

Animal-assisted Therapy

Creativity applied to loneliness (Activity 3/12)

DESCRIPTION

Animal-assisted therapy is a form of therapeutic treatment in which one or more animals that meet a series of criteria play a fundamental role in the process. The sessions are directed by a health professional, who sets specific objectives and guidelines for each intervention. In order to carry out animal-assisted therapy for the elderly, it is necessary for greater effectiveness to have 1 or 2 sessions per week per group or user. Each session lasts approximately 50 minutes. One or two animal-assisted therapy technicians, together with one or two therapy dogs, as well as a professional from the center for the elderly or nursing home, must be present at the sessions. The sessions can be carried out individually or in groups. In the case of group sessions, it is essential that the groups are as homogeneous as possible. Depending on the characteristics of the users.

OBJECTIVES

1. Increase mood: contact with animals produces a release of endorphins in the elderly, generating a state of mental wellbeing.
2. Improve self-esteem and autonomy: caring for animals provides residents with an improvement in self-esteem as they go from being dependent to being carers.
3. Promote the improvement of physical abilities: caring for and interacting with animals requires moderate physical activity, improving functional abilities.
4. Avoiding social isolation and loneliness by being in contact with companions and other living beings

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

1. Dog food.
2. Dog toys.
3. Dog Grooming Combs.
4. Walking leashes for dogs.

IMPLEMENTATION - INSTRUCTION

In order to carry out animal-assisted therapy it is necessary to have several sessions with the participants. The first session is only an introductory session. In this case, we will use the example of performing the therapy with dogs. First of all, the dog will enter the room when the participants are calm and, in their position, and will approach each of them progressively, trying to be petted but without forcing them to do so. Reactions of nervousness, joy, rejection, fear, etc. may arise. In most cases animal-assisted therapy is stimulating and positive, but a reaction of acceptance should not be expected from all participants.

In the following therapy sessions, contact activities and exercises can be done, such as brushing the dog, offering it food, throwing biscuits... The mood of the group should always be taken into account in each of them, choosing the best activity in each case.

Concrete examples of activities

- Individually, the patient is asked to pick up a biscuit of a specific colour and then give it to the dog.
- With coloured balls, the patient is asked to pick up a specific ball and is asked to throw it for the dog to fetch.

POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS

According to the Delta Society, animal interventions can be divided into three blocks, depending on the aims and objectives being investigated:

- Animal Assisted Therapies (AAT): The fundamental characteristics are that a trained health professional must guide the therapy, it must have specific pre-defined objectives, and the process must be properly documented with timely evaluations. These therapies are created with the aim of producing improvements in the social, cognitive, physical and emotional spheres of the person.
- Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI): Unlike AAT, it is not subordinated to specific previously established objectives and can be more spontaneous or informal. It can be applied to people of any age, and has the possibility of being group or individual.
- Animal Assisted Activities (AAA). It is not goal-oriented, nor is it expected to achieve specific objectives. Professionals or animal careers involved in AAAs should have some training.

It is advised that animal-assisted therapy should be used to achieve a greater holistic benefit for older people. If it is not possible to have a specialist in animal therapy, animal-assisted intervention may be an option, at least to alleviate feelings of loneliness and sadness in adults.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Participants are expected to improve cognitively, emotionally and physically. Animals offer unconditional love making participants feel safe and accepted, and this can reduce feelings of loneliness and sadness that older people may feel.

In addition, for people with dementia, contact with an animal provides a multi-sensory experience. Therefore, it is expected that these people will be able to establish a connection with reality. At the same time, they will be able to recall their childhood and relate the animal to other memories from the past.

On an emotional level, contact with animals makes the environment of older people more pleasant and accessible. This fosters positive emotions and feelings that boost their self-esteem. They even have an impact on the enhancement of the sense of humor, as animals can create comical situations, favoring laughter and shared joy. On a cognitive level, the involvement of an animal is a key element in helping to fix attention, activate memory, enhance effort and provide extra motivation.

Finally, on a physical level, it is hoped that this type of intervention will have an impact on the participants' state of health and well-being.