Assisting the Animal in Animal-Assisted Interventions: Keys to Safeguarding Animal Welfare

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Is welfare even an issue in AAI?
Tolerance does not equate to welfare
Defining welfare

The Five Freedoms

The welfare of an animal includes its physical and mental state and we consider that good animal welfare implies both fitness and a sense of well-being. Any animal kept by man must, at least, be protected from unnecessary suffering.

1. **Freedom from hunger and thirst**
   by ready access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigor

2. **Freedom from discomfort**
   by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area

3. **Freedom from pain, injury or disease**
   by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment

4. **Freedom to express normal behavior**
   by providing sufficient space, proper facilities, and company of the animal’s own kind

5. **Freedom from fear and distress**
   by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering
The freedom we are looking for is the freedom to be ourselves, to express ourselves.

DON MIGUEL RUIZ
BE YOURSELF!
THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

• “a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and other animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both”

AVMA, 1998
Golden Retriever Offers Hugs to Strangers She Encounters on Walks: 'She's Trying to Bond'

• “While Loubie is quite generous with her hugs, she doesn't just hug anyone - she only hugs people she makes a connection with...”

• "Sometimes people run up and ask for a hug, but I tell them, 'I don't think it's going to happen,' because she has to bond with that person first..."

• "But when she sits next to someone, then I say, 'You're probably going to get a hug.'"
What happens when you can’t be yourself?
Unacknowledged negative animal welfare state
What can we do to enhance animal welfare in AAI?

- Allow them to be themselves
- Ensure the animal’s comfort and security
2. Environment

1. Handler

3. Participant

4. Intervention

Balance
1. Handler

- Acquire appropriate handler training
- Be attentive to animal’s behavioral cues
- Ensure proper breaks
- Remain in control of the intervention at all times
2. Environment

- Secure flooring
- Temperature controlled
- Access to water
- Access to escape for respite
- Give a chance to acclimate!
- Conduct in animal’s own environment if possible
3. Participant

- AAI may not be appropriate for all participants
- Instruct participant how to safely and respectfully interact with animal
  - Location/pressure of touch
  - Volume to speak at
4. Intervention

• Utilize the animal’s natural and spontaneous behaviors
• Permit animal’s freedom of choice
• Control “dose” of AAI
Approximate Timing of Animal-Assisted Interventions

- High frequency
- Medium frequency
- Low frequency
“You Are Your Animal’s Best Advocate”

If your animal is not acting like himself/herself, do something different
Always be yourself!
Thank you!