

# Diamond Model Training

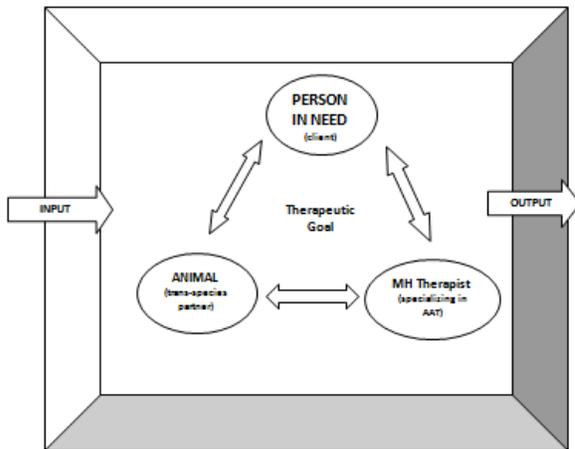
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**Purpose:** The purpose of this training is to clarify the roles of therapists and animal handlers when they are working together to do an animal assisted intervention (AAI).

## Some Terms:

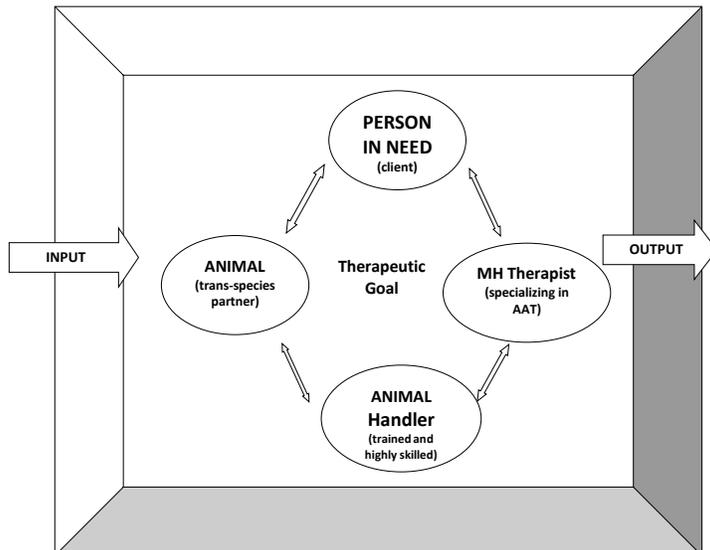
### Triangle Model

This is the most often discussed form of AAT but in my opinion it is missing an element.



### Diamond Model

Has addition of the animal handler if the therapist is not skilled in the animal species. This adds another dynamic to the therapeutic process



**When:** The Diamond Model of AAI is often used when a therapist requires assistance with an animal. This may be due to the therapist not being familiar with a particular species or a new animal, a therapist being in the process of learning about that species or animal, or a therapist in need of assistance due to a client with special or high needs. Groups often require animal handlers as well due to the high volume of clients and the need for safety.

**Animal Handlers:** Highly skilled in working with the species of choice. Not only do they firmly understand the language and behavior of the species but they are skilled in ensuring the animal remains under control. They are capable of handling the animal in all circumstances and they understand how to interact in a dual role when assisting a therapist in AAI. Animal handlers not only understand the species they are assisting with but they also know the particular animal they are working with, its like and dislikes, 'normal' behaviors, etc. Animal handlers are fully trained in the Diamond Model.

**Therapists:** Mental health professionals who are highly skilled in working with people in need of therapeutic help as well as in AAI. They understand the species they are working with but they may have limited knowledge or skill in ways to handle the animal in sessions or they may require assistance with the animal due to a special needs client or a high volume of participants at once. They understand the dual role of the diamond model and work alongside the animal handler to meet the therapeutic goals.

### **How Does It Work?**

Each person in the model has a role to play. The important aspect is for everyone to understand their role and stay within it as much as is possible to ensure a smooth, ethical and successful session. Important parts for this to work:

1. Therapist has a clear and concise session plan and is trained in the Diamond Model
2. Animal handler has a firm understanding and ability to handle and control the animal and is trained in the Diamond Model
3. Therapist and animal handler communicate AHEAD OF TIME for what presenting issues the client may have, what the session focus is and what the therapist is trying to accomplish in the session
4. The animal handler may input ideas for what they can have the animal do, activities or objectives that the client can attempt to do with the animal to reach the therapeutic goals
5. The session is planned together and the therapist clearly communicates to the animal handler how much input they would like from the animal handler in the session about the animal's communications and how they would like this information relayed (privately or in front of client). This will depend on type of client, presenting issues and severity of need for communication.
6. Each person in the model checks in on their "!'s" before the session, is aware of what comes up, communicates and checks it before session.

7. Session takes place with everyone in their respective roles
8. Session is debriefed for “!!’s”, what went well, what did not go well, roles are re-clarified if necessary for next time.

### **Some Do’s and Don’ts for Animal Handlers in the Diamond Model**

- Have a firm understanding of the species of animal you are handling; know its language, typical behavior and what is ‘normal’ and abnormal’ for that species
- Have a firm understanding of the particular animal you are working with. Spend time with the animals and KNOW them. Know what they like, don’t like, how they react in certain situations, whether they are nervous, fidgetty, etc.
- Know how to get and keep them under control. You are the expert on the animal in this and it is your responsibility to be able to handle the animal under any circumstances.
- Be aware of your biases and skill sets. Do not allow personal biases to come into your sessions. If you are aware of your biases, decline to work with a certain animal or a certain population of people.
- Be aware of your “!!’s” and the impact they can have on your session before, during and after. Check these before, communicate them to the therapist and ensure they are not impacting your session during. If they persisted, debrief this with the therapist so as to ensure they get resolved if possible.
- Your role is to handle the animal and to let the therapist know what is happening for the animal by reading the animal and reporting what is going on.
- You are also responsible to advise the therapist of a need to discontinue if something in the environment is negatively impacting the animal and cannot be controlled.
- You must have a firm understanding of the population you are working with. It is imperative to check in with the therapist ahead of time to get an understanding of the client, the session focus and what the therapist is trying to achieve so that you can support this and assist in making it happen.
- Ask questions to the therapist before session. It will take time to get used to working together.
- Your job is to assist the therapist by ensuring the animal is safe and under control at all times.
- Your job is to assist the therapist by perhaps teaching skills to the client. This should be decided in the pre-meeting about the session focus.
- Be aware of interfering in the dialogue between client and therapist. You are mostly silent except when asked for advice or in the event that you notice a shift in the animal and need to report it (unless your role is decided to be different in the pre-meeting). This may be done privately with the therapist or as part of the session depending on what you and the therapist have decided ahead of time.

## **Some Do's and Don'ts for Therapists in the Diamond Model**

- Ensure that you inform your animal handler of your clients' needs, sensitivities, fears, comforts and presenting issue you are targeting in your session before the session.
- Brainstorm together with your handler for the session focus if necessary, they know the animal species and are skilled in the handling, they can likely make great suggestions for meeting the client goals.
- Ensure your handler is comfortable with your population and presenting issues, monitor for discomfort and “!!’s” in the pre-meeting and during the session and handle accordingly (maybe suggest a plan for communicating these things during session if necessary).
- In the pre-session, set the guidelines for what kind of, and how much, input you would like from the handler during the session and communicate the best method for this to them.
- If working in groups, lay out the role of the handler before the group and inform them of what you need from them. If the group is likely to make disclosures or discuss therapeutic content one:one with the handler, set the guidelines for how you would like them to handle this ahead of time.
- Check your “!!’s” before the session, during and debrief after with your partner to ensure resolve for next time.