

# Animal-Assisted Therapy Interventions for Children With Disabilities: A Systematic Review

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**PURPOSE:** Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) offers a meaningful approach for occupational therapy (OT) practitioners to connect with individuals, promote participation, and enhance their quality of life. By incorporating AAT, practitioners can address various areas of occupation, leading to improvements in motor, cognitive, social skills, and more. Despite the reported potential benefits, evidence specific to AAT in OT is limited.

**DESIGN/METHOD:** This systematic review aims to explore the effectiveness of AAT using dogs for children with disabilities in the context of OT practices. The review is reported in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines. A comprehensive search was conducted using CINAHL, PubMed, PsychInfo, and Web of Science databases from January to March 2022. The articles were screened and selected by the primary speaker, and the quality, rigor, and bias of the articles were assessed.

**RESULTS:** Eleven studies met the inclusion criteria, with seven classified as Level 2B and four as Level 3B. The results were synthesized by the outcomes to inform clinical practice. Overall, a low strength of evidence was found across the AAT studies due to the variability of the interventions.

**CONCLUSION:** The review indicated a limited body of substantial evidence regarding the effectiveness of utilizing dogs for AAT in pediatric OT practices. Additionally, these studies highlight the absence of standardized protocols in AAT implementation.

**IMPACT STATEMENT:** While AAT has been recognized as an emerging practice area, this systematic review reveals a significant literature gap concerning AAT interventions and research in OT practices. OT researchers are encouraged to conduct further studies with rigorous methodologies to investigate the effectiveness of AAT for children with disabilities. Additionally, practitioners should stay updated with new publications to ensure the integration of evidence-based practice when utilizing AAT.

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