Purpose

The purpose of the Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapy® Instructor (CAAPT-I) program is to designate highly skilled instructors who are qualified to offer the Level 1 AAPT training program for professionals wishing to become certified in AAPT as therapists. Individuals are qualified to teach the Level 1 course to groups of 10-18 qualified people. The instructor credential indicates specialized skill in conducting this highly complex workshop.

The CAAPT-I certification is based upon demonstrated competencies in the same array of areas as required for the Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapist and Supervisor credentials as well as the added areas of teaching complex information from several fields; responding to wide-ranging participant questions and concerns; setting, conducting, and debriefing activities; empowering trainees; demonstrating and assisting with the handling of dogs and horses to a high level of skill; and observing and understanding animal behavior and body language in real time and fluently. It also requires high level skill in recognizing and handling group dynamics and the myriad problems that can arise in a training program such as this involving multiple people and animals.

There are prerequisites for beginning the process of becoming an AAPT Instructor, as well as requirements designed to enhance skills and prepare the candidate for this level of work. It is essential that CAAPT-Is demonstrate strong fidelity to the AAPT model and are well-versed in all of the skills they help develop in Level 1 participants pursuing their own certifications in AAPT as therapists.

Instructors play an exceptionally important role in helping the individuals with whom they work as well as in advancing the AAPT field as a whole. The rest of this document describes the steps one takes to become a Certified AAPT Instructor.
The International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy® (IIAAPT) was created 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 at all levels, as well as fidelity to this relationship-based and welfare-focused model.

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 participants of all species benefit from involvement in this approach.

The instructor certification program is rigorous and requires substantial work and dedication on the part of professional practitioners, followed by continuing education. 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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Requirements

In general, people who are already certified by IIAAPT as therapists and supervisors and have shown themselves to be highly skilled in the many aspects of AAPT may be invited to start the Instructor track, although those who are interested can certainly make their interest in this known.

Prerequisites

The following are prerequisites to begin any part of the AAPT Instructor training process. Future instructors must have:

- An active professional license in good standing in a relevant mental health field.
- A supervision credential in their primary field (at the state or provincial level, or equivalent).
- A Certified Animal Assisted Play Therapist credential for at least 3 years and 300 hours of documented post-certification AAPT-specific experience (i.e., post CAAPT or CPP-AAPT).
- A Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor (or equivalent) credential (in the future this requirement will likely broaden, although play therapy requirements will still be in place).
- A Certified AAPT Supervisor credential in good standing for at least 2 years and at least 4 AAPT supervision groups completed, and/or the presence of specialized skills needed for the Level 1 instruction process.
- Advanced knowledge/credential/experience in applied animal behavior of dogs and horses. (This includes ethology, positive training, and behavior management for these species).

Requirements

The following requirements are part of the process for becoming an AAPT Instructor. They are listed in the usual order in which they occur, although some variation is possible. Instructors-in-training must:

- Read or reread the *Animal Assisted Play Therapy* book in its entirety. [VanFleet & Faa-Thompson, 2017, Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press]
- Read the manual, *Animal Assisted Play Therapy Instructor Manual*, offered by the International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy® (IIAAPT). (This is provided in advance of the in-person 5-day Instructor Training.)
- Take the 5-day in-person *AAPT Instructor Training* offered by the IIAAPT.
• Help with a Level 1 AAPT Workshop. This entails helping with at least one Level 1 training led by Risë VanFleet or Tracie Faa-Thompson (at the helper’s own expense) and minor presentation responsibilities. This may occur before or after the AAPT Instructor Training.

• Participate in the Level 1 AAPT Workshop as a coleader with Risë VanFleet or Tracie Faa-Thompson. This entails considerable responsibility during the workshop, and must be done after the candidate has completed the AAPT Instructor Training. The candidate’s economy-level travel expenses are covered by IIAAPT, within reason, but there is no further remuneration for this.

• Demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the primary areas listed in the Demonstrated Competencies section of this document.

• Following certification as an AAPT Instructor, the person signs and follows the AAPT Instructor Agreement.

• The Certified AAPT Instructor’s first offering of the Level 1 Training is completed with another Certified Instructor as a coleader.

• Following certification as an AAPT Instructor, the person agrees to obtain regular continuing education related to this role, as designated by IIAAPT. Suggestions of areas to pursue will be discussed during the final stages of initial certification based on competence areas and Instructor interest areas.

• Within 3-4 years of certification as an AAPT Instructor, the person will obtain a basic-level credential relating to training, handling, and animal behavior. The IIAAPT will provide a considerable list of such credentials and individuals who are approved for this purpose. It is possible that IIAAPT will also create a credential for this that will be easy to access and relate directly to the animal handling and behavior skills needed for AAPT, while enhancing Instructors’ recognition in the broader animal behavior and HAI field.
Demonstrated Competencies

The Certified AAPT Instructor credential represents a very high level of knowledge and skill in a wide range of competencies and fields. The competencies are demonstrated (a) during the in-person Instructor Training, (b) when the person serves as a workshop helper, (c) when the person functions more fully as a coleader, and (d) through videos of training work, as needed by the evaluator. The primary competencies, in addition to those demonstrated when becoming a Certified AAPT Therapist and Supervisor, are below.

- Thorough applied knowledge of AAPT
- Thorough applied knowledge of therapy principles, theories, and skills
- Thorough applied knowledge of play therapy
- Understanding of both ethology and animal behavior principles and practices for dogs and horses (and/or other species such as cats or goats)
- Fluency in observing and understanding body language in dogs and horses (and other species as needed); ability to distinguish between observations and interpretations
- Accurate knowledge about the species with which they work & those included in the Level 1 training
- Ability to work as a team with any needed animal behavior professionals (for species with which one is less familiar)
• Ability to handle dogs and horses capably, to conduct spontaneous demonstrations with workshop animals, even if they are not as familiar as one’s own animals
• Group leadership skills including but not limited to establishing safety and rapport, keeping group on track, handling common problems, ensuring full participation, discerning and intervening as needed in group dynamics, managing challenging individuals, adjusting to help meet the learning needs of all participants, demonstrating co-leadership skills
• Teaching skills to convey information in an effective and fun manner, ability to follow the PowerPoint and other course materials, attentiveness and responsiveness to participant questions or concerns, empathy and flexibility to maximize the learning environment
• Ability to complete multidimensional workshop tasks, stay on schedule (but with some flexibility), serve as timekeeper for starts and endings of each day, after breaks and lunchtime
• Ability to present a variety of video material and to discuss briefly afterward in a manner that maximizes what participants learn from it
• Ability to conduct experiential activities—giving clear instructions, observing and facilitating during them as needed, debriefing afterwards by first drawing out group impressions and then asking questions to highlight salient points
• Ability to conduct skill-building activities—giving clear instructions, observing and providing positive feedback in the moment, providing suggestions that will improve participant skill performance, debriefing per the AAPT model with the whole group at the end
• Ability to see patterns of interactions, “meta communications,” and read the body language of human workshop participants, and respond accordingly, appropriately, and empathically; ability to use limits as needed for the good of the entire group
• Basic business management skills, ability to plan and follow through; ability to respond to potential participants readily and effectively
• Strong professional ethics and animal welfare understanding and practices in real time
• Ability to carry out and report continuing education requirements
• Ability to render first aid in indoor and outdoor situations
Other Considerations

The Certified AAPT Instructor credential is based on demonstrated competence in all the areas needed to provide high quality training in AAPT, and specifically, the Level 1 course.

Certified AAPT Instructors will conduct workshop activities only for those species for which they are well-versed. In some cases, a Certified AAPT Instructor will need to pair with a properly credentialed animal professional. This depends on the scope of practice the Instructor has with regard to relevant species, animal behavior, body language, training, and so on. In these cases, the Instructor will be responsible for the overall training and activities, but will invite the animal professional to observe and comment upon animal behaviors, stress signals, and interpretations during that session. They will serve as an interdisciplinary team working within each of their boundaries of practice/designated competencies. Instructors work with IIAAPT to identify appropriate animal specialists for this role to ensure that the values and principles of AAPT are preserved throughout the workshop.

Questions that arise in the training courses that cannot be answered easily should be directed to AAPT leadership (VanFleet & Faa-Thompson). As the field expands, this process will be detailed further, but at present, these are the two individuals to whom an Instructor turns for confirmation, suggestions, review.

Instructors will immediately inform the AAPT leadership of unresolved problems that arise in their Level 1 training programs, such as ethical concerns, conflict, resistance to Instructor input, and the like.
As with all aspects of AAPT training, supervision, and professional development, questions and challenges are to be handled in an empathic, empowering manner while ensuring that workshop participants adhere to AAPT principles and ethics of practice, as outlined in the AAPT book as well as online courses developed and provided by IIAAPT.

Instructors will be expected, via the *IIAAPT Policies & Procedures*, to engage in regular continuing education relating to their roles and the content of the Level 1 training. Their work will be reviewed based on participant evaluations, observations, self-reflection, and meetings with Risë and Tracie, all handled in an empowering and user-friendly manner with the goal of continuous improvement.

Questions of any kind about this process should be directed to Dr. Risë VanFleet or Tracie Faa-Thompson, co-founders of the field of AAPT. Their contact information is on the next page.

For More Information

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

www.iiiaapt.org

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

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