

For discussion

A new definition of "animal assisted

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In 2011, the European Society for Animal Assisted Therapy (ESAAT) presented a new definition for animal-assisted interventions. This has led to diverse, often controversial discussions in the field of animal-assisted interventions. As a result, it has been a catalyst for a variety of new and further developments.

From the beginning, this definition was understood as a "working definition" (Wohlfarth & Widder, 2011). In recent years, a variety of new developments have emerged that require a new conception of the definition. First and foremost, the basic definition of animal-assisted interventions by the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO) of 2014 and in the revised version of 2018 should be mentioned here.

Here, an attempt will now be made to describe criteria for a current definition adapted to developments in the field of animal-assisted interventions.

Preliminary remark 1

The IAHAIO definition has two main problematic aspects:

1. it only outlines minimum requirements for animal-assisted interventions such as goal orientation or specific basic profession.
2. very different fields of application are subsumed under the terms used.
3. it is implied that animal-assisted intervention is an independent professional field.

Regarding 1. the definition of the IAHAIO does not formulate specific standards for the education and training of animal-assisted workers nor for the animals used. Animal ethical aspects are also not specified in more detail, although they are presented in principle.

Re 2: It is not possible to adequately describe all settings in which animals are used by the definition of the IAHAIO. It represents only a rough grid, which ultimately falls short. For example, the term "animal-assisted therapy" covers such different fields of application as occupational therapy, speech therapy, physiotherapy or psychotherapy, which are additionally - at least in the German-speaking countries - subject to very different legal frameworks and whose designations are partly protected by law.

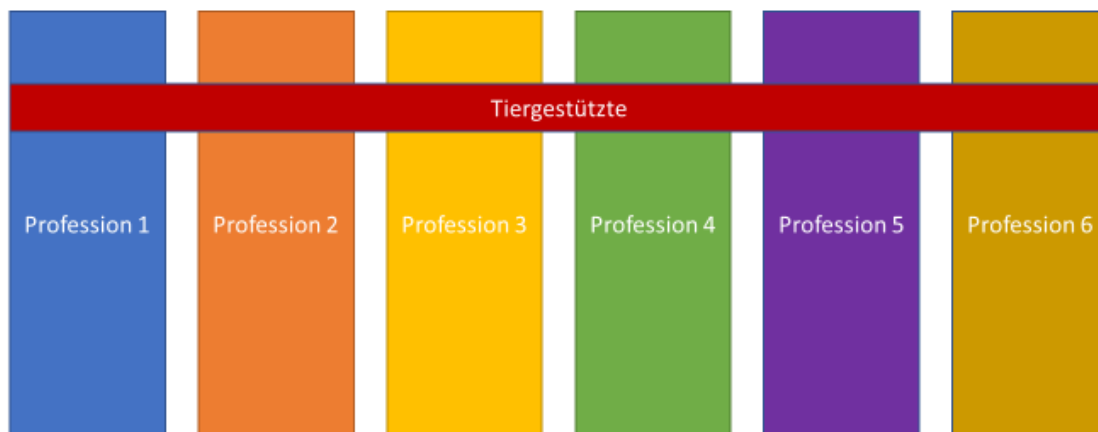
To 3. the basis of any inclusion of animals in a therapeutic, pedagogical or coaching process are the theories, models and concepts of the respective profession. This means that the use of an animal is always based on the professional principles of the respective profession.

Preliminary remark 2

Although the term animal-assisted intervention has been used for many years to refer to the therapeutic and educational use of animals, animal-assisted interventions have no independent modeling, theories, or frames of reference. An intervention must always first be conceived against the background of the models, theories, and frame of reference of the profession in question. Only afterwards it makes sense to consider whether and how the use of an animal can add value within the planned concept.

Therefore, it does not make sense to speak of animal-assisted interventions in general, but more specifically of "animal-assisted occupational therapy", "animal-assisted physiotherapy", "animal-assisted psychotherapy" or "animal-assisted social pedagogy", "animal-assisted social work", "animal-assisted curative education", "animal-assisted nursing" or "animal-assisted coaching". This also states that animal-assisted intervention does not represent an independent professional profile, nor can it attain this status.

The basic professions with their theories, models and methods form the vertical pillars, while the fundamental principles and animal ethical aspects of "animal-assisted" represent the horizontal connection across all basic professions.



The adjective "animal-assisted" is meant to make clear that the inclusion of animals in an intervention is an approach that goes beyond the respective basic profession and requires specific skills and abilities, as to be specified in a framework curriculum yet to be developed.

"Animal-assisted" in this context does not include generally applicable techniques, methods, or exercises that can be used with all clients, students, customers, participants, or the like. (hereafter generally referred to as clients) in always the same way, but rather it takes into account the specific approach of the basic profession, the individual possibilities and limitations of a client as well as the animal used.

Definition of basic "animal-assisted" principles

1. "animal-assisted" includes educational, psychological and socially integrative services planned from the basic profession, taking into account "animal-assisted" principles, with animals specially socialized for this purpose, accustomed to the setting, specifically trained and kept in a species-appropriate manner, for people of all ages with and without physical, psychological, social-emotional and cognitive limitations and behaviors.
2. the basic planning and implementation intervention is carried out according to the guidelines of each profession. It integrates "animal-assisted" principles. This means that in the respective goal-oriented intervention on and with the client, the animal is included in this work as a subject with special consideration of its needs.
3. the "animal-assisted" units are planned, carried out and evaluated by persons who have a therapeutic, pedagogical, social, nursing or medical profession or coaching as a profession and have completed an animal-assisted further training.

- a) The existing state-specific legal requirements for the respective professions apply.
- b) Only those that meet the criteria of ESAAT or ISAAT, are accredited by them and comprise a scope of at least 60 ECTS or equivalent are considered as animal-assisted further training.
- c) Depending on the animal species used, further animal-specific training courses must be successfully completed at least in accordance with the specifications for basic training courses of ESAAT or ISAAT. If training courses for the respective animal species are already available, the training shall be concluded with a practical examination of the human-animal team.
- d) Continuing specialized education in "animal-assisted" shall include a minimum of 16 hours in two years.
- e) "animal-assisted" can also be carried out by a specialist in animal-assisted interventions without a corresponding basic profession, if a competent involvement - depending on the field of application by occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, (social) pedagogues, etc. - is ensured.

4. "Animal-assisted" requires a specific animal ethic, which includes the perception of animals as sentient beings that deserve respect, animal-friendly husbandry as well as animal-friendly training of the animals. Specifically, this animal ethic includes:

- a) Encountering animals and people being worked with with respect and consideration; aligning animal-assisted work with the ethical principles of the profession in question for the benefit of people and animals.
- b) An intensive, cooperative and sustainable relationship with the vertebrate animals used.
- c) Knowledge of the individual preferences and needs of the animals.
- d) A special focus on the protection of the animal in "animal assisted". The animals used must not be instrumentalized, exploited or overworked. In the event of stress or discomfort in the animal-assisted work, immediate action will be taken to ensure the well-being of the animal.
- e) Each animal used and/ or kept is kept and cared for in accordance with the current guidelines and standards of the respective animal-specific professional societies (e.g. BTI- Bundesverband tiergestützte Interventionen, ÖKL -Österreichisches Kuratorium für Landwirtschaft, TVT - Tierärzte für den Tierschutz) in a manner appropriate to the species and animal.
- f) The preparation of the animal for the animal-assisted intervention includes obligatory good socialization, habituation and animal-friendly training through methods of positive reinforcement, model learning and social learning. The preparation or training of the must be largely stress-free and appreciative.

5. "animal-supported" takes place in an individual or group setting.

6. the basis of "animal-assisted" is the relationship and process design in the relationship triangle client - animal - reference person. This means that it is not the use of animals alone that achieves something, but it is a team effort.

7. "Animal-assisted" includes methods in which clients interact with animals, communicate about/with animals or work for the animals. The implementation of the human-animal interaction is goal-oriented based on a clear process and topic orientation, taking into account animal ethical principles, with subsequent documentation and professionally based reflection, evaluation and supervision.

8. "animal-assisted" considers in its approach breed- and animal-specific as well as individual needs and abilities of animals and integrates these into the conception of an intervention.

9. "animal-assisted" goals are based primarily on the needs, resources and strengths of the respective client, based on the indication from the respective profession.

10. "animal-assisted" utilizes the findings of related scientific disciplines that deal with the human-animal relationship, such as antrozoology, psychology, ethology, biology, and veterinary medicine.

Summary

With the definition presented here for discussion, the claim to strive for an independent job description "animal-assisted interventions" is abandoned. Rather, the animal-assisted approach is understood as a general concept - not a specific method - that can be used in a variety of professions. Thus, the animal-assisted approach does not contain any generally valid techniques, methods or exercises that are to be completed with all clients in always the same way, but rather it takes into account the individual possibilities and limitations of the respective client and incorporates them into the specific approach of the respective basic profession by applying some principles.