

## **Bearded Dragons as Therapeutic Animals: A Case Study of Autism and a Bearded Dragon**

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**Abstract :** Assisted Therapy (AAT) is the usage of animals as a therapeutic method; it is the planned integration of animals into a treatment plan. Animal-assisted therapy has been practiced for many years and can be a practical intervention for individuals or groups. Animal Assisted Therapy has been used with humans in the western world for decades, treating children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Animal's therapeutic potential was first identified in the 1800s, through observations and surveys conducted by psychiatric institutions, by using small animals that helped reduce anxiety in patients. Animal assistive therapy focus mainly on "mainstream" animals; such as: dogs, cats, bunnies, Guinee pigs, parrots and horses. This paper will explore reptiles in general - as therapeutic animals and bearded dragons in particular. It will show how one particular bearded dragon managed to assist in reducing stress levels in a young boy with autism, how we managed to control anxiety attacks accompanied by hyperventilation, undesirable vocal bursts, extreme violent outrages integrated with personal endangerment. By understating how to correlate the suitable animal to a person's needs at a given time; we can assist a larger and more diverse of humans.

**Keywords :** animal assisted therapy, autism, anxiety, reptiles, bearded dragons

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