

The Effect of Incorporating Animal Assisted Interventions with Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

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Abstract : This study explored the role animal-assisted psychotherapy (AAP) can play in treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) when incorporated into Trauma-informed cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT). A review of the literature was performed to show how incorporating AAP could benefit TF-CBT since this treatment model often presents difficulties, such as client motivation and avoidance of the exposure element of the intervention. In addition, the fluidity of treatment goals during complex trauma cases was explored, as this issue arose in the case study. This study follows the course of treatment of a 12-year-old female presenting with symptoms of PTSD. Treatment consisted of traditional components of the TF-CBT model, with the added elements of AAP to address typical treatment obstacles in TF-CBT. A registered therapy dog worked with the subject in all sessions throughout her treatment. The therapy dog was incorporated into components such as relaxation and coping techniques, narrative therapy techniques, and psychoeducation on the cognitive triangle. Throughout the study, the client's situation and clinical needs required the therapist to switch goals to focus on current safety and stability. The therapy dog provided support and neurophysiological benefits to the client through AAP during this shift in treatment. The client was assessed quantitatively using the Child PTSD Symptom Scale Self Report for DSM-5 (CPSS-SR-5) before and after therapy and qualitatively through a feedback form given after treatment. The participant showed improvement in CPSS-SR-V scores, and she reported that the incorporation of the therapy animal improved her therapy. The results of this study show how the use of AAP provided the client a solid, consistent relationship with the therapy dog that supported her through processing various types of traumas. Implications of the results of treatment and for future research are discussed.

Keywords : animal-assisted therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, PTSD in children, trauma treatment

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