Texas State University Animal-Assisted Counseling Academy Alignment with AAT-C Competencies

AAT-C Competencies: Stewart, L. A., Chang, C. Y., Parker, L. K., & Grubbs, N. (2016). Animal-assisted therapy in counseling competencies. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, Animal-Assisted Therapy in Mental Health Interest Network. Retrieved from
https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/animal-assisted-therapy-competencies-june-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=c469472c_14

AAT-C Competencies	AAC Academy Training Alignment	How Competencies are Assessed
KNOWLEDGE		
1. Formal AATC training. Providers of AATC are expected to acquire AATC-specific training, assessment, and supervision, including:		
Successful completion of formal evaluative course work, to include: ○ Evaluation of animal knowledge, including: • Knowledge of how animals are incorporated in therapeutic settings • Ability to work effectively as a team with a therapy animal ○ Evaluation of AATC knowledge, including: • AATC professional identity • History of AATC • Literature and evidence-based practice of AATC	Intro to AAC	Intro to AAC Discussion Questions, What is AAC Discussion/Forum Assignment
Knowledge of AATC-specific counseling techniques and principles, including implications for specific presenting concerns and client populations	Intermediate Methods in AAC	Intermediate Methods in AAC Discussion Questions
Understanding of the relevant aspects of the human–animal bond, including: • Physiological and neurological impact of human–animal interaction • Awareness that human–animal interaction can elicit unexpected vulnerability and disclosure in others • Impact of the human–animal bond on the therapeutic process, including advantages, limitations, and contraindications	Intro to AAC	Intro to AAC Discussion Questions, What is AAC Discussion/Forum Assignment
Participation in supervised professional practice, including: ○ Applied experience under the supervision of an appropriately qualified AATC provider to supplement didactic knowledge ○ Feedback and assessment of AATC skills by a supervisor	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment
2. In-depth animal knowledge. Providers of AATC are knowledgeable about their therapy animal on an individual, breed, and species level, including:		
Adequate, species-specific ethological knowledge about the selected therapy animal(s), including: ○ Physiology, behavior, and history ○ Care and husbandry	Intro to AAC	Intro to AAC Discussion Questions, What is AAC Discussion/Forum Assignment

o Understandings that knowledge about one particular species is not necessarily generalizable to other species o Limitations on the utility of using animals and selecting specific animals in client situations		
Knowledge of the importance of animal training techniques, including: o Ability to apply positive, noncoercive training methods o Ability to ensure that the animal is trained for the counseling environments and situations in which it is working o Ability to detect and, as necessary, arrange to facilitate the animal's socialization, desensitization, and comfort	Intro to AAC	Tough Love Discussion/Forum Assignment
Establishment and maintenance of a strong working relationship with the therapy animal(s), to include: o Knowledge of triggers to stress o Ability to educate others about the animal's triggers o Ability to recognize and apply effective calming interventions to a stressed therapy animal	Intro to AAC & Practicum in AAC	Canine Communication Worksheet, AAC Skills Assessment
3. Knowledge of existing ethical requirements. Providers of AATC demonstrate integrated ethics. Thus, competent providers of AATC are aware of AATC-specific ethical considerations and are able to incorporate AATC practice within the ACA Code of Ethics, with actions that include:		
Ability to recognize and discuss the ethical implications of AATC, including: o Assessing the suitability and amenability of each client to this type of counseling o Informing clients of the purpose of AATC o Discussing and addressing potential safety issues o Maintaining respect for the animal(s), the client(s), and the therapeutic process o Being aware of the provider's personal biases, including the impact of the provider's emotional bond with the animal and its impact on the therapeutic process	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment, AAC Informed Consent
Ability to understand the social and cultural factors relevant to AATC and multicultural implications of AATC, including: o Respecting the attitudes of others, particularly those concerned with the animal's presence o Understanding that human–animal interaction may hold different meanings across a variety of cultures	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment

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Ability to maximize the potential for safe interactions between clients and animals, including: ○ Infection prevention/control and consideration of other zoonotic agents ○ Considerations for allergies, phobias, past history of animal abuse, and past history of animal-related trauma	Intro to AAC & Intermediate Methods in AAC	Ensuring Safety in AAC Quiz, AAC Informed Consent
Effective risk-management strategies and skills, including: ○ Knowledge of liability issues related to AATC ○ Knowledge of legal issues associated with AATC ○ Inclusion of appropriate documentation procedures ○ Confirmation of personal and professional insurance coverage for AATC	Intro to AAC, Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	Ensuring Safety in AAC Quiz, AAC Informed Consent
SKILLS	**SKILLS**	
1. Mastery of basic counseling skills. Competent providers of AATC demonstrate competency in general counseling skills prior to integrating AATC interventions. AATC is practiced only within the boundaries of a provider's professional scope of practice.		
Counselors are expected to effectively integrate AATC into their personal model of counseling.	Practicum in AAC	AAC Skills Assessment, AAC Treatment Plan
Counselors are expected to demonstrate counseling effectiveness without the integration of a therapy animal	Practicum in AAC	AAC Skills Assessment
Counselors are expected to recognize that AATC is used to enhance the therapeutic process rather than as a stand-alone intervention	Practicum in AAC	AAC Skills Assessment
2. Intentionality. Competent providers of AATC demonstrate intentional incorporation of AATC into the counseling relationship, plan, and process. Providers are able to demonstrate:		
Knowledge that AATC is a skillful intervention and that AATC is: ○ More than owning/loving animals ○ More than simply including an animal in the counseling setting	Intro to AAC	What is AAC Discussion/Forum Assignment
Knowledge and integration of theory-based interventions, including: ○ Ability to articulate the role of AATC within a provider's personal theoretical approach or personal model of counseling ○ Understanding of the goals of AATC interventions ○ Awareness of the validity of the AATC interventions being used	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment, AAC Treatment Plan
Skillful selections and assessment of AATC intervention strategies, including: ○ Selection of appropriate interventions and strategies for each client, in each session, based on treatment goals ○ Ability to assess the outcome of AATC interventions	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment, AAC Treatment Plan

3. Specialized skill set. Competent providers of AATC recognize that AATC is a specialty area with a learned and practiced skill set. Competent AATC providers demonstrate specialized skills and abilities that are appropriate to the specialty area of AATC, including:		
Ability to understand the experiential nature of AATC interventions and demonstrate skill in spontaneous situations	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment
Ability to attend to/care for the client(s) and therapy animal(s) simultaneously by demonstrating: ○ Effective judgment when assessing the session's impact on the therapy animal(s) ○ Effective judgment when assessing the session's impact on the client(s) ○ Effective judgment when assessing the session's impact on volunteers/assistants/paraprofessionals (if applicable)	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment, AAC Session Transcript
Ability to assess, interpret, and utilize the animal's responses in a therapeutically meaningful way, including: ○ Ability to link animal–client interactions to client behaviors, goals, or conceptualization ○ Willingness to allow natural client–animal interactions to occur ○ Ability to link unexpected events or interactions to client goals or presenting concerns ○ Ability to model appropriate, respectful, and empathetic animal care	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Skills Assessment, AAC Session Transcript, AAC Treatment Plan
Ability to prevent and respond to animal stress, fatigue, and burnout ○ Ability to immediately address unexpected animal stress and proactively plan stress-relief and stress prevention ○ strategies for the animal(s) ○ Ability to identify and respond to the animal's signals and body language, especially when the animal ○ does not want to interact ○ Ability to provide for the animal's needs, both at the site and in general, including: 　■ Attending to the animal's access to water, a quiet rest/retreat area, and regular bathroom breaks 　■ Attending to the animal's overall wellness through appropriate provision of quality nutrition, exercise, grooming, and veterinary care	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Team Evaluation, AAC Skills Assessment, AAC Session Transcript

Ability to objectively assess an animal's suitability, strengths, and limitations despite the provider's potential emotional bond with or personal bias toward the animal
  ○ Ability to identify and address personal biases toward the therapy animal(s), including:
      ▪ Awareness of transference/countertransference considerations related to AATC interventions
      ▪ Objective assessment of an animal's suitability for AATC in general
      ▪ Objective assessment of an animal's suitability for each AATC session on an individual basis
  ○ Ability to identify and address personal biases toward AATC interventions in general
	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Team Evaluation

Ability to attain and maintain compliance with applicable legal requirements for registration, care, and inoculation of the animals used for AATC	Intermediate Methods in AAC, Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Certification & Recertification
ATTITUDES	**ATTITUDES**	
1. Animal advocacy. Competent providers of AATC prioritize their responsibility to animals involved in AATC and demonstrate that they are effective animal advocates by:		

Understanding that the animal(s) involved in AATC is (are) the provider's responsibility, including:
  ○ Understanding how and why animal welfare and advocacy directly affect client safety
  ○ Understanding how and why animal welfare and advocacy are essential to the ethical practice of AATC
	Intro to AAC	Animal Welfare Discussion/Forum Assignment, Temple Grandin Movie Worksheet

Respecting animal rights and animal welfare, including:
  ○ Recognizing that animals have a right to choose their level of participation in AATC
  ○ Recognizing the potential for animal exploitation, either accidentally or intentionally
	Intro to AAC	Ensuring Safety in AAC Quiz, AAC Skills Assessment

2. Professional development. Competent providers of AATC continue the development of their AATC skills by:		

Active involvement in continuing education and engagement in professional development, including:
  ○ Regular consultation and collaboration with other AATC providers
  ○ Regular consultation and collaboration with professional animal specialists
	Supervision in AAC	Recertification

Familiarity with existing and emerging AATC literature, including: ○ Familiarity with current AATC language/terminology ○ Encouragement and support for the continued development of AATC literature	Intro to AAC	Intro to AAC Discussion Questions, What is AAC Discussion/Forum Assignment
3. Professional values. Competent providers of AATC strive toward AATC-specific professional values, including:		
Demonstrating enthusiasm and passion for AATC	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Team Evaluation, AAC Skills Assessment
Demonstrating flexibility, openness, and creativity	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Team Evaluation, AAC Skills Assessment
Demonstrating a calm demeanor during unexpected events/situations	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Team Evaluation, AAC Skills Assessment
Demonstrating empathy for humans and animals	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Team Evaluation, AAC Skills Assessment
Demonstrating a willingness to embrace the experiential nature of AATC by being cognitively present and responsive to ever-changing situational factors	Practicum in AAC & AAC Supervision	AAC Team Evaluation, AAC Skills Assessment