

Animal-Assisted Interventions in Mental Health: Definitions and Theoretical Foundations

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I. INTRODUCTION

As described in Chapter 1, the advent of scientific medicine toward the end of the 19th century had the effect of displacing companion animals from therapeutic settings until the 1960s, when the concept was revived in the writings of Boris M. Levinson. In his book *Pet-Oriented Child Psychotherapy*, Levinson described the benefits that his dog brought to his counseling sessions with children and youth and provided numerous examples of ways in which animals could enhance therapy (Levinson, 1969). Levinson intended for this material based largely on case studies and anecdotes to inform and encourage future research into the various beneficial effects that he observed. While this has occurred to some degree, more often Levinson's writings have been used to justify the implementation of animal-assisted interventions (AAIs) in the absence of valid efficacy studies.

Despite their long history and the unequivocally positive media attention they typically receive, animal-assisted interventions are currently best described as a category of promising complementary practices that are still struggling to demonstrate their efficacy and validity. Some attempts have been

