



**\* CODE OF ETHICS  
THE ISRAELI ASSOCIATION OF  
ANIMAL-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY**

**TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

1. One will be considered an Animal-Assisted Psychotherapist if one has fulfilled the requirements of professional academic and field training according to the requirements determined by the Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy, and in the future according to requirements determined through the recognition of a governmental body.
2. The AAP therapist is expected to be aware of his/her responsibilities and obligations.
3. The AAP therapist is expected to maintain a high professional level and to keep updated with professional developments and new ideas – both in the areas of mental health and of animals.
4. The AAP therapist is expected to act fairly and respectfully towards clients and also towards other professionals, to cooperate with them for the good of the client, to not libel or discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race or religion.
5. The AAP therapist is expected to be acquainted with the various animals with which (s)he works (the animal's life style, needs, abilities and limitations) in the therapy context, and to be considerate of the animal's needs, and to be aware that (s)he is responsible for the animal's welfare.
6. The AAP therapist is expected to be aware of the unique characteristics of this type of therapy:
  - a. The animal's vitality is a factor that initiates events that create and influence the therapy dynamics.
  - b. The live animal's presence in the session creates various therapeutic connections with various characteristics
    - therapist ⇔ client
    - therapist ⇔ animal
    - client ⇔ animal
    - animal ⇔ animal
    - therapist ⇔ client ⇔ animal

*\* This document was written by the Committee for the Creation of a Professional Code of Ethics for Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy in preparation for the establishment of the IAAAP. The committee was chaired by Tamar Axelrod.*

- c. The animal may intensify experiences, emotions, senses.
  - d. The animal may invite touch and make it legitimate.
  - e. The animal may in many instances facilitate, invite, catalyze creation of emotional connection.
  - f. The animal may arouse preoccupation with primary needs: nourishment, love, nurturing, containing, holding.
  - g. The animal may serve as an aid in the development of empathy and concern for others.
  - h. The animal may serve as an aid in distinguishing between self and others, and the establishing of a self-identity.
  - i. Animals may facilitate regressive and playful expression.
  - j. Animals may represent for the client his/her drive-related characteristics (aggression, sexuality).
  - k. Animals may serve as an object for projection.
  - l. Animals may facilitate experiences of control, capability, success and achievement.
  - m. Animals may facilitate reparative experiences that compensate for negative experiences and deprivations from the past.
  - n. Animals may serve as a factor in the mobilization of ego strength (self-control, self-restraint, self-regulation, functioning).
7. The AAP therapist must obey the Code of Ethics of the professional association and the regulations of the Ethics Committee.
8. The AAP therapist must obey the national laws related to work in the field of mental health, welfare and education as well as in the field of animal welfare law and its derivations.
9. The AAP therapist must maintain professional contact, for the purpose of supervision, consultation and evaluation, with professionals in the areas of mental health, welfare, education, veterinary science, and animal behavior, according to the framework and population with which one works.
10. The AAP therapist must evaluate, give therapy and supervises only in the area of his/her expertise and according to his/her training and experience in the area of AAT.
11. The AAP therapist must make known to the client (or to the client's guardian) at the time of acquaintance his/her training, skills, professional rank, expertise and experience.
12. The AAP therapist must properly document the therapy process, and be ready to write a professional report on the therapy when required. The report must be adapted in order to be suited to the particular destination of the report (family, educational institution, other therapy professionals). In special cases (such as in the abuse of animals or people or in other dangerous situations), the reporting will be done with in consultation with other professionals appropriate to the situation, and special discretion will be used in order to safeguard the secrecy of the report.

13. Private work:

- a. It is forbidden for the AAP therapist employed by a public institution to work privately within said institution and/or with the same clients, unless one has received special permission to do so from the institution.
- b. The AAP therapist must wait one year between doing therapy with a client within said institution and continuing therapy with that same client privately, unless it is done as part of a special agreement that condones the immediate continuation of the therapy.

14. The AAP therapist must be aware of situations which require the cessation of therapy or the transferring of the client to different psychotherapist in the case of personal limitations.

15. The AAP therapist must know how to terminate the therapy relationship at the appropriate time in a fitting manner and to aid in the transfer of the client to another psychotherapist if needed.

16. The AAP therapist is subject to the authorization and the limitations of the Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy according to his/her therapy training, specialization and experience.

17. The AAP therapist is obligated to work under supervision and guidance according to the requirements of the Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy and according to the accepted regulations of the therapist's place of employment.

18. The AAP therapist that has had the proper training and is interested in giving supervision is obligated to fulfill the conditions, including receiving supervision on one's work as supervisor, according to the regulations of the Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy.

19. Supervisor and educator:

- a. A supervisor or educator must abstain from taking advantage of his/her influential status over his/her intern or supervisee.
- b. A supervisor must abstain from a therapeutic connection with his/her intern or supervisee, unless there is a contract or agreement the otherwise on the part of both sides.
- c. An educator is forbidden to form a therapeutic connection with his/her student or intern.
- d. A supervisor or educator must abstain from creating a therapeutic connection with a client of his/her intern or supervisee without the agreement of all concerned.
- e. A supervisor or educator must be aware of the possible difficulties of creating a therapeutic connection with a client of a past intern or supervisee.

20. The AAP therapist that is also a supervisor or educator is obligated to nurture the professional development of his/her interns and supervisees over time. (S)he must stand as a personal example in the areas of ethics, scholarliness, professional level, and interpersonal attitude in a way that shows respect towards the profession as well as towards his/her clients.

21. The AAP therapist must be sure to, to the best of his/her ability, explain the essence of his/her profession to the public and to professional organizations in Israel and abroad, as well as to do one's best to promote and advance the profession and the Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy.

## RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS CLIENTS

22. The AAP therapist must act in the best interest of the client and use therapy interventions that are appropriate for the client's needs. The therapist must match the framework of therapy, as well as the therapy contract, to the client, through mutual understanding between the therapist and the client.

23. The AAP therapist must define the therapy contract with the client during the intake with the client: therapy conditions, mutual responsibility, meeting schedule, information concerning therapeutic work with animals, information concerning immunity and legal obligation to report abuse to the proper authorities.

24. The AAP therapist must take into account the medical, psychiatric, neurological and/or psychological state of the client during the therapy process.

25. The AAP therapist must abstain from taking advantage of his/her influential status over the client.

26. It is forbidden for the AAP therapist to do therapy with someone with whom (s)he had family/friendship/economic ties. It is forbidden for the AAP therapist to do therapy with a student for at least two years after the completion of the student's course of studies.

27. The AAP therapist must take care of the emotional welfare of the client while in the presence of animals:

- a. It is forbidden to bring together the animal with the client against the client's will, other than in special cases in which the therapy demands such according to the therapy contract and there is an agreement with the client ahead of time.
- b. It is forbidden to obligate the client against his/her will to touch the animal, other than in special cases in which the therapy demands such according to the therapy contract and there is an agreement with the client ahead of time.
- c. Enough space should be provided within the therapy setting to allow for both the client and animal enough space to be comfortable while allowing the client the option of keeping the distance (s)he desires from the animal.
- d. Throughout the meeting between the client and the animal, the AAP therapist must be aware of every change or process relating to the condition of the client in relation to the animal.

28. The AAP therapist must worry about the physical welfare of the client while in the presence of animals:

- a. Before the first meeting with the client in the presence of the animals:
  1. It must be verified that the client does not have any allergies or sensitivities to any animals, or to any specific animals, or to their secretions or to their food.
  2. It is advisable to draft a form to assess the medical condition of the client, to be filled in and signed together with the doctor. In the case that there are special risks, one must try to obtain written medical permission for the therapy.
  3. In the case of special sensitivities/allergies/immunological issues/cancer/Aids or any other condition in which the client is physically sensitive or vulnerable (including sensitivities to medicine), one must seek a doctor's advice and obtain medical permission according to the risk involved.

4. In the case that it is not possible to obtain written medical permission, one must inform the client (or guardian) of the risks, and have him/her sign a form giving informed consent for the therapy, or alternatively to consider refusing to do therapy.
  5. When the need arises (e.g. riding therapy, dolphin therapy), one must check the client's general medical condition and physical fitness specifically in terms of the field of therapy, and to obtain medical permission relevant to the client's condition and to the risks involved.
- b. Throughout the therapy:
1. One must stay aware of and check out any signs of allergies or sensitivities to any animals, or to their secretions or to their food.
  2. One must not allow the client to do anything that might constitute for him/her possible danger or harm by the animal or by any accompanying accessories, without warning ahead of time of expected dangers (e.g. poking fingers between the bars of the animal's cage, lifting cages).
  3. One must not expose the client to an animal with a zoonotic disease.
  4. One must not allow the client to touch or get close to an aggressive animal or one that is not used to contact with humans.
  5. One must not expose the client to an animal with whom (s)he is unacquainted, to avoid injury (physically or emotionally) towards the client, therapist, animal, group, or the surroundings.
  6. In the case that the client is injured by the animal, one must act according to the regulations of the Health Ministry. In addition, one must act according to the following:
    - a. give the appropriate basic first aid
    - b. report to the person responsible for the client (when relevant) – parent, teacher, director of institution, etc.)
    - c. refer the client to a doctor to check for the need for tetanus shot and/or other treatment
    - d. isolate of the animal as ruled by law
    - e. in each case of a client's injury caused by an animal, one must file a report and inform the authorities according to law relevant to the type of injury.
  - c. It is forbidden to allow the client to injure an animal. In the case that the client injures or kills an animal, one must act on two levels: according to the regulations of the Health Ministry, and concerning the client according to the situation that occurred.
29. The AAP therapist must make sure that the therapeutic area, the resources and the methods are appropriate for the client and his/her specific needs:
- a. One must avoid exposing the client to dangers in the environment (therapy room, zoo, gardens, open area, etc.) without proper guidance and supervision.
  - b. The therapist must match the environment of the therapy to the needs and limitations (physical, emotional, cognitive) of the client.
  - c. The therapist must be especially aware of any possible changes throughout the therapy. The therapist must react immediately and appropriately to any change.

30. The therapist must show professional judgment in choosing the appropriate animal for the client:
- a. according to the therapy goals;
  - b. according to the client's age, developmental stage, motor capabilities, and emotional and cognitive sensitivities;
  - c. according to the therapy environment.

### **MULTICULTURAL ASPECTS**

31. The AAP therapist must readily accept the complexity and the diversity of his/her clients and of their opinions towards assisting them in therapy.

32. The AAP therapist will not force his/her beliefs about the animals, or his/her manner of working with the animals, onto the client.

33. The AAP therapist should make an effort to acquaint him/herself, as much as possible, with a variety of cultures, traditions, religions, belief systems, values and ecological and geographical environments in order to be able to help a wide variety of clients, through an understanding of their motivations and behaviors during therapy.

34. The AAP therapist must be aware of his/her own beliefs, opinions and prejudices, as well as of the clients' beliefs, opinions and prejudices, before (s)he commences therapy. In addition, one must be aware of their implications on the therapy process and on the dynamics between the therapist and his/her clients and the animals present in therapy.

35. The AAP therapist must be acquainted with the cultural characteristics and symbolism associated with the animals as a therapy tool, and as a source for communication that is not language-dependent.

### **CLOSENESS, SEXUALITY, TOUCH AND INTIMACY**

36. The framework of AAP creates closeness and intimacy – physical and emotional – between the therapist and the client, between the client and him/herself, between the client and the animals, and among the animals. Likewise, activity with the animals (who are, by their very existence, alive and driven by their instincts) is related to a great extent to basic drives and physical closeness. Since this subject is especially sensitive in AAP, the therapist is required to pay attention to this in supervision.

37. The therapist must know how to discern between expressions of sexuality and a close relationship, touch (physical or emotional) and intimacy within the therapy triangle (therapist-client-animal), which are meaningful for the client's personal development, for the therapy process and for the therapy connection. In addition, the therapist must discern between positive close relationships, touch and intimacy on the one hand, and erotic relations and the abuse of close relationships on the other hand, which constitute a grave ethical violation.

38. In the case that unnecessary touch occurred within therapy, the therapist must be sure to bring the subject to supervision and work it through, and later do the same with the client.

39. Coming face-to-face in therapy with animals, which are intrinsically alive and driven by their instincts, brings up in a very tangible way various content (parenthood, birth, nursing, sexuality, mating, violence, etc.) that are likely to bring up difficulties for certain clients. The therapist must be aware of this and make sure that no damage is caused to the client.

40. In reference to touch:

- a. The presence of an animal in therapy invites closeness and awakens feelings of primary needs in the client. One of them is the need for touch.
  1. Closeness by definition is proximity, being located next to someone or something.
  2. Touch by definition is physical contact, the bringing close of a hand or other body part to someone or something.
- b. The therapist must be aware of and differentiate between situations in which
  - 1) the good of the client demands closeness and contact, while exercising caution and keeping limits, and
  - 2) situations in which closeness and touch are not needed.
- c. In the field of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy there exist various situations that demand minimal contact between the therapist and the client, between the therapist and the animals, between the client and the animals, between clients, and between the various animals. The therapist must be aware of such and must inform the client (and when needed, those responsible for the client) ahead of time and define this in the therapy contract. The therapist must pass judgment in the following situations:
  - the handing of the animal over from therapist to client and between the clients;
  - the therapist instilling in the client various skills needed in working with animals, such as: correcting holding, patting, grooming, caring for a wounded animal, etc. (by the therapist or by clients);
  - the therapist helping clients who have difficulty touching animals (due to motor disabilities, discomfort, etc.);
  - the therapist physically separating the animal from the client in times of distress or danger of either one (in situations of sudden fear or physical harm);
  - the therapist physically calming the client due to an emotionally distressing incident with the animal (as in the case of death, sickness, bites, scratches, etc.);
  - the therapist giving first aid to the client due to being wounded by an animal;
  - the therapist preventing the fall of an animal while the animal is resting on the client;
  - the therapist preventing the client from stumbling or falling while in the zoo or trying to get to an animal (the area of the zoo contains cages of various sizes, stairs, railings, barriers, fences, etc.);
  - touch is likely between those present in the zoo when the client is interested in getting close to a cage or a certain animal in an especially crowded area;
  - a therapeutic intervention involving touch is likely for therapy or rehabilitation purposes, according to the therapist's ethical judgment.

- d. Within the framework of AAP, the therapist must allow the client to choose the type of touch and proximity to the animal with whom (s)he feels comfortable.
  - e. The therapist must allow enough room in the therapy setting for the client and animals to move around, in such a way that neither the client nor the animal will feel threatened.
  - f. The therapist must allow the client to decide to which animals (s)he wants to be exposed.
  - g. The therapist must avoid forcing the client to touch an animal.
  - h. The therapist must be aware of and avoid touch that may hurt the client or the animal.
  - i. The therapist must avoid allowing touch with or proximity to an animal that is potentially harmful or that is not used to humans.
  - j. The therapist must avoid exposing the client to animals with which the therapist is not acquainted, so as to prevent injury (physical or emotional) to the client, the therapist, the animal or the surroundings.
41. In reference to sexuality between the therapist and the client:
- a. The therapist is forbidden to be involved in a sexual relationship with a client and/or supervisee.
  - b. The therapist is forbidden to be involved in erotic activity with a client and/or supervisee.
  - c. The therapist is forbidden to undress in the presence of a client and/or supervisee.
  - d. The therapist is forbidden to allow the client to undress for the purpose of self-exposure.
  - e. The therapist is forbidden to have a sexual relationship with a former client after the conclusion of therapy.
  - f. The therapist should take care to avoid the legitimizing of inappropriate closeness as a result of misinterpretation due to the need for closeness by the therapist, by the client, or by both.
42. In reference to sexual content that arises in therapy:
- a. The therapist must be aware of the power of animals and of the fact that they bring up in a very concrete way sexual content that is likely to be problematic for certain client.
  - b. The therapist must apply judgment, in each case, according to the condition of the client, as to whether to allow the client's presence during events and experiences of a sexual nature.
43. In reference to intimacy:
- a. Intimacy by definition is closeness, family, friendship, camaraderie
  - b. The therapist must be aware that the presence of animals may fundamentally influence the development of intimacy and beware of its consequences.
  - c. The therapist must be aware of and differentiate between 1) the strength of positive motivation related to intimacy that is due to the three-way therapy relationship and interactions of therapist/client/animal, and 2) the misuse of intimacy that may cause confusion and blurring of limits.