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Dog-assisted therapy as a supportive treatment for people with intellectual disability

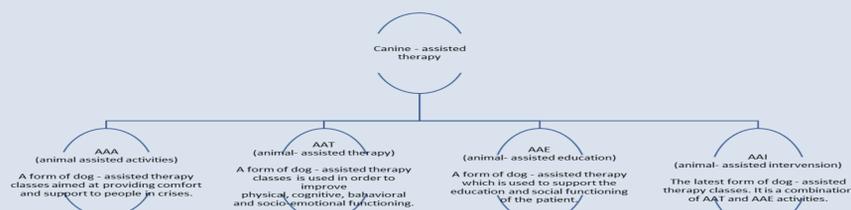
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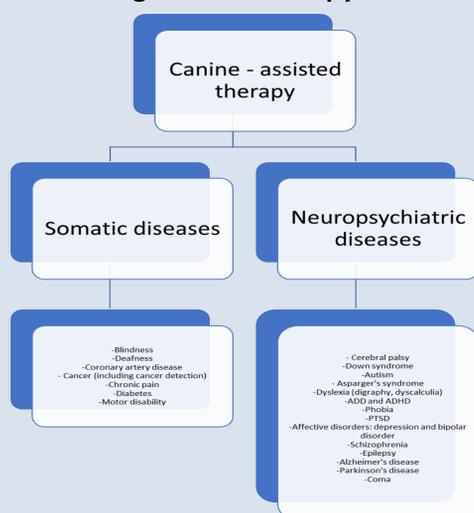
Dog-assisted therapy- definition

This is one of the forms of classes that are designed to help mental, physical and sensory development. It perfectly combines learning, revalidation and fun. This therapy involves contact with a specially trained dog. The joyful behavior of the dog during its tasks largely mobilizes and gives great satisfaction to people taking part in the therapy.

Forms of dog-assisted therapy:



When can a dog-assisted therapy be used?



Planning a dog-assisted therapy course and its goals:

Before starting the therapy, it is necessary to evaluate the level of a child's intellectual development and its abilities to interact and communicate with the environment as well as its physical development, the type and severity of occurring disorders and relations with a dog. Goals:

- Establishing and deepening the child-dog relationship.
- Shaping and improving orientation in the system of the child's own body.
- Improving child's motor sphere.
- Improving the emotional sphere.
- Learning imitative skills.
- Supporting self-reliance.
- Improving the ability to recognize and express own feelings.
- Shaping hygienic habits.
- Improving the efficiency of the articulation apparatus and enriching the vocabulary.

Introduction of participants and description of changes which occurred due the dog-assisted therapy. Introduction participants and description of changes that occurred due the dog-assisted therapy as a method supporting individual therapies and support measures adapted to the individual needs of patients.

An 11-year-old boy with multiple disability (moderate intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, blind). Neurological disorders - epilepsy. Initially, the boy did not have a verbal channel developed. However, the level of his functioning has been improved by participating in revalidation classes and also under the influence of classes taking place at school, i.e. speech therapy, massage, music therapy (piano, guitar). The boy also receives support from the Nursing Home - activities supporting the boy's educational process (doing homework, supporting the learning process). Dog - assisted therapy is a supplement to the above assistance for the boy. During the classes with the dog, the boy released the desire and motivation to speak. The child, probably thanks to contacts with the animal, began to communicate verbally by issuing simple commands and trying to make contact with him. At the moment, the child is happy to play with the dog. At first, however, he tugged its ears and tail. The boy has a tendency to schematic behaviour and sticking to them relentlessly. If the boy is asked to do a task, he is reluctant to do it. It is probably caused by being in a nursing home for people with severe intellectual disabilities, where abuse could have occurred through excessive use of orders. The child likes playing with the dog, throws the ball, feeds it with snacks. He talks to the dog, says goodbye to him, wants to meet it again.



Cerebral palsy - diplegia, severe intellectual disability. Initially, the girl did not show her emotional states in any way. Under the influence of different types of classes, including remedial-and-educational classes, classes supporting general development, as well as rehabilitation with corrective gymnastics and music therapy (based on listening to music), which were supplemented by a series of dog - assisted therapy classes. After several classes with the dog, there was an improvement in the expression of emotions accompanying the girl. Classes with the animal arouse the girl's positive reactions. When interacting with the dog, she focuses completely on the animal. This therapy is full of joy, which can be seen in the girl's smile and her energetic actions. When she does not receive constant attention, stimulation occurs by putting her hand in her mouth. The girl is sensitive to smell stimuli, she likes flower scents very much, hence she is stimulated with many smells during classes , which allows her to relax. The girl likes a colourful scarf that she always has with her during every dog-assisted class. While stroking the dog the girl stimulates superficial feeling. In addition, after completing the tasks set for the dog by the dog therapist the girl learns to applaud with the help of the person conducting the classes. She gladly hugs the animal when it is looking for its treats on her body. Every class with the dog is enriched with music, favourite songs put her in a positive mood.



Conclusion:

During the series of therapeutic classes, in both cases, an improvement in the functioning of the people participating in the therapy was noted, mainly in the emotional sphere. These changes were obviously achieved as much as possible for the person undergoing the therapy. However, there has been an undoubted increase in positive feelings and motivation during actions taken by patients. The reactions of patients while playing with the animal also indicated a sense of empathy towards the dog. Constant development and empathy are an extremely important human life abilities, because they allow to understand others better, which often makes it easier for a person to function in a broadly understood society. Empathic functioning often causes a lot of difficulty for people with different levels of intellectual disability, but it is worth doing everything possible to sensitize the individual, regardless of the difficulties it causes.

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Fotografie zrobione podczas zajęć dogoterapeutycznych zostały zamieszczone za zgodą upoważnionych do tego osób.