

The position paper

Animal-Assisted Interventions: Animal Care and Participation Guidelines

was developed during the workshop “Animal-assisted interventions – are they beneficial and advantageous for participating animals?” under the direction of Prof. Dr. Susanne Waiblinger (University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna) and Dr. Carola Otterstedt (Stiftung Bündnis Mensch & Tier, Munich).

It was discussed and approved by 40 representatives of various disciplines (as life-sciences, the humanities and AAI) at the conference „Tiergestützte Intervention im Fokus der Wissenschaften“ (“AAI in focus of science”) in Dresden, September 7-8th 2012. Up to today more than 100 AAI practitioners and experts signed the paper (3/2015).

Your personal contribution:

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If you are interested in citing the paper, please proceed as follows:

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Position Paper

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Fundamental Principles

1) Essential Conclusions

1.1. Animals have both species-specific and individual needs and capacities. These needs and abilities develop, vary and change with experience and age.

1.2. Prerequisites of animal welfare are housing and management practices that consider the physical, physiological and psychological well-being of each animal. This approach lays the foundation for professional animal-assisted interventions.

1.3. Species-specific and individual requirements include social behaviour, comfort behaviour, food intake and reproductive behaviour.

1.4. Animals exhibit different personality traits, highly developed social structures and strategies as well as sophisticated emotional expression and behaviour.

2) Ethical Handling

2.1. We regard all animal species with respect, let them live their lives in dignity with the aim to avoid fear, pain, suffering and harm and promote positive emotions.

2.2. Respectful handling of the animal reflects the animal handlers reverence for all life: human, animal and nature.



3) Motivation

3.1. Within the framework of animal-assisted interventions (e.g. therapy, pedagogy, facilitation, activities) and any environments where animals are used for social support, a special commitment to the needs of individuals, to species-appropriate care and to ethical use guidelines are essential.

3.2. These principles allow activity-related protective measures for animals, based on species-appropriate and ethical use.

4) Recognising Resources

A prerequisite of working with animals is to understand their needs and expressive behaviours in order to recognise their abilities, condition as well as their potential and limitations in a timely manner.

5) Avoiding Excessive Demands

In order to avoid stressing the participating animal the animal handler has to recognise species-specific and individual signs of work overload, stress and related behaviours to adjust or cease the intervention according to the animals' abilities and requirements.

6) Species-Appropriate Animal Care

6.1. The professional use of animals in animal-assisted interventions is based on appropriate animal care in accordance with species-specific and individual care requirements of each animal.

6.2. The animal handler is obliged to provide the animals in use a high quality of life.

6.3. Since animals in animal-assisted interventions are most effective when displaying their natural behaviour, animal care standards for these animals must exceed the minimum legal regulations. As a reference for better animal care, the TVT-Bulletin No. 131 "Use of animals for social support" (in German) with species-specific explanatory notes is recommended. (see <http://buendnis-mensch-und-tier.de/?id=119>)

6.4. Species-appropriate care of animals involved in animal-assisted interventions warrants regular screening by a veterinarian familiar with the unique requirements and activity-related stress potential of this kind of work. The animal handler has to disclose and review the animal's specific working conditions with the veterinarian. (see TVT-Bulletin No. 131 "Use of animals for social support" <http://buendnis-mensch-und-tier.de/?id=119>).



TIERGESTÜTZTE INTERVENTION
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7) Animals in Use

7.1 The central principle is to avoid work overload and stress in the animals.

7.2. Type of use is based on the physical and psychological abilities (e.g. health, stress-reactivity, sociability with strangers) of the animal.

7.3. The animal has to be appropriately prepared and must not be forcibly used if signs of discomfort or anxiety occur.

7.4. Animals with behavioural abnormalities (e.g., improper imprinting) should not be used in animal-assisted interventions. These animals may exhibit unusual behaviour and are therefore less suited for communication and social interaction with humans (hazardous because of inadequate distance or misbehaviour).

8) Expert Knowledge

8.1. Advanced training for pet or livestock owners (especially for those who offer animal-assisted intervention) is essential.

8.2. Integration of the subject “animal-assisted interventions and veterinary support” in education and advanced training of veterinarians and official veterinary service providers should be supported and promoted.

8.3 In accordance with animal welfare law and independent of legal regulations, anyone offering animal-assisted interventions should obtain “documentation of proficiency and competence” for each species the animal handler intends to use in animal-assisted interventions.

8.4. Holders of the “documentation of proficiency” are responsible that other persons engaged in animal care or use, under their supervision, have the required expertise.

8.5 In absence of legal regulations, the “documentation of proficiency” is currently a voluntary effort to ensure best practices by the provider of animal-assisted interventions.

Dresden, 8th of September 2012