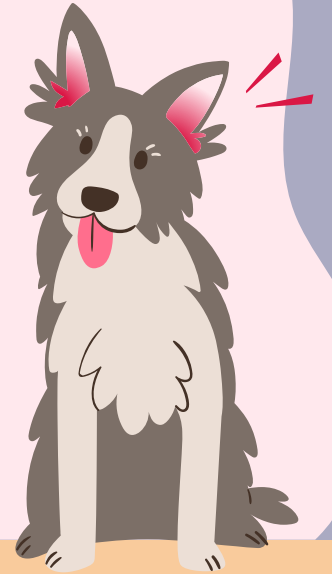


Emotional Support Animals And Its Contributions To Person-Centered Therapy

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What Are Emotional Support Animals?

Animals that offer an emotional connection to their owner

Provide emotional support and comfort

Help their owner deal with challenges that may impact their quality of life

Individuals still receive accommodations
Ex: Fair Housing Act - individuals cannot be discriminated against when

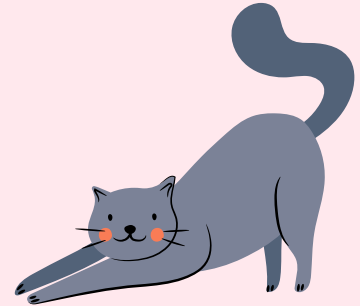
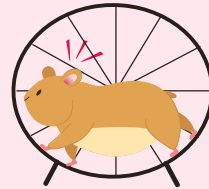
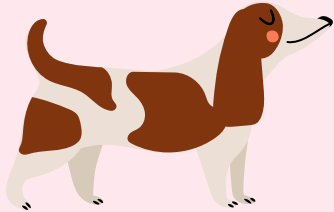
deposits are waived
seeking housing; pet bans and restrictions are waived; pet



Which Animals Can Be ESAs?

Dogs
Cats
Ferrets
Snakes
Rabbits
Horses
Pigs
Hedgehogs

-> All domesticated animals <-



How Can An Animal Be An ESA?

Animal needs to be prescribed by a licensed mental health professional

Ex: Therapist, Psychologist,
Psychiatrist

Must be determined that the presence of the animal is needed for the mental well-being of the individual

Ex: Having animal lessens their
Anxiety





What's The Difference?

Emotional Support Animals

- Provide support and emotional comfort through companionship
- Do not receive the same accommodations compared to service animals (*Confirm with local govt agencies if ESAs can access public areas where you live)
- Does not receive specific training to perform tasks

Service Animals

- Allowed in public areas
- Are individually trained to perform tasks pertaining to individual's condition



Therapy Animals

- Provides therapeutic contact in a clinical setting
- Improves physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning



Perceptions of Assistance Animals

- There is widespread misconceptions about definitions, rules, regulations, and rights related to all kinds of assistance animals
 - Service animals are more likely to be perceived to help with a “legitimate” need
 - Access to public spaces is favored towards service animals
 - There is concern regarding the legitimacy and necessary access rights for ESAs
 - The roles and rights of therapy animals are generally understood
- Media outlets focus on the false representation of ESA, service animals, and therapy animals



Assistance Animals ~ Foster Care

- Foster children with disabilities are a protected class under the Fair Housing Act
 - Ex: If a child currently has a service animal or ESA, the foster care system must attempt to find a placement that can accommodate disability-related needs.
- It is counterintuitive to remove children from their pets, or not provide an assistance animal to ensure a child's wellbeing
 - Dependency Process
- Idea For Further Consideration
 - Inclusion of assistance animals in foster care health assessment, forensic interviewing process, and placement decision
 - Within context of rights in Fair Housing Act



Core Conditions Of Person-Centered Therapy



Congruence

- Animals can provide individuals a moment away from the stressors of direct human exchange
- Even though most individuals know that animals cannot comprehend what is being said to them verbally...
- People have the feeling of being **heard** and **understood** in the presence of animals



Empathic Understanding

- Individuals consider assistance animals as **neutral** and **non-judgmental** beings in a therapeutic environment
- Environments like a counseling office, classroom, or medical office can invite stressors...
- ESA can provide a **calming** interaction for the individual engaging in an environment that is stressful or nerve-wracking for them



Unconditional Positive Regard

- ESA (or assistance animals in general!) **support** individuals on a social/emotional level
- Animals are active and **willing** participants
- Animals **do not verbally criticize or judge** the individual's progress



How Can Someone Apply This Information To Person-Centered Therapy?



Congruence

- Maintain **genuineness** with the client and their ESA
- **Match** the client's experience
- **Allow** the client to discuss about their ESA when they're **ready** to do so
- Stay **present** in the moment with the client (try not to get distracted with their ESA)



Empathic Understanding

- Continue to grow the **therapeutic relationship** through empathic reflections
- Do not make attempts to minimize the client's experience about their ESA
- Feel **With** > Feel For
- If needed, ask Qs regarding ESAs to the client for better **understanding** (make attempts to **learn** and be **informed**)



Unconditional Positive Regard

- **Recognize** your own personal biases regarding assistance animals (or animals in general)
- Have **respect** and **support** for the client and their ESA
- You don't have to like the ESA, but you can find ways to **acknowledge** personal biases and **redirect** back to the core conditions (Ex: supervision)



References

[Everything You Need to Know About Emotional Support Animals – American Kennel Club \(akc.org\)](#)

[Which Kinds Of Animals Can Be An Emotional Support Animal? \(emotionalpetsupport.com\)](#)

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