



Model of Human Occupation

Archived List Serv Discussion

MOHO with AAT and Hippotherapy

January 26, 2009

Hi, I am an OTD student currently working on a project that is looking at applying MOHO to animal assisted therapy and/or hippotherapy. I am particularly interested in the impact animals have on volition and why they seem to be so volitionally relevant for many clients. I was wondering if anyone out there is currently working in AAT or hippotherapy and using MOHO and had any information/ resources on this.

Thanks!

Caitlin Smith

February 3, 2009

I have volunteered at a hippotherapy clinic and was motivated to take lessons and ride horses again after many years. When I take a lesson and work with the horses, I feel like I am personally improving my handling skills as a therapist. You have to be emotionally attentive to the horse as well as physically. You have to have an agreement and respect for the horse. I know, I was thrown off for the first time last week and I got back on, even though I am a little scared of the horse. I had to work on that relationship.

I often encounter the household pet in my home visit for OT and find that they are part of the family and expect to be acknowledged. They are also very protective of the patient often.

Which brings me to the real answer to your question. This is just my experience and opinion but I think with any sort of animal therapy or interaction "we" the willing human experience "Unconditional Love". I think that is what makes the animal therapeutic. Think about your own relationship with your pets.

That is also why if the patient is not interested in or afraid of animals, they should not be 'forced' to participate. They have to be open to that unconditional Love and want to be in relationship with the animals. It just isn't always the right therapy for some. But, if they are really interested, they can overcome the fear and experience the healing power of the animal. That is where using MOHO to really identify can this client be served with this therapy approach.

Lisa

February 4, 2009

Hi Lisa,

Good points. I have been involved off and on for many years in hippotherapy and have a couple horses of my own. I just got two puppies that I plan to train as therapy dogs. So I am naturally enthusiastic about this idea.

that said, I have observed situations in hippotherapy where therapeutic riding instructors completely ignored clients' volition and put them in situations that were filled with anxiety and stress rather than interest and satisfaction. So it is very important always to note the client's volition for animals before proceeding with their use.

You raise a second issue which is that animals are part of clients environment (a point already noted in the last edition of the MOHO text) As such animals often are an important influence on clients volition, roles, habits and even skills. In some cases they are a very major component of the environment that influences how people organize their daily routines and what make up their occupations. This needs to be recognized and respected in what is done in therapy.

Gary Kielhofner

February 4, 2009

Hi Caitlin and Lisa,

Caitlin, thanks for introducing this interesting topic to the MOHO listserv.

Lisa, I couldn't agree more with your response.

I have had some training and experience in AAT with horses and am an avid rider and horse lover. As a clinical psychologist, I'm interested in the ability of the horse to not only motivate clients, but to empower them to be leaders in their own lives (if and when the client is ready).

During one of my experiences as a teaching trainee for a pediatrics therapeutic riding group, it was clear over a period of several weeks that two of the children were not enjoying the experience of being on the horse - one cried the entire time, and one child was terrified and cried intermittently depending on the week. Yet, my instructor encouraged me to "push them through it" - which I refused to do - which is one reason I no longer volunteer with that particular organization.

I think my instructor would have benefited tremendously from learning MOHO concepts, and I wish she could have been open to hearing about the importance of all components of volition (personal causation, interests, and values) to riding... If she had been open to such instruction, I definitely would have introduced it to her.

But some horse people sometimes are very set in their ways and often some are convinced they know best...

Fear is a good thing with horses as it teaches us to respect their power. However, too much fear around horses is dangerous. I think it's dangerous to expose clients to animals that they are intensely afraid of - horses in particular - these animals are intuitive and tremendously sensitive creatures. They "smell" and do all they can to escape from fearful people and from people who carry and try to hide other negative emotions, such as anger. In particular, they are brilliant at detecting and "exposing" people who are emotionally incongruent (i.e., fearful but trying to hide it - or angry but trying to "be nice")... One really has to be motivated, as well as emotionally centered, before interacting with and venturing on the backs of these incredibly complex and awesome animals, and before letting a client do the same. I have found that starting with a relationship on the ground is the best thing - for both the horse and the human.

Renee Taylor