; can easily become interested in people and activities and remain so for at least 5-10 minutes at a time; can switch to new activities as requested; has a diversity of interests; persists with tasks
- **tolerant**—accepts appropriate human closeness and touch without flinching or backing away; has high tolerance for unfamiliar or unpredictable situations
- **respectful of boundaries**—does not crowd people or other animals excessively; backs off when asked
- **patient**—is willing to wait or relax until clients wish to involve him/her
- **self-regulated**—does not startle or arouse easily; can calm self down quickly when aroused; does not have extreme reactions in any direction
- **cooperative**—is willing to do things that are asked, even if they are not naturally of interest
- **confident**—approaches people, tasks, and situations without significant hesitation, fear, aggression, or pushiness
- **healthy**—has only mild or no medical problems, pain, or sensory problems (such as sensitivity to sound) that might interfere with relaxed interactions with clients; properly vetted
- **energetic**—has sufficient energy to do the work, but not so much that he/she cannot relax or rest quietly when needed
• **learns easily**—enjoys the training process; shows interest in training sessions and learning new things; can learn from different people interchangeably

• **flexible**—adapts to different styles of interaction or training methods; can adjust when different people use slightly different cues or gestures

• **free of significant problem behaviors**—does not display behavior problems such as aggression, resource guarding with humans, fear, anxiety, reactivity to certain stimuli, and so on

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**AAPT Animal Appropriateness Scale: Live**

The evaluation of the animal's appropriateness can be conducted in several ways, and these are discussed during the in-person trainings. The live evaluation of appropriateness will be offered to most participants during the Level 2 AAPT training using the Animal Appropriateness Scale © (AAS). The AAS is described in more detail in another document.

Externally completed evaluations will also be considered, as long as they are based on live observations. Ideally, an AAS is completed by an appropriately trained professional who is an expert with the species being evaluated. Any independent evaluations or profiles are submitted with the other two components of the Animal Specific Evaluation at any time. In some cases, other evaluation tools conducted by people appropriately trained and credentialed in their use will be permitted (such as the CARAT). A brief report must be submitted that explains the assessment used and the evaluation of the dog. Assessments (such as the C-BARQ) that rely on questionnaires rather than direct observation by an objective and trained administrator are welcomed, but they may not necessarily supplant the need for the live AAS. **Pre-approval of external evaluators/evaluations is urged to ensure acceptability!**
**AAPT Animal Appropriateness Scale: Video**

Applicants will be asked to provide a video of the animal in several specified situations that permit evaluation with the Animal Appropriateness Scale ©. The results of this will be considered in conjunction with the other two components of the Animal-Specific Evaluation. If the animal is not deemed appropriate for therapy work, this feedback is provided to the candidate in detail.

Upon request, informal preliminary evaluations of the animal's appropriateness can be conducted for a small fee.
Component 2: Trained Behaviors

This section focuses primarily on dog behavior and training. Separate lists relating to equines (such as training for halters, saddles) or cats have to learn will be made available upon request, but are less extensive, given the nature of the species as well as the way they typically are involved in the therapeutic process. The purpose of this section of the process is to ensure well-behaved dogs who respond to the therapist readily. The following list details the prerequisite behaviors for dogs to attend the Level 2 AAPT training. These behaviors form the core expectations of the training and behavior expectations for certification.

- Sit
- Down
- Stay [stay in place for 2 minutes; stay while you walk a distance away (20 paces) for 1 minute; you may remain in sight during this]
- Come/Recall (returns to you when called)
- Sit upon greetings with people when asked; say hi politely
- Wait
- Loose leash walking (not necessarily heeling; walks by your side with the leash being loose - doesn't pull)
- Gets along with other dogs (doesn't growl, snap, lunge, or run away, tremble)
- Ability to be by him/herself - rest quietly in crate, car, or quiet area without you having to be present for at least two hours
- Place/Settle (you can ask the dog to lie on a rug or mat and he/she will settle in for a period of time)

Other behaviors that are considered important for dogs in AAPT work are as follows:

- Leave it - steers clear of any item when told
- Take it - picks up or takes an item into his/her mouth upon cue
- Drop it - immediately releases any item in his/her mouth; drops it to the floor
- Speak - vocalizes on cue
- Quiet - remains silent on cue
- Find it - looks for item/treats
- Emergency recall - immediately returns to you at any time
- Send away and/or send behind (the therapist)
- Stop - immediate stop to whatever he/she is doing
- Hand target/touch; targeting in general
- Look, watch me; auto-check-ins
Valuable behaviors in AAPT include the following general areas:

- Scent games
- Tricks
- Physical games (similar to agility—jumping through hoops, running through tunnels)
- Play - various ball games, disc, Treibball

**Demonstration of Animal’s Trained Behaviors**

This will be done on an individualized basis. Much of it can be accomplished during the Level 2 AAPT training course. Other training/behavior assessments, such as the CGC, CLASS, or one of the other therapy dog certifications (e.g., Pet Partners) are not required, but can be useful in determining where the dog is in the process.

If your dog is not present at the Level 2 AAPT training, we will make special arrangements with you to evaluate this area.

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**Component 3: Therapy Involvement Plan**

This portion of the Animal Specific Evaluation is completed by the candidate, drawing together the Animal Appropriateness Scale profile and the candidate's knowledge of the animal into a plan for how the animal will and will not be involved in AAPT and other therapy work. This is to be completed for *each* animal being involved, as well as any *new animals* who begin AAPT work. All ways in which the animal will be working or volunteering must be included.

Barring any obvious features that would rule out an animal’s involvement in AAPT, this section is evaluated based on the candidate’s knowledge and accurate understanding of the animal, as well as the candidate’s judgment in developing a working plan for that animal that keeps potential clients' and the animal's best interests in mind. The animal is not expected to be perfect. The therapist/handler must demonstrate a reasonable plan of action that adheres to
the principles and guidelines for AAPT as applied to each specific animal therapy assistant. In essence, you are providing the rationale for how this animal will be humanely employed.

The following 4 sections comprise the Therapy Involvement Plan (TIP).

1. General Description of the Individual Animal

Based upon the Animal Appropriateness Scale as well as your observations and experiences with this animal, please write a 1-2 paragraph description of your animal's personality. Please include your animal's natural interests and intrinsic motivations.

2. Animal Strengths

Describe your animal's strengths or attributes that lend themselves well to AAPT and other therapy work.

3. Areas of Concern

Describe potential areas of stress, weaknesses, areas of concern, and other considerations that might compromise your animal's therapy work or that might be potentially problematic for your animal or the therapeutic process. It is critical to be completely straightforward about this.

4. Therapy Involvement Plan

Considering all of the information gathered about your animal and your answers to items 1 through 3 above, please outline your plan for your animal's involvement in AAPT and/or other therapy or volunteer work. Please discuss the types of therapy activities, clients, or problems with which your animal will be involved. Please also discuss what you will be watching for when observing and participating in your sessions. Include other such factors as amount of time to be worked, options for downtime, how you will ensure your clients' and your animal's welfare, and any other factors that demonstrate your awareness of and responsiveness to your animal's unique personality and interests.

Final Note:
This portion of the certification process is completed for each individual animal who works with you in AAPT. The goal is to ensure that you involve only appropriate animals, and this is designed to protect the animals, your clients, and you. Not all animals are suitable for this work. Others are appropriate for limited use; still others are excited to be involved on a regular basis. As long as the animal is appropriate, we will work with you to ensure the best planning for the involvement of your animal in your work.
Observation of Body Language in Real Time - Two Species

The ability of the therapist to read therapy animals' body language is one of the most critical skills to ensure the safety and welfare of all involved in AAPT. Before candidates complete this live observational activity, they should successfully complete the online courses, *Canine Communication in AAPT* and *Equine Communication in AAPT*. These courses and continual awareness of one's own animals will increase one's ability to read body language as it is occurring. This skill entails knowledge of individual body language, reading the entire animal, and looking at the context from the animal's point of view. Having a clear understanding and ability to observe accurately in real time allows candidates to make better choices that are attuned with their animals' needs.

Even though many therapists work with just one animal species, learning to observe two different species enhances this skill considerably. Most therapists are trained observers of human behavior, so learning to apply these observational skills to dogs and horses builds upon this foundation. For therapists who work with still other species, such as cats, cows, pigs, birds, or goats, we believe that if candidates learn to watch body language accurately in dogs and horses, they will be much more aware and likely to apply those skills with other species. If a candidate submits an Animal-Specific Evaluation for other species, then arrangements will be made to include some assessment of a working knowledge of body language in that species as well.
Canine and Equine Observations

The evaluator will set up two separate observation scenarios, one with a dog and one with a horse. Each will last approximately 5 minutes. Candidates will make observations of the body language, intervene in situations that are stressful or potentially stressful for the animal, and then discuss their observations and interpretations with the evaluator at the end. The expectation is that candidates will recognize all major body language communications and develop an accurate interpretation of that body language by reading the whole animal, in context, and from the animal's point of view. The scenarios will be of a level of difficulty likely to be encountered during a therapy session. Additional scenarios might be used as needed to ensure enough of a sample to determine the candidate's ability to read and respond to the body language.
Demonstration of Positive Animal Training Skills

The Therapist's Ability to Use Positive Training Methods to Teach New Behaviors

One option in AAPT involves helping clients teach something new to an animal. This part of the certification process requires candidates to teach a new behavior to an animal. The animal can be their own therapy animal or one provided to them by the evaluator. While this part of the certification can sometimes be accomplished in conjunction with the Level 2 AAPT training, at times a video option might be used. If a video is approved, the program director will outline the specific things needed on the video.

The candidate will select from a list of potential new behaviors the one he/she wishes to teach.
Demonstration of Animal Training Skills

The list of potential behaviors for this demonstration will not be complicated, but they will require a knowledge of positive training, basic behavioral principles, and shaping or capturing, as covered in the online behavior and training course and the Level 2 AAPT in-person training. The candidate is permitted to change the training plan as needed to work effectively with his/her animal; i.e., if the first plan does not work well, the candidate may change to a different approach. The key is to keep the animal engaged in the process, make it fun, and find ways to communicate what is wanted to the animal. (Please note: In most cases, this process will involve teaching a dog or horse, but some options can be considered for other species.)

The training demonstration may or may not be carried to completion, but at least the first several steps will be performed. Following that, the candidate will explain the next steps planned. For videos, more time will be allotted and candidates will be asked to show portions of the entire training process.

The demonstration, live or video, will be examined in terms of the following criteria:
- the candidate keeps the process fun and the dog/animal engaged
- only positive methods are used without reliance on leashes, collars, and other equipment
- props used are appropriate for the dog/animal
- the pacing of the training is appropriate for the dog/animal
- the candidate uses basic behavior training principles effectively
- the candidate adjusts as needed to keep communication clear with the dog/animal
- the candidate is able to articulate what he/she is trying in terms of training principles and concepts

At the end of the training session/s, the candidate reflects on the process, mentioning the things that went well and things that might be done differently in another attempt (if any).
Assessment of the Quality of the Therapist-Animal Relationship

The relationship that exists between the therapist and the animal in Animal Assisted Play Therapy is of critical importance. It is through this relationship that the partnership for therapeutic practice is forged. The relationship influences and is influenced by the training that takes place, but it goes beyond that to encompass the entirety of the interactions that occur between the therapist and the animal. The AAPT Philosophy and Guiding Principles describe the type of relationship that is most beneficial to this work, and it is one based on mutual respect, empathy, acceptance, safety, cooperation, and playfulness. This relationship is extremely important as a model to clients of humane interactions with animals as well as a reflection of what clients can expect of their own relationship with the therapist.
Each therapist-animal relationship is unique, but there are certain features that suggest a pleasant, healthy, collaborative relationship. The Scale of Therapist-Animal Relationship Strengths© (STARS) is designed to assess these relationship features and to provide feedback to therapists so they can enhance their relationships with their animals to ensure the type of interactions that work best in AAPT.

This assessment is completed in order to provide feedback to the therapist of the strengths in the relationship as well as areas that might benefit from some work. The process is done in a collaborative manner.

The Scale of Therapist-Animal Relationship Strengths © (STARS)

The Scale of Therapist-Animal Relationship Strengths (STARS) was developed from the fields of relationship and family psychology and attachment theory. It has been modeled after the Family Play Observation used in Filial Therapy as well as other measures of healthy attachment relationships, incorporating information from numerous resources on animal ethology and behavior as well. Input from a large number of leading canine, equine, and mental health professionals was also included in its creation. All of this has been distilled and adapted for specific use in assessing the therapist-animal relationship.
The STARS is used to provide feedback to therapists about the relationships they have with their animal partners. It is based on a series of observations of interactions between the therapist and animal. It is not a pass-fail type of scale, but one that shows relative strengths and areas for improvement. Because there is a subjective component to it, the results are discussed by the person administering the STARS with the therapist. Therapist input is encouraged and taken into account as well. The discussion is designed to reinforce the relationship strengths and to pinpoint other areas for further attention and work.

The STARS will not be used to rule out therapist-animal teams except in the most extreme cases, i.e., those that violate the AAPT Philosophy and Guiding Principles in serious ways. In some cases, the therapist will be urged to continue work on certain relationship features, after which the STARS can be administered again.

Relationship Domains Included in STARS

Some key features to be observed, rated, and discussed include, but are not limited to, the following. The domains below are further operationalized for both therapist and animal behaviors in the STARS coding scheme. There is some overlap in the domains.

- **Partnership: Connection & Engagement** - how well the therapist and animal work together, attend to each other, are involved with each other, pay attention to each other; how well the therapist avoids compulsion or controlling methods of interaction; the degree of mutuality in the interactions
• **Empathy: Communication & Attunement** - how well the therapist communicates with the animal, conveys what is wanted; how well the animal makes his/her wishes or needs known; how clear and consistent the communication is; how congruent the therapist's communications are; how well the therapist recognizes and reacts to the animal's emotions; the degree to which the therapist can see the world from the animal's point of view; the therapist's empathy for the animal

• **Appreciation: Acceptance & Respect** - how well the therapist praises and shows appreciation in various ways to the animal; how well the therapist respects the animal's needs; how well the therapist accepts the animal for who he/she is; how well the animal respects the wishes, needs, and requests of the person; extent to which the therapist seeks to help the animal grow in ways that are true to the individual animal

• **Enjoyment: Time Together, Fun, & Mutual Interests** - the extent to which the therapist and animal spend time together; the degree to which they engage in activities that are of interest to both of them; their ability to play together and have fun together

• **Security: Secure Attachment, Structure, & Planning Ahead** - how well the therapist anticipates the needs of the animal and plans ahead; the degree to which the animal seeks security with the person; the ability of the animal to explore the environment and return to the therapist periodically or when asked; how well the therapist manages challenging situations; how well the therapist establishes boundaries as needed, the therapist's awareness of the environmental context

• **Nurturance: Emotional Safety, Affection, & Attention to Needs** - how well the therapist responds to stress reactions in the animal; how well the therapist looks after the animal; how well the therapist adjusts his/her own behavior based on feedback from the animal; the degree to which the therapist and animal express affection and caring

**How STARS Is Administered**

STARS involves observations of the therapist and the animal interacting in various ways. This may be done in-person or by video in some cases. General observations are made as the two interact naturally (as much as possible), and more specific observations are made as they complete some simple tasks.

After the STARS ratings are completed, the evaluator has a discussion with the therapist, sharing impressions, listening to therapist input, and highlighting the strengths in the relationship and suggesting ways to strengthen it further.
Demonstration of AAPT Skills

The demonstration of skills in applying Animal Assisted Play Therapy is critical in showing competence in the method. The demonstration of these skills shows the candidate's ability to involve the animal appropriately in a manner that is geared toward clients’ goals, as well as the ability to use humor and playfulness to create an emotionally safe atmosphere that allows clients to open up, express themselves, try new things, and solve problems. The demonstration also illustrates the candidate's ability to attend to and respond to the well-being of both the client/s and the animal.

Demonstration of AAPT skills is accomplished through a live role-played situation (usually with a dog) and a videotape of an actual AAPT session (dog or horse). In some special and rare cases, the certification program director may substitute an alternative method of demonstrating this competence. Non-clinical cases can be used when prearranged.

Video of AAPT Session (dog or horse)

Candidates will submit a videotape of one full AAPT session. This video should be approximately 20-30 minutes in length and be from a different case than the one used in the written case study or in supervision. The video should be audible and show the client/s, the animal assistant, and the human therapist as much as possible throughout. It may demonstrate the involvement of either a horse or a dog.
The candidate will provide a copy of the information release signed by the client or parent or legal guardian, or sign an attestation that this has been obtained.

The following information should be included with the video in *brief form* (just 1-2 pages):

- Case history, presenting problem, client/s depicted in the video
- Indication of which session this is for the client
- List of client's goals addressed in this session
- List of the intervention/s depicted on the video
- List of what went well, problems that arose, and any safety issues
- List of animal responses to the session
- List of possible future plans or interventions, based upon this session

The video will be reviewed for the following features:

- match between intervention and client goals
- developmental appropriateness of intervention
- use of humor, play, or playfulness to set a comfortable therapeutic tone for the client
- demonstration of therapist empathy
- therapist attentiveness and responsiveness to client needs
- therapist attentiveness and responsiveness to animal needs
- adherence to accepted psychotherapeutic practices and ethics
- therapist ability to recognize strengths and weaknesses, and ability to adapt in real time and for the future
Live Role-Play (dog, although possibly horse)

When possible, the live role-play will be conducted with the candidate's own dog or play therapy animal, but a different animal may be substituted as the situation dictates.

It is understood that candidates might have some anxiety about "performing" a role-play such as this, and effort will be made to create a comfortable atmosphere for the process. The intention is to hold a role play, allow the candidate to reflect on the experience, and for the evaluator to provide positive feedback as well as suggestions for improvement. The role-play is designed to assess candidate skills in AAPT while providing a useful learning experience.

The evaluator will provide the candidate with a brief case history on which the role-play will be based, at least an hour prior to the assessment. This permits the candidate to formulate an activity or intervention and gather needed materials, toys, and treats. The role-play will be chosen from several pre-determined "cases" that are straightforward, common problems at a reasonable level of challenge (neither simplistic nor highly complex).

The evaluator or a helper trained to assist in the role-play will play the role of the client, who will be of an age similar to that of the candidate's primary clientele. The candidate will conduct a 10-minute session with the "client," involving the dog in the intervention. The candidate will try to run the session as much as possible like a real-life session, making adjustments or changes as needed along the way depending on the client and animal responses.
At the end of the role-play, the evaluator will hold a brief discussion with the candidate about the session, using a supportive Filial Therapy-type debriefing that includes the following:

- candidate's thoughts about the intervention
- candidate's thoughts about what went well
- candidate's reflections about things that did not go so well
- candidate's observations about the dog during the role-play
- evaluator's feedback about things that went well and that could be altered or improved
- evaluator's observations of the dog during the role-play

If someone other than the certification program director serves as the evaluator for the role-play, he/she will then provide information about it to the program director (and videos of it may also be supplied) for final determination of completion of this requirement.
Case Study

A case study is required as one of the practical assessments for the AAPT Certification. To preserve client privacy, all identifying information must be changed, and composite cases are acceptable.

Case studies may describe work with an individual, a family, and/or a group of clients. An ongoing case is also acceptable, as long as there have been at least 4-5 sessions held. Ideally, the sessions should have been held on a regular basis, either weekly or biweekly, and concluded within a 6-month period.

This document outlines the format to be used for the case study, as well as the competence areas by which it will be evaluated.
Format
Case studies should be written in narrative form, typed in 12-point font, pages with 1-inch margins, with either 1.5 or 2.0 line spacing. They should range in length approximately 8 to 15 pages, but should not be greater than 15 pages. The page length range is intended as a general guideline, but you are requested to avoid going over 15.

The following subheadings are suggested for you to use in your case study. It is acceptable for you to add to them or alter them as the case requires.

- **Case information:** names (fictitious) of clients, age/s of child/ren involved, gender/s, other relevant information (adopted, foster child, etc.).

- **History:** presenting problem/s, observations, assessments used, diagnosis, medications, family members, summary of the history, summary of mental health treatment to date, including approximate number of sessions completed with you.

- **Treatment goals:** listing of current treatment goals.

- **Summary of treatment to date:** brief description of all treatment methods used, play therapy approaches incorporated, response to treatment, play themes, behavior changes in daily life for child/family.

- **Description of AAPT:** detailed description of rationale for using AAPT in the treatment of this client, how AAPT was incorporated into the treatment plan, explanation of goal areas addressed, methods used, animal behavior during AAPT, client response to AAPT.

- **Positive aspects of AAPT:** description of positive experiences, interactions, and/or outcomes for client using AAPT. Include why you think it was effective.

- **Challenges in the use of AAPT:** description of the problems or challenges faced in the use of AAPT with this client, how you addressed those challenges, how that worked.

- **Animal welfare or well-being issues:** situations that arose that had implications for animal welfare, how considerations for the animal's well-being impinged on the therapeutic process, how you responded to insure animal safety and well-being.

- **Countertransference issues:** description of any reactions you had to the case, and especially what it felt like to have your animal involved, how you felt about the child's interaction with the animal, positive and/or negative.

- **Ethical issues:** discussion of any ethical issues that arose during the case and how you handled them.
• **Summary**: how the case concluded, thoughts about the role that AAPT played within the overall treatment process.

• **Lessons learned**: what you learned from this case, things you might do differently next time, your own reflections and conclusions about the case.

• **Relevant references**: (optional) listing of any citations or materials that you referred to in the case study, resources from which you drew any specific interventions or methods.

### Assessment of Case Study

The case study will be evaluated in terms of the core competencies listed below.

Each of the following areas will be rated on a 3-point scale as follows:

1 = inadequate or needs significant improvement

2 = satisfactory; demonstrates full competence

3 = excellent; demonstrates competence at a high level

NA = not applicable for this case study

**Core competencies to be evaluated:**

- adherence to AAPT guiding principles
- appropriateness and relevance of interventions used for the stated client goals
- strength of rationale for using AAPT with this case
- use of humor, playfulness, and play-based methods in the AAPT portion of the case
- coordination of the various modalities included in the treatment plan
- awareness of problems, ethical concerns, welfare issues, and/or countertransference considerations in the case and appropriateness of action in terms of them
- awareness of animal behavior during AAPT
- responsiveness to client needs and reactions during AAPT
- ability to learn from the experience

### How the Case Study Ratings Are Used

Receiving ratings of 2 or above in all categories is considered satisfactory for the completion of this requirement. Ratings of 3 in any item are to be commended. Ratings of 2 will be discussed with candidates in order to formulate a professional development plan to continue skill development to the highest levels possible.
A rating of 1 in any competence area will be discussed with the candidate, and the candidate can submit an addendum to address it, if applicable. A rating of 1 in more than 1 area, or a significant problem in the case study (such as an ethical violation) will require a discussion with the candidate that seeks to help the individual learn and move forward through the process. If all other aspects of the application are satisfactory, a second case study will be required at that point. If there are other areas or significant issues needing further work, the candidate will work out a plan for further education or supervision—whatever is needed—to be completed before resubmitting an application.

We recognize that some subjectivity is involved in rating the case studies. A collaborative approach is used to clarify issues with the candidate. If someone other than the certification program director has reviewed a case study that raises questions, the program director will then review it for a final determination.
For More Information

Information about training programs, online courses, and this certification process can be found on the following websites:

www.iiaapt.org

www.risevanfleet.com offers a gateway to all the various sites pertaining to this certification.

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