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# The Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Children with Autism

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## INTRODUCTION

Autism is a neurobehavioral condition that is characterized by ongoing social problems and repetitive behaviors. Children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) tend to have difficulty when expressing themselves, communicating, and understanding what other individuals think and feel. In many cases, it is easier for the child to develop a bond with something that is non-human, which is where animal assisted therapy (AAT) can help. The purpose of this research is to explore the effects of AAT on children with ASD in relation to their physical and psychosocial well-being.

## PICO QUESTION

In chronically ill pediatrics (P), what is the effect of animal-assisted therapy (I) compared with no animal-assisted therapy (C) on physical and psychosocial well-being. (O)?



## INTERVENTIONS

- Patient and family education
  - Training sessions to safely involve child in AAT
- Age of Introduction
- Patient advocating
  - Community resources
- Allergy Screening

## STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE

**Level V. O’Haire, M. E. (2012).**

Preliminarily supports that AAT increases social interaction and communication while reducing problem behaviors, autistic severity, and stress in patients with ASD.

**Level III. Grandgeorge, M., Tordjman, S., Lazartigues, A., Lemonnier, E., Deleau, M., & Hausberger, M. (2012).**

Supports that AAT improves prosocial behaviors, offering to share and offering comfort, in individuals with ASD.

**Level V. Berry, A., Borgi, M., Francia, N., Alleva, E., & Cirulli, F. (2013).**

Supports that AAT promotes verbal and non-verbal behavior. This is directed towards both the animal and the therapist.

## CLINICAL DECISION

- The evidence gathered supports the proposal that AAT is a **viable option** for the improvement of well-being and psychosocial behavior in children with ASD
- This is a modern study that warrants the need for further research

