

The Effects and Benefits of Animal Therapy

Kaliyah Sturges

Sports and Medical Science Academy

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Mental health awareness is becoming a more common message in our community. There are many strategies one can use to manage their mental health and perform self care. A common strategy that is seen for therapy is Animal-Assisted Therapy. “Animal-Assisted Therapy is characterized as the pointed cooperation between prepared creatures and patients, which is viewed as correlative to traditional treatments. It is planned and executed by a group of specialists including the advisor, the creature overseer, and some wellbeing experts (Benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy in Mental Health, n.d.). Dogs, cats, and horses are the most common animals that are thought of when hearing the word animal therapy, but animals like rabbits, goats, crickets, and chickens can be considered therapeutic animals. The history of humans and animals sharing therapeutic relationships dates back 12,000 years ago. Animal therapy can provide many possible benefits of certain illnesses when it’s either mentally/emotionally or physically with a broad range of patients that can be any age. Depending on the individual and their situation, there’s many benefits available to help in the field of therapy, and one of the most common ones is animal therapy. 8/10 for introduction - introduces the topic well

Depending on an individual’s circumstance whether it’s physical or emotional, an example can be for someone taking chemotherapy that may bring benefits to an individual depending on the situation but does have bad side effects like hair loss, mood things, and weight changes that may lead to depression. A study was performed at Mount Sinai Beth Israel, which was to understand what type of benefits are received. The study was based upon cancer patients that were undergoing chemotherapy, which led the the doctors deciding to see what gain would the patients get from certified therapy dogs that visited during their treatment (Benefits of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Cancer Patients, 2015). The study has shown that expansions had a

great impact throughout the span of the creature helped visits. Patients went through checked and critical decreases in both physical and utilitarian prosperity. Another common predicament that is seen is that Animal-Assisted therapy can be a possible solution for people who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder also known as PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a disorder that is caused by terrifying experiences that an individual goes through, which make recovery a very difficult process. It has been proven that Animal-Assisted Therapy has a great impact for people who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and can bring ease to individuals who suffer from it. “In one study of the effect of dogs with patients, psychologists noted an 82% reduction in symptoms. One particular case noted that interacting with the dog for as little as one week, enabled a patient to decrease the amount of anxiety and sleep medications by half.” (Animal Assisted Therapy and Trauma Survivors, 2019). Animal therapy can have very good benefits on an individual's being, if that has to play a part in one's mental or emotional state and is the reason why the therapy is so common today.

When people see an animal like a dog most are going to want to pet it and obtain a sense of relief, but why is that? Studies have shown that when people interact with animals like dogs, certain chemicals in your brain that cause depression and anxiety are released. “Several studies have shown petting and playing with a dog can improve patients' moods by decreasing their distress and pain specifically. A visiting dog can boost your body's production of endorphins, which ultimately trigger the release of chemicals that act like painkillers and produce euphoria.”(Why does Animal Therapy Work, (It's Not Just Cute Dogs), 2018). Studies have shown that there are many physical and emotional benefits from animal assisted therapy like self-esteem and reducing stress. “It can help reduce blood pressure and improve overall

cardiovascular health. It can also release endorphins that produce a calming effect. This can help alleviate pain, reduce stress, and improve your overall psychological state.” (Pet Therapy, 2017). Animal Therapy is very common for the elderly because there’s many ways for them to receive the treatment. In speaking to a man named Earl Johnson, he explained how having his dog that has the name of Tyson, he explained how “it changed his life. Mr. Johnson explained how the loss of his wife and an accident that led him to having foot surgery led him into a grave amount of depression that led him to not wanting to handle his responsibilities that needed to be done. He later explained how before he just saw Tyson as a dog, but now he understands the impact Tyson has on him when he visits every Sunday, Mr. Johnson stated “When he walks in with his welcoming bark, I cannot do anything else but smile”. When observing the two, you can observe how Mr. Johnson is more physically active, if that’s him walking Tyson around the neighborhood which gives both of them a good cardio, to them just playing a simple game of catch. When you watch the two it’s very heartwarming, even for the people who don’t classify themselves as animal lovers.

In speaking to Mrs. Patricia Kelly, CEO/President of Ebony Horsewomen Equine Assisted Therapy Program there is a need to be creative and innovative during COVID. Equine Assisted Therapy is defined as Ms. Kelly recognizes the essential work of healing never stops. Equine Assisted Therapy is defined as therapy that has many therapies within that therapy such as “physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language therapy and psychotherapy where a horse is part of the treatment team, is an emerging field internationally” (Equine-Assisted Therapy: An Overview, 2013). The Ebony Horsewomen’s women program was created in 1984, by a woman named Patricia Kelly. “Ebony Horsewomen became Ebony Horsewomen, Inc. and was turned into an equestrian and agricultural center with a fully functioning farm housing

horses and other animals; and a safe space for youth to receive education, therapy, and personal development using comprehensive programs, equine and animal-assisted therapy, and S.T.E.M. classes" (Kelly, n.d.). Ebony Horsewomen offers equine assisted therapy to children from the urban communities and children in foster care. Children are still experiencing trying times and COVID adds to the feeling of distress. One thing to take in consideration is that the benefits of animal therapy are the same for children from urban neighborhoods and give a great impact on children no matter the background. When speaking to DCF worker TaMika Terry about her opinion on the program, she stated "I had a few of my children in the past including my niece, and I couldn't name a better program where children can learn the importance of honesty also trust, increasing problem solving skills, and helping build ones patience, skills, and confidence" (T. Terry, personal communication). Ebony Horsewomen is located on the Northend of Hartford which has many good benefits for children and families for a reasonable price but not many people know the program, even people surrounded by the community. A program like this is important because instead of attending therapy where you speak to a therapist, you actually witness the child receiving benefits from the horse from comfort, but the horse also benefits like being fed, groomed, or physical exercise from the child. With knowing these characteristics that's why it is important to make sure people go out and be involved with their communities, because there's beneficial programs like Ebony Horsewomen out there that can help many children that need it. There's not many programs like Ebony Horsewomen, especially in urban communities. It's a great way to make the community one and address the "taboo" topic in some people's eyes which is mental health.

Animal therapy is a great way to cope with many physical, emotional, or mental situations and relieve stress during this very stressful time. When watching a friend or family member battle and you attempt alternatives however none appear to work can prompt an incredible feeling of sadness. Most think all therapy is expensive and don't have the money for it. If you're feeling alone, losing that motivation to do what you need to do, the individual should consider getting a companion. It's a good idea because the amount of benefits a person can receive is broad, and can be life changing for a person. The benefits of animal therapy are the same, but the list of situations individuals can go through that can be helped with animal therapy is never ending.

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