



Animal-Assisted Interventions Code of Practice for the UK



Animal-Assisted Interventions: Code of Practice for the UK

Purpose and Scope

Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI) is a relatively new field and there are currently no National Occupational Standards (NOS) for this practice in the UK. Well planned AAI sessions which are delivered responsibly offer numerous benefits to the participants, including those involved in delivering the intervention, as well as to the animal. For recipients, AAI can have a positive impact on physical abilities as well as addressing psychological, social, emotional and cognitive needs.

The **Animal-Assisted Interventions: Code of Practice for the UK (the Code)** has been produced by The Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS) and its members. It is a voluntary code intended to offer guidance on good practice for delivering AAI effectively and safely, ensuring that the welfare needs of both humans and animals are met.

It is recommended that the Code is applied as part of a multidisciplinary approach and that advice and guidance from those working in allied disciplines such as health, social care and education, psychology, veterinary science, animal welfare and animal behaviour are sought in the development of AAI programmes and in the delivery of AAI sessions.

Who is the Code aimed at?

The Code is for organisations, charities, businesses or individuals that design, manage, organise and/or implement the delivery of AAI programmes. Their services may be commissioned by others or, in some cases, those responsible for the management of an AAI programme may also be the AAI facilitator who delivers the session.

Application of the Code

The Code recognises that AAI in the UK is delivered in a variety of ways, across different settings and involving a diverse range of species. The number of people involved in the delivery of sessions may vary from one person to several, and the roles may differ too. For example, many AAI programmes in the UK are volunteer-led which see individuals delivering a service as part of a larger organisation e.g. Pets As Therapy and Therapet. Such visits may be undertaken with the volunteer's own animal and delivered to clients in different settings as part of a 'meet and greet' informal approach; in other instances, an AAI session may involve several people with different roles. For example, a professionally qualified health professional may include their own animal in a structured session which aims to meet the specific goals of a client, or may work alongside a volunteer team and/or a client's support worker.

In all of these examples the ways in which the various roles and responsibilities within AAI sessions and programmes will differ. For example, some programmes may appoint one individual practitioner who is responsible for the delivery of the session; other larger organisations may oversee issues such as insurance, policy compliance, safety requirements, etc. leaving their volunteers to focus on the delivery of the AAI session.

The Code seeks to clearly define the considerations and responsibilities which must be addressed in order to deliver AAI in a consistent, safe and effective manner. It does not attempt to define how such roles and responsibilities should be assigned. This will be dependent on the type of programme and how its delivery is structured and as outlined above, this can vary considerably.

Definitions

For the purposes of the Code, the following definitions are adopted.

Types of Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI)

Kruger and Serpell (in Fine, 2010¹) define AAI as “an intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals either as part of a therapeutic process or in less structured interactions”.

Types of interventions include Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT), Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA) and Animal-Assisted Education (AAE), all of which offer a broad spectrum of involvement and may take place across a variety of structured settings. For example, they can be delivered by teams or individuals, or as residential or visiting programmes.

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT): Goal-directed intervention integrated into a treatment programme that intentionally incorporates animals. Sessions are usually evaluated and documented (based on Delta Society² definition)

Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA): Activity that involves interactions between people and animals but are not goal-centred or designed to meet an individual’s specific needs, for example, meet and greet activities. (based on Delta Society definition)

Animal-Assisted Education (AAE): A specialised application of AAA or AAT directed at students and involves the incorporation of animals in an educational setting (Delta Society definition).

Participants: People that may benefit from AAI who can be of all ages and abilities.

Animal steward: Person(s) responsible for the care of the animal during AAI sessions. This may also involve ensuring the animal is suitably prepared for the intervention and rested/cared for during and afterwards. In many cases they will also be the AAI facilitator.

AAI facilitator: Person delivering and leading the AAI session. For example this may be an individual therapist delivering AAT in a secure setting or a volunteer delivering AAA within a school.

AAI delivery team: Team of people involved in the delivery of the AAI session. This will include an AAI facilitator and may include other members of a multidisciplinary team such as a participant’s support worker or an animal behaviourist. All may be present at the session.

AAI programme: The structure and planning which supports the delivery of an AAI session or multiple sessions – e.g. a volunteer-led AAI programme delivered across local hospitals or a number of AAT sessions to be delivered to one participant.

AAI session: The period of time devoted specifically to the delivery of the intervention.

¹ Fine (2010) Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice. Academic Press.

² Please note that Delta Society is now named Pet Partners

Sections

This document is organised in seven main sections:

1. Participants
2. Animals
3. Programme planning and implementation
4. Qualifications and training within the AAI delivery team
5. Health and safety
6. Risk assessments
7. Ethical considerations

1. Participants

Participants are people that can benefit from the delivery of AAI who can be of all ages and abilities. The physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of the human participants must not be compromised during an AAI session. All AAI sessions should have a designated AAI facilitator responsible for delivering and leading the session. Both participant and anyone present should have the option to terminate the intervention any time.

1.1 Suitability and selection

Interventions that are appropriate to the abilities, preferences and needs of their individual participant(s) should be devised and developed. If relevant, other members of the participant's care team should be present at, or available to provide input on the session and how it can best meet the participant's needs.

Prior to the session, the participant's confidence and their comfort levels when being around the particular animal species involved in the intervention and any contra-indications should be explored and defined.

1.2 Health considerations

Infection control procedures and essential hygiene practices should be in place. With support from veterinary and allied professionals, advice should be followed to minimise the risk of zoonotic disease and injuries.

Participants' adverse reactions, contraindications and allergic reactions that may arise should be responded to appropriately. Knowledge of an individual's care plan and personal goals, if available, may be relevant in this context.

Those taking part in the session should be informed about, and where necessary, provided with appropriate attire. Everyone present should be briefed in safety considerations concerning the handling or behaviour of the animals, as appropriate to the type of AAI.

Participants should be supervised at all times during an AAI session. The participant and anyone else present should be advised of appropriate animal handling techniques relevant to the therapeutic context.

2. Animals

2.1 Animal Welfare Acts

It is the responsibility of the animal steward to ensure that the physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of the animal is neither compromised nor likely to be compromised during an AAI session and they must adhere to the guidance provided in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) 2006. These laws apply to all animal owners/keepers, ensuring that they have a legal duty of care to meet the five welfare needs of their animals. (see www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms)

2.2 Animal suitability and selection

Selected animals should be in good health, free from zoonotic disease, of an appropriate species and have a behavioural assessment to ensure that they are of a suitable temperament prior to participation in AAI. The animals must be able to cope with, and ideally have experience of, the environments in which they will be working. Where possible for that species, animals included in AAI should be trained to a basic level of obedience using positive reinforcement methods (eg clicker training of dogs and horses). The animal should receive all required/appropriate vaccinations and preventative treatment specific to the species, as recommended by a veterinary professional, and these should be up-to-date.

A process should be in place which ensures that the animal's health and temperament is regularly assessed for suitability for the AAI session, including the environment, by a competent authority such as a veterinary professional, animal behaviourist, experienced stockman. Assessors must have experience of the environment in which the animal is working. The opinion of the animal steward should always be considered in this assessment. Animals should be responsibly sourced.

Animals should be transported in a way that ensures their welfare and meets any legal requirements. Visiting animals should be local to where the session is delivered in order to minimise travel time and stress levels. The animal should also be able to rest after transport and before being included in a session.

All animals should be identifiable and micro-chipped where this is practically possible.

2.3 Monitoring during sessions

The animal should know at least one member of the AAI delivery team well and be calm and responsive to the person handling them. Animal stewards should accompany their animals at all times. They are responsible for the handling of the animal and should ensure they are monitored for signs of stress, injury, illness, fear and fatigue. Stress levels in animals should be minimised before, during and after the AAI session. Guidance on species specific stress signs can be found at www.defra.gov.uk, www.wales.gov.uk and www.scotland.gov.uk in the Codes of Practice for a variety of species such as dogs, horses and rabbits.

The animal should have access to an appropriate area and be given opportunities, as required, for rest, access to water and toileting facilities before, during and after the session. Only the animal steward should have access to the animal during these periods. Animals should not be mixed with unfamiliar animals on site without careful consideration and supervision. If used together, animals need time to familiarise themselves with each other and predator and prey animals should not mix.

A maximum duration and frequency for an interaction with one animal should be agreed in advance of an AAI session and not exceeded. Sessions should be terminated immediately if the animal's welfare is in danger of being compromised.

3. Programme planning and implementation

Programme planning is an essential element of the effective delivery of AAI. It requires a considered approach whereby the manner in which the objectives of the programmes will be achieved is clearly demonstrated and communicated to all relevant parties. It is also important to clearly define and allocate roles and responsibilities within the team. (refer to “Definitions” in this document for further information)

3.1 Delivery plan and models of practice

The delivery of all AAI sessions should be supported by an accessible delivery plan based on the most appropriate way to meet the needs of participants and animals. The most appropriate type of AAI practice (such as an activity (AAA) or therapeutic (AAT) or education (AAE) based approach) should be considered. An animal welfare plan must be available which includes all considerations relevant to that specific animal’s care and welfare.

3.2 Induction

Everyone involved in delivering any part of the AAI sessions should receive appropriate induction and be briefed on communication, boundaries and confidentiality with participants. This is particularly important in visiting programmes involving volunteers. Induction must also include guidance on appropriate behaviour around the animal.

3.3 Monitoring

There should be clarity on how the participant and animals’ engagement in the AAI session will be monitored and documented and by whom. There should be an opportunity for all participants to debrief following any AAI session. Monitoring may include consideration of:

- Issues relating to participants’ and animals’ welfare
- Issues relating to health and safety – all incidents should be recorded and followed-up as appropriate
- Issues relating to participant’s progress – for example, observations of any changes

3.4 Evaluation

Outcome measures are becoming increasingly important as both the public and private sectors move towards evidence-based practice. Programmes should consider how it might be possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the AAI and how this might be communicated. While a structured approach to documenting outcomes and evaluating effectiveness is advised for some programmes for example, AAT, the Code recognises that this is not always possible or suitable for all AAI programmes.

3.5 Visiting sessions

For visiting programmes, an opportunity to briefly discuss and review the requirements of the participants, animals, facilitators and delivery teams should be offered at the start of each session to ensure that the session can take place safely and securely at this venue. Any insurance considerations and other requirements, such as Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, relating to providing a visiting service should be taken into account prior to any service beginning. Information regarding the session should be agreed in advance. This enables staff and volunteers to prepare for the visit e.g. select suitable participants, provide induction information, prepare the animal. A review of the environment before beginning the session should take place, where possible.

3.6 Sustainability

The AAI programme should be suitably resourced (e.g. funding, staffing) ensuring that it can be delivered effectively. Programme plans should consider the process for terminating the programme, ensuring there is minimal emotional and physical impact upon the welfare of all participants. And as part of the recommended multidisciplinary approach and the duty of care to participants, participants should be directed to other/continuing services if the AAI programme is coming to an end. The provision of ongoing care for animals

should be considered as their involvement in AAI comes to an end. This may be due to the termination of a programme(s) or issues relating to the animal's health or natural retirement.

3.7 Insurance

Appropriate third-party insurance and all other necessary insurance covering the specific type of AAI undertaken should be in place. This is to protect all those involved in the delivery of the AAI session, as well as the setting and organisation, as appropriate.

3.8 Current legislation

All current, relevant and species-specific legislation in the UK, including the Animal Welfare Act 2006 should be complied with. UK legislation may be amended from time to time and AAI programmes need to adhere to up-to-date policy and legislation. Useful sources include: Defra (www.defra.gov.uk), the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) (www.wales.gov.uk), the Scottish Government (www.scotland.gov.uk), RSPCA (www.rspca.org.uk) and relevant guidance from the Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk).

4. Qualifications and training within the AAI delivery team

Those involved in the facilitation and delivery of AAI sessions should be competent to do so. This may be evident in their skills, knowledge, experience or qualifications.

4.1 Training requirements

AAI facilitators and animal stewards should be equipped with the necessary training to enable them to deliver AAI safely and effectively. Training requirements may differ according to the type of AAI employed. For example, AAI facilitators delivering AAT and working as professional therapists would need to fulfil training requirements stipulated by the relevant governing body to ensure participant welfare and uphold best practice. In addition, all AAI facilitators are encouraged to complete relevant specialist courses and have evidence of ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Training seminars and domiciliary training through educational literature, DVDs, webinars etc. are also encouraged.

4.2 Knowledge in animal welfare

AAI facilitators should be committed to maintaining the highest level of care for the animal(s). Animal knowledge must form part of the expertise within the AAI delivery team and experience of working with the specific animal(s) included in the session is essential. It is important that the team includes an individual experienced and competent in the relevant field of animal welfare, behaviour and training. Experience of working in the AAI environment concerned is also necessary. Facilitators should consult with others when required for specialist input (e.g. behaviourists, other experienced handlers) whilst also seeking and following veterinary advice regarding preventive healthcare.

4.3 Mentoring and support

AAI facilitators should ensure that they receive support to guide them in their AAI work, with regular opportunities to reflect and review their service provision. This can take the form of peer support, formal supervision or drawing on existing organisational structures.

5. Health and safety

The health and safety requirements inherent in an environment where participants and animals are working together should be managed responsibly. All current health and safety legislation (e.g.) Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) must be complied with. In visiting programmes, the AAI facilitator should also be aware of these requirements. Further information can be obtained from the Health and Safety Executive (www.hse.gov.uk).

5.1 Basic first aid

The AAI delivery team should be trained in or have access to individuals trained in human first aid and animal first aid. Some examples of organisations providing training in basic first aid include:

First aid courses:

- Health & Safety Executive (www.hse.gov.uk)
- British Red Cross (www.redcross.org.uk)

Animal first aid:

- Animal Care College (www.animalcarecollege.co.uk)
- Animal Aiders (www.animalaiders.co.uk)
- College of Animal Welfare (www.caw.ac.uk)
- PDSA (www.pdsa.org.uk)

5.2 Relevant checks

The AAI delivery team should have undertaken any required checks in accordance with latest advice from relevant national and local bodies to ensure the safeguarding of animals and participants. They should be aware of any other requirements as requested by partner organisations and commissioners for working with specific participant groups such as Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

6. Risk assessments

6.1 Content

Risk assessments exist to enable activities to take place safely. A written risk assessment should be conducted where possible for every proposed inclusion of animals, using a standardised, structured format. The risk assessment should cover all aspects of an AAI session including risks to participants, risks to animals, risks to property, risks to the AAI delivery team and risks to the general public.

6.2 Communication

Information on the risk assessments already in place at the setting where the AAI session is due to take place, how they work and their importance should be made available to the AAI delivery team, including any external participants, for example volunteers involved in AAI visiting programmes. Contact details of a local veterinary and medical services and any other identified support should be available in case of an emergency.

6.3 Suitability of the environment

The environment where sessions take place is an important consideration and should be conducive to AAI and the animals involved. The basic factors e.g. access, lighting, space, floor and other contact surfaces, temperature, noise levels, smells, exit routes, security etc. should be considered prior to and during the intervention session in order to maximise the welfare and reduce the risks to humans and animals involved.

7. Ethical considerations

7.1 Apply the AAI Code of Practice

The Code outlined in this document should be adhered to in order to ensure that the welfare of participant, animals and the AAI delivery team is upheld throughout the practice of AAI. The relevant plans, procedures and protocols should be in place prior to, during and following delivery of AAI.

7.2 Knowledge & expertise

Those involved in the delivery of AAI sessions should work within their existing capabilities. They must be honest, transparent and accurate about their competence, experience and qualifications/training.

7.3 Confidentiality

The importance of confidentiality and consent issues when working with participants should be fully understood. Data Protection standards and procedures must be complied with. Further information can be obtained from the Commissioner's Office at www.ico.gov.uk.

7.4 Equal importance of participants and animals

The physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of the participants and of the animals is of equal importance and the needs of both these groups should be met.

7.5 Adhere to ethics of respective discipline or membership organisation

The professional ethics of relevant, respective professions and organisations should be adhered to.

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