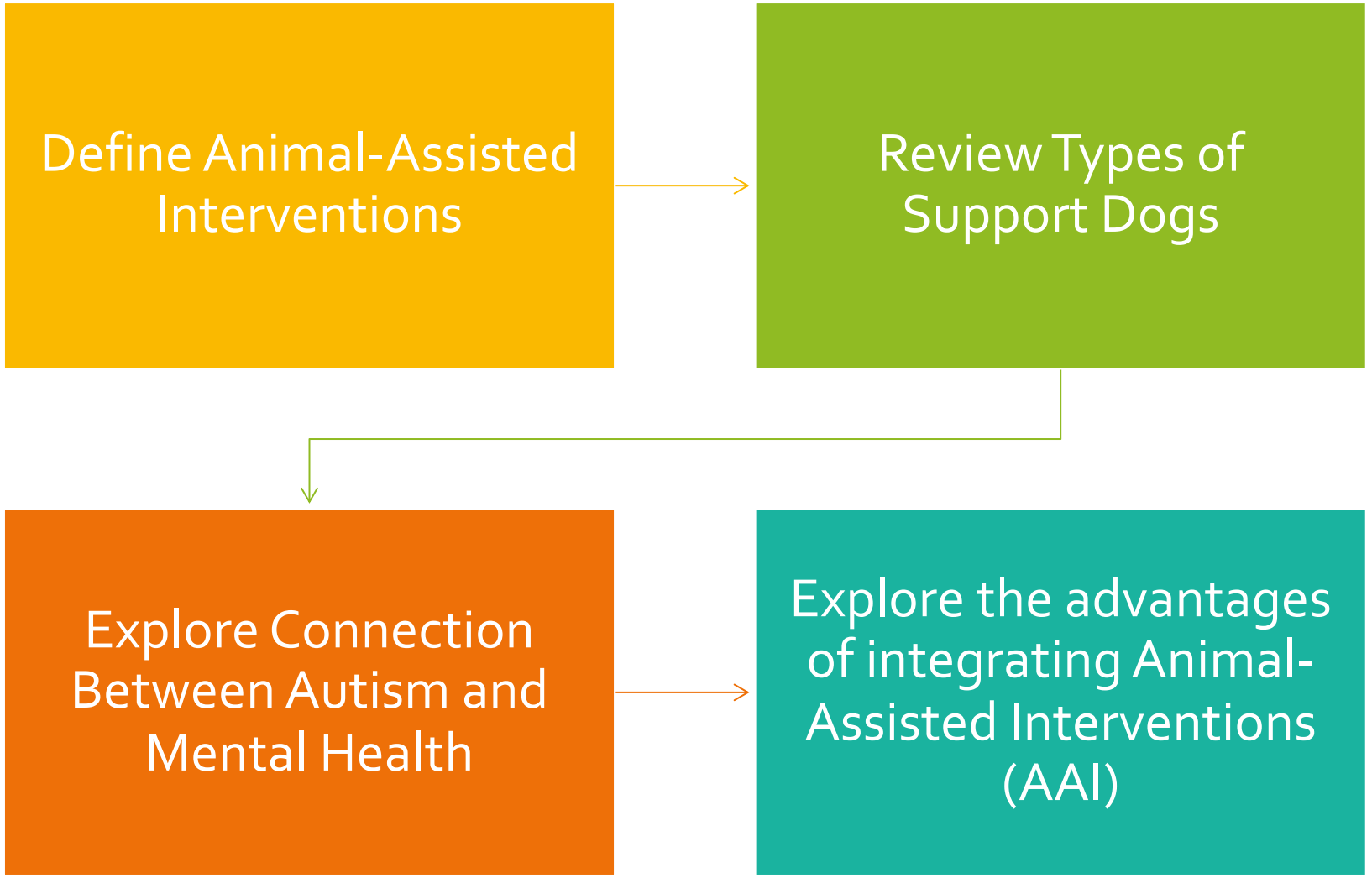


Pawsitive Impacts: Enhancing Autism and Mental Health through Animal-Assisted Interventions

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LICSW, C-AAIS

Objectives


Define Animal-Assisted Interventions
Review Types of Support Dogs
Explore Connection Between Autism and Mental Health
Explore the advantages of integrating Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI)

Types of Support Dogs



Types of Support Dogs

- Therapy Animals
- Emotional Support Animals
- Service Dogs

Types of Support Dogs

	SERVICE DOG	THERAPY DOG	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DOG	FACILITY DOG
Specialty Trained (task trained)	✓	✗	✗	✓
Allowed by federal law to accompany handler in restaurants, stores, movie theatres, etc.	✓	✗	✗	✗
Allowed by federal law to stay in apartments with no pet policies	✓	✗	✓	✗
Trained to assist or provide comfort to just one person	✓	✗	✓	✗
Trained to provide emotional comfort to many people	✗	✓	✗	✓

Human Animal Bond



Our Connection to Animals

HUMAN ANIMAL BOND (HAB)



HUMAN ANIMAL INTERACTIONS (HAI)



Animal Assisted Intervention





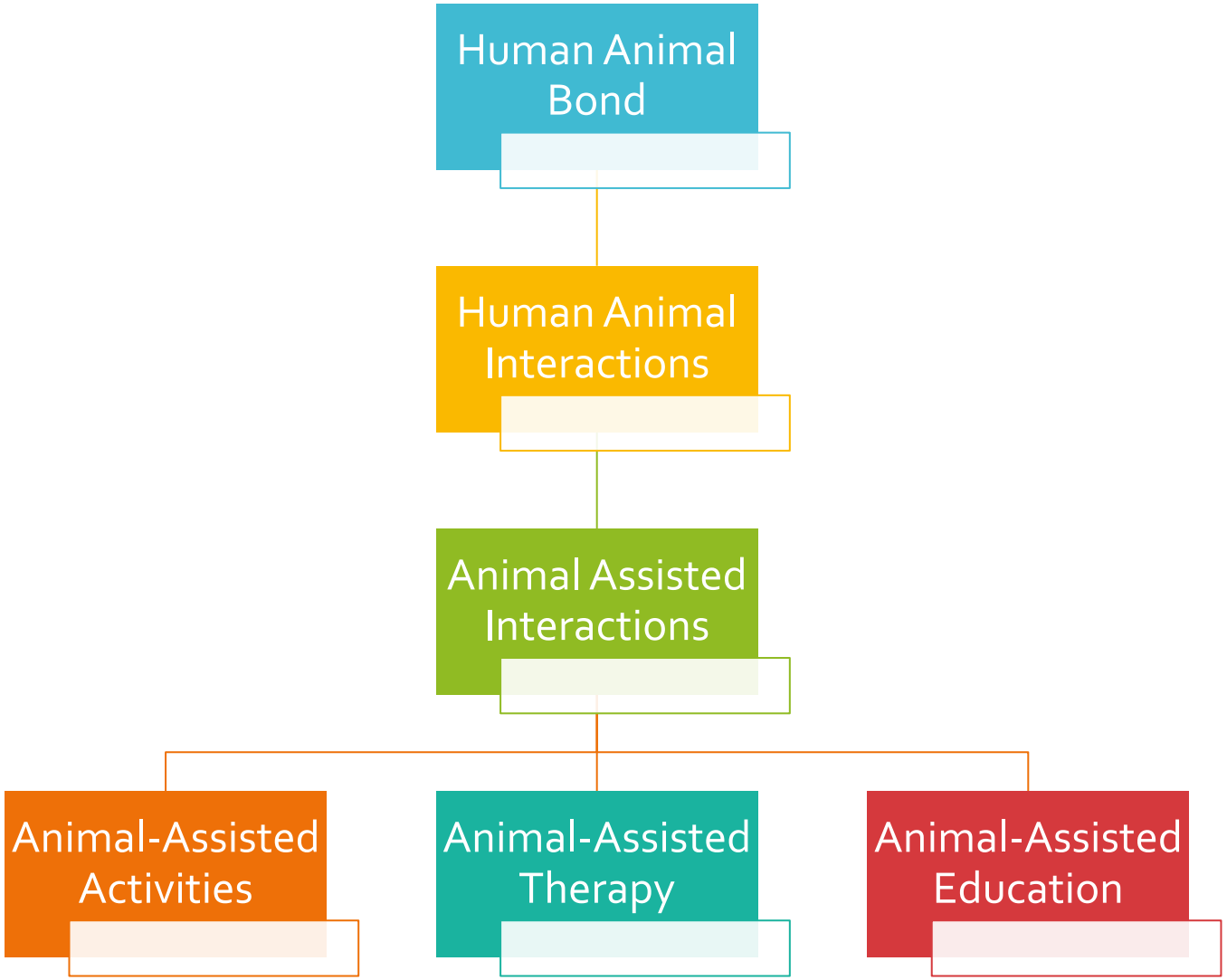
Animal Assisted Intervention

- Therapeutic approach involving animals
- Assists individuals in achieving therapeutic goals or improving well-being
- Conducted by trained professionals

Types of AAI

- Animal Related Engagement
- Animal Assisted Education
- Animal Assisted Therapy
- Animal Assisted Activities




Human Animal Bond
Human Animal Interactions
Animal Assisted Interactions
Animal-Assisted Activities
Animal-Assisted Therapy
Animal-Assisted Education

Autism and Mental Health

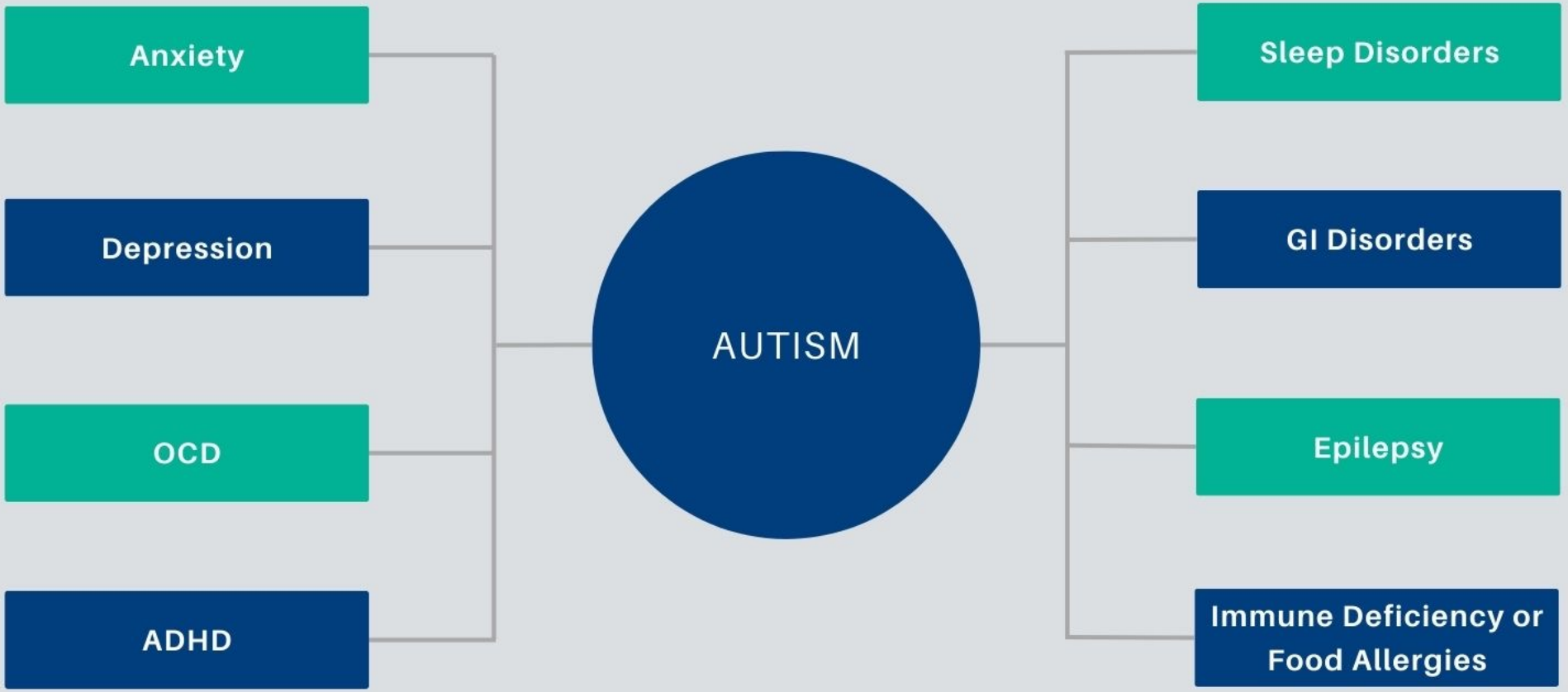


Many individuals with autism experience co-occurring mental health conditions

Co-occurring mental health issues in individuals with autism can present unique challenges

AUTISM AND MENTAL HEALTH

CO-OCCURRING DIAGNOSES IN AUTISM



Accessing Mental Health Services in the US



Accessing Mental Health Services in the US

- Average wait time for therapy: 6+ weeks
- Average cost for therapy: $50-$150/session
- 60% of psychologists are not accepting new patients
- 40% of psychologists had a waitlist of 10+ patients

Animal Assisted Interventions and Autism



Physiological Benefits of AAI in Autism

- Decreased heart rate
- Decreased blood pressure
- Decrease in anxiety



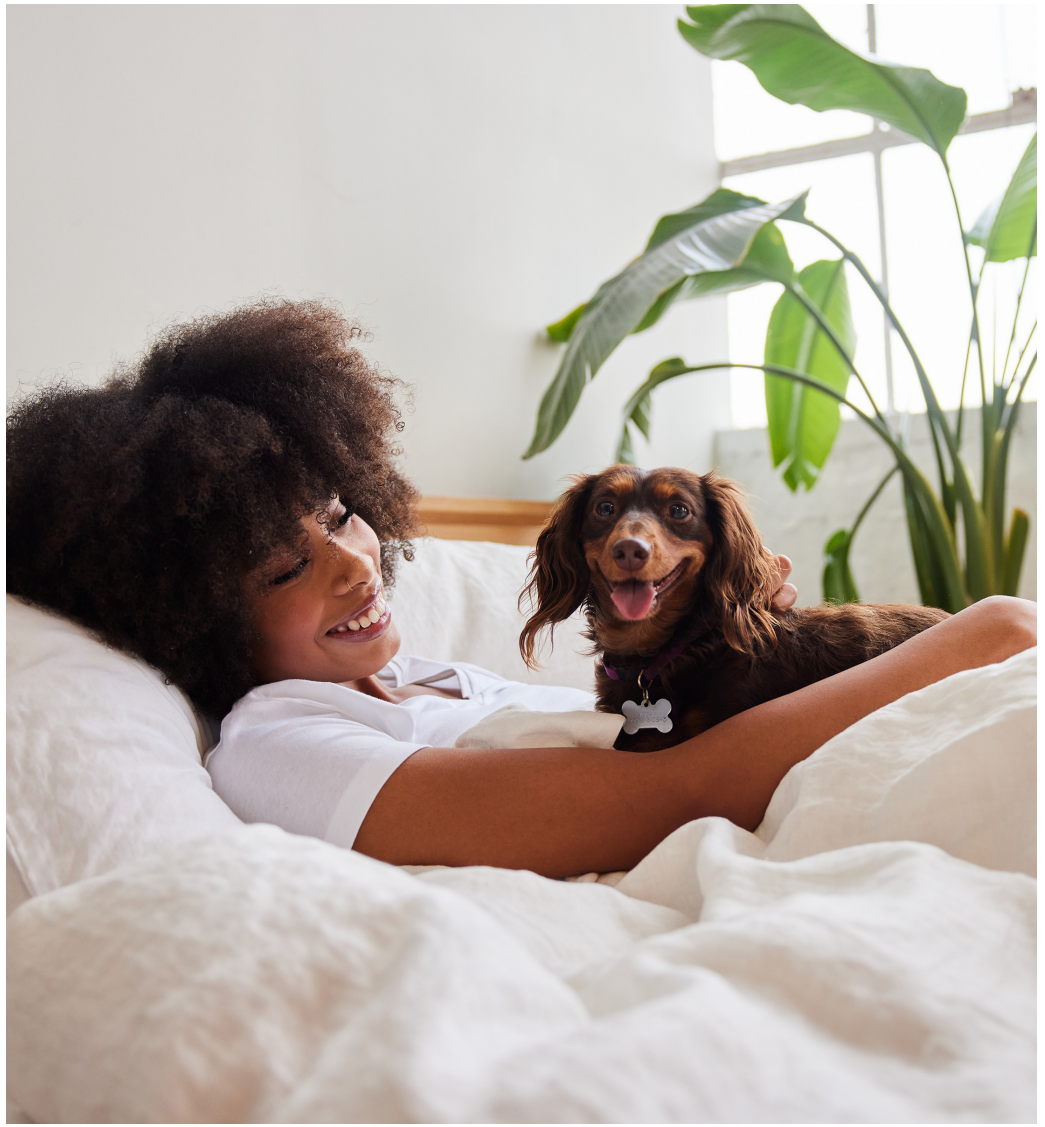


Social and Emotional Benefits of AAI in Autism

- Emotional Connection
- Improved Communication
- Enhanced Social Skills

Benefits of AAI in Autism

- Increased Motivation
- Enhanced Focus and Attention
- Sensory Integration
- Boosted Self-Esteem



Accessing AAI



Summary





AUTISM BARKS

Resources

Websites	Books for Parents	Books for Kids
Autism Barks	Dogs and Autism	ELLA: A Dog with a Job
Association of Animal Assisted Professionals	Animals in Translation	The Dog That Gave My Brother Words
Autism Speaks	A Friend Like Henry	A Friend For Henry

Please note links above are clickable.

- https://www.verywellhealth.com/psychiatric-service-dog-benefits-laws-training-5206941#:~:text=Benefits%20to%20humans%20have%20been,and%20less%20reliance%20on%20medication.
- https://psychcentral.com/autism/autism-service-dogs#summary
- https://www.autismspectrumnews.org/diagnosing-depression-in-autistic-individuals/
- https://www.rover.com/blog/autism-service-dogs/
- https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/news/everything-about-emotional-support-animals/
- https://www.minddog.org.au/
- https://uncw.edu/chhs/shahs/academic/undergraduate/rectherapy/servicedogtraining.html
- https://littleangelsservicedogs.org/
- https://www.wcvb.com/article/world-class-service-dogs-trained-in-princeton-mass/41757137
- Appleby, R., Wright, S., Williams, L., & Stanley, M. (2022). Australian parents' experiences of owning an autism assistance dog. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30, e4113–e4121. https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13805