

AI TRANSCRIPT FOR BRAAAINS PODCAST EPISODE 010 - ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY (BRAAAINSPodcast.COM)

00:00:09 - Heather Taylor

Welcome to Braaains, a podcast exploring the inner workings of our brains and how film and television portray them. Hosted by me, writer-director Heather Taylor.

00:00:17 - Sarah Taylor

And by me, film and television editor Sarah Taylor. Before we begin, we want to acknowledge that the lens from which we recorded this podcast are part of territories that have long served as a gathering place for diverse indigenous peoples, and we are thankful as guests on this land to be able to live, work and gather here.

00:00:33 - Heather Taylor

On today's episode, we'll be talking about animals and animal-assisted therapy. Jocelyn Nand from the Family Counseling center in Edmonton is joining us to talk about her co-therapist and dog, Watson.

00:00:47 - Sarah Taylor

I love Watson.

00:00:48 - Heather Taylor

Watson's so cute and the work that they do to help a variety of clients dealing with emotional dysregulation issues, impulse controls, behavioral struggles, anxiety, low self-esteem, any trauma or severe loss, or even those who have sensory struggles. We'll also discuss our impact on the mental health of animals and how positive reinforcement when training pets can go a long way.

00:01:10 - Sarah Taylor

A quick reminder to our listeners that this interview should not be taken as medical advice, and it is for informational purposes only because everyone's brain is different. Please consult your healthcare professional if you have any questions. And now, Jocelyn Nand.

00:01:29 - Heather Taylor

Thank you so much for joining us today on our podcast.

00:01:32 - Jocelyn Nand

Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here.

00:01:34 - Heather Taylor

First off, before we dive into the questions that we have for you, we'd love for you to tell us a little bit more about yourself and why and how you became interested in using animals in your practice.

00:01:44 - Jocelyn Nand

My name is Jocelyn Nand and I'm a registered provisional psychologist and I work in private practice. I'm a business owner. I run three offices, one in Edmonton, Beaumont and Leduc. And aside from that, I'm a mom. So I'm a mom with two kids and they also keep me busy. I've got two dogs as well. I think it's a pretty fulfilling life, one that I pretty much enjoy. And I would say that my interest in utilizing animals really started off when I was in grad school. I was just thinking about my own experience and having had a dog and have always had one since I was 18, but never as a child. And I thought a lot about how I feel when I'm around my dogs and just how comforting the presence can be, just how attuned they are to you and just all the little nooks and crannies of their personality and temperament, and they're just so playful, right? So you can't not be playful with a dog that's trying to engage with you?

00:02:43 - Sarah Taylor

Yes.

00:02:44 - Jocelyn Nand

I mean, you could try to resist, but resistance is.

00:02:48 - Sarah Taylor

It's really true.

00:02:50 - Jocelyn Nand

It is. And so when I started working as an intern and I was doing my master's program in BC, when I started off as an intern and then later as a provisional psychologist, the first few experiences I had working with children were all with children who were in the foster care system. And so these were children who had really rough beginnings in life. And the ones that were coming to see me were either currently in the foster care system, were in some kind of weird transition place between potentially going back to their biological caregivers or in the process of being adopted. And the one thing that I guess was in common, no matter what client I saw, it was their lack of trust in adults, actually, because so many of their experiences were just inconsistent. And then there were abusive aspects in the relationships with caregivers as well, and so the trust piece was just not there. And then when I would form relationships with them and I would build rapport and I would gain their trust, it would only be a matter of time before they were pulled from therapy, or something would happen, and it would be like inconsistent attendance, and then they come back even more hardened and even more defensive. And so then it would be like starting all over again in some ways. And that's what kind of introduced me to maybe I should try having an animal in therapy room and just see how that shifts the energy even when they come in. And so then I started doing training, and I came to realize that not all the dogs that I owned were suitable for this work. They were lovely as my own pets and my own companions at home. But therapy work, not so much. So then I started searching for a dog that would have a good temperament, style and personality, where there wouldn't be risk factors in having them join into my work. And a lot of training went into this program. There's a lot of postgraduate training that I did for myself and then a lot of training that I put my dog through as well. So my dog, Watson, he is my animal co therapist in the room, and he's actually a rescue. The more and more research and the more and more training that I did, the more I came to

realize that this would be a great way for clients to feel safer in the room and then to just experience the same type of unconditional, positive regard that I've experienced in even just having dogs as pets. So that was kind of the origins, I guess, of how I really dived into this work.

00:05:35 - Sarah Taylor

What have you noticed when you did start implementing Watson into your therapy room. How did that change for you?

00:05:42 - Jocelyn Nand

The. I think you know, right from the beginning, when Watson's waiting for them to come into the room or he greets them at the door, there's just such a level of excitement that he displays, and it's all positive. He's got his goofy smile, his tongues hanging out of his mouth, and he's interested and totally attuned to them. And so just being greeted in a way where it's like, I'm so excited to see you. You matter to me. That experience in and of itself, just kind of helps people who are coming in a little bit guarded or nervous about the process just lighten up in a lot of ways. Right. And their stress level kind of goes down because, especially when they're petting the dog, for instance, because we know from research that on a neurotransmitter level, we're increasing the release of serotonin. We've got oxytocin kind of coming in and regulating emotions and just kind of downplaying cortisol levels that are often our stress hormones. And so blood pressure would kind of start to normalize as well. So if they came in agitated, just even petting him was very calming and regulating and grounding. And then he was very attuned to them like they were to him. So if they were nervous or if they came in very adjusted. But then we got into a topic that riled them up in some way. He would kind of lean into them in those exact moments, or he would just patiently sit in front of them. And he's a very tall and big dog, so you can't avoid presence. He's 110 pounds.

00:07:18 - Sarah Taylor

Wow.

00:07:19 - Jocelyn Nand

Doesn't know it. They would just allow him to kind of connect with them in that manner, and they would start petting him, and then they'd be more regulated in the room and much more calm. And then with some clients, depending on what's going on in their world, there's often some kind of overlap in whatever narrative I have with Watson in his life outside with me, or just his life coming to my home that I can kind of also incorporate into therapy. So, again, if I'm working with a child that really has gone through one home environment to the other, when I share Watson's story and, like, he was a rescue, and he kind of went from one home to the other before he kind of came to us. And what his experience was of, they know what it might be like, and I'm not having to put my own interpretations out there. I mean, I have empathy, and I can express my empathy towards what they've experienced, but Watson kind of shares the same narrative, and so they're almost able to relate with him because they're. Oh, yeah, like, we know what that's.

00:08:23 - Heather Taylor

Yeah. Who benefits the most from having this type of therapy with an animal in the room?

00:08:29 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. I mean, there's so many different types of clients that benefit from this. I think anyone who has any emotional dysregulation issues. So we're talking, like, impulse controls, behavioral struggles, anxiety, low self esteem, any trauma or severe loss, all of those kind of issues work really well. Kids even who have sensory struggles or even are on the autism spectrum. So children and adults with all of these types of issues would benefit from him being in the room. And that's just because a lot of the goals in animal assisted therapy, or even animal assisted play therapy, really gets into some of these presenting concerns that clients come in. You know, the goal is to foster empathy and to build those skills. The goal is to kind of help them regulate and have a sense. Know if I was really loud and screaming in the room and Watson moved away from me, oh, what's going on for Watson? Can we tune into that? And then they're like, oh, it's because I was loud, so I need to be quieter. It is very different. Rather than me coming in with a limit and telling them that if we're not quiet, Watson's not going to like, it's not shaming language, then I like. Then, you know, there's. There's other aspects as well from the attachment standpoint. So if we were to talk about a healthy attachment style with a caregiver early on in life versus an unhealthy, insecure attachment style, people who have had healthy ones and secure attachments, they have had someone meet their needs regardless of what those needs are. So whether it's their emotional needs, whether it's providing them with consistent care and stability in their environment, that's been met. And so when they kind of meet a dog, they kind of already have this operating framework. And so it's a little bit easier to kind of build the empathy pieces and the focus on nonverbal cues. But for a child, let's say, or even an adult who hasn't experienced a healthy, secure attachment style, and it's more insecure, they haven't had that consistent sense of support and nurture. If they were crying, maybe they were left crying for hours and hours before anyone kind of came. They may not have that existing framework. But when they experience it from a dog or an animal in general, there's something about that experience that helps them start building the foundational blocks for it, which then the therapist kind of harnesses and builds and facilitates more on. But, yeah, it's a really powerful thing to see that they can then connect and almost receive the attention they're getting from Watson in a much different way than they would from me, because I, as the adult, have an know they're being sent to see me, let's say, for a particular reason. And so they think that they need to behave a particular way to earn whatever they think know, whether it's my trust or acceptance for the dog or animal, it's very different. It's just being in their presence and being accepted in their presence and kind of nurtured.

00:11:28 - Sarah Taylor

I know for myself I didn't grow up with animals. Well, full disclosure, Heather's actually very allergic to animals, so we didn't grow up with animals. Or we had them, and then Heather made them go away. No, I'm just kidding.

00:11:43 - Heather Taylor

I did. It was doves.

00:11:45 - Jocelyn Nand

Okay.

00:11:45 - Sarah Taylor

I had a pet dove, and she was allergic to my pet dove. But anyway, that's a whole other story. So I haven't had dogs until my adult life, and I started dating my now husband, and he had a black lab and just loved this dog, and this dog changed his life. And so this is the first time I lived with a dog, and I really liked her. I was like, yeah, this dog's cool. Okay, we have a dog. And then I found my dog. So we got a second dog named Penny, and I met her at a dog rescue event, and it was just like I needed her. There was some sort of weird connection, and I started sobing, and my husband's like, are you okay? And I'm like, there's something about this dog. I just need this dog. And then I noticed, I thought that I could sense the calmness when I was with Abby. There's something about me and Penny where I just made this connection with her, and she can sense if I'm starting to feel anxious or if I'm. And she'll come to me, and she'll be like, Kate, put her paw on my knee to make sure. Mom, are you. I'm here. Let's have a pet. So, there's something about having a connection with an animal that brought me. That calms me down. I don't know where I'm going with that. I just share that. I've experienced it, and I can see the value just in my day to day life, one of my questions is, I noticed on your site that you actually have more than just dogs. You have, like, cats and goats, I think, and horses. Can you kind of walk through the other animals that work in your practice? And maybe, I don't know, a laundry list of benefits of, like, what could a goat do for somebody? I'm curious.

00:13:16 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah, I mean, goat, sheep, rabbits, chickens, the sky is kind of the limit to some degree, although I would say some are better at some of therapeutic goals we're trying to have in place than others. There's a sensory component, as always, where with kids who, let's say, have struggles with different types of sensations and touches and textures, it can be quite regulating to experience just animal fur in and of itself. So, like, a sheep's texture is quite different than a horse or a dog. And so sometimes just growing comfort in some of those sensory struggles that they're experiencing is nice, but almost. The research would say that all the things that I kind of talked about earlier can be facilitated with training and the right temperament of animals as well, for all of these types of goals that we have for, whether it's emotional regulation, whether it's fostering empathy, whether it's building problem solving skills or growing cognitive skills, and for some, even speech skills. Right? So some children are thinking about ones who have, like, selective mutism, for instance, where they won't speak in any environment, or there's only a few environments they speak in, but not others. It's a very different experience to then be around animals because there's almost, again, that agenda piece, right? Like, when they're around adults or other caregivers, there's almost like this pressure to maybe do something, whereas with the animals, they can just be, and they can play. And that's almost one of our first opportunities of learning anything in life is through play. Right. When you get to do that with animals, whether you're an older child, a child kind of getting that experience for the first time or an adult, you kind of go back to those foundational elements of play and the way that we connect and relate with others. And so I would say that regardless of what animal it is, the benefits are definitely there. We do have more research with certain animals. So, like equine assisted therapy with horses and canine assisted therapy when you search those up, definitely more research in that area. And then there's growing research with other animals as well. There's limitations on what we can do, right? We can't train a chick to do the same thing that we

can train a dog and horse to do. And so there's different animals that can be utilized for different goals and components of what we're after. But I would say overall, it's those elements. And then I think where it's outside of a traditional office space, at least for the horses and the other born animals, there's almost an aspect of nature therapy that kind of gets incorporated into that as well. Right. So you're really grounded then, not only just with animal, but then with nature. And it's harder to not be in that moment then, rather than being taken away by your anxieties or whatever else that you might be thinking about.

00:16:16 - Heather Taylor

Okay. I'm curious then, because we're talking about all these different animals, and someone actually asked on twitter, because I know that certain people will have therapy pets, but they're very wide ranging in terms of the animals that make someone feel the most comfortable or reduces their anxiety. But what makes us like cat people, dog people? Is there something innate in us or they said or mental that leads us to prefer one over the other, or why do we gravitate towards a certain pet to feel calmness over another? I'm just really curious.

00:16:49 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. I don't know if I have a research supported answer for that, but my hunch would be that a lot of it has to do with our own personalities and our own characteristics. Right. And so when we see something like that that's similar in the animal that we're choosing or that we're around, there almost is this mirroring effect happen? And so we just naturally kind of gravitate towards them, I would say. And anytime I talk about, when I ask people why they like the certain pets that they have, they'll give all sorts of different reasons. And often I'm like, there's actually a fair bit of overlap here between who you are and your likes and dislikes and the style of your cat in some ways. So, I mean, I don't, again, not a research supported answer there, but I think a lot of it does have to do with our own stuff that we then project onto the animals.

00:17:43 - Sarah Taylor

That leads to another question that was actually asked on Twitter is how can our mental health impact our animals mental health.

00:17:51 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. So coming back to that concept of mirroring, it goes both ways. Right? So even when I think about my own experiences of having a dog and some of the milestones or challenges in my own life, hardships that I've kind of been through and having my dog kind of be with me through them, there's a witnessing component for them, too. And so this is where even animal welfare as a topic kind of ends up coming into. Even the work that I do as a strong component of the work do, because as we are impacted by them, they are impacted by us. So if we're in a high stress kind of arousal state all the time, and our dogs or our cats or whatever our animals are that are around us, they're being impacted, and so their stress levels can change. This is an area that requires a little bit more research just to see how we impact the animal stress levels. But there is an impact, and there's even growing literature to say that animals might actually also have some mental health related issues. Right. So if you think about if there's a house that has more than one pet in it, and all of a sudden we go from having three dogs to one or even two, that dog is going to notice that my other companions are no longer there. And so we see a

drop in mood. And so I think that there is a huge overlap, and again, not an area that's researched as much as I would like it to be, but I do think that there is a strong impact that we have. And so in my work that I do, there's often caution in has my dog had enough time to play and have a break between really intense sessions where I know clients are coming in with really heavy stuff. Right. And other times there's a strong focus on the cues. So it is taxing to kind of do what I do in some ways, too, because I'm paying attention to the client's cues, I'm paying attention to Watson's cues, and then I'm paying attention to my own, to kind know, analyze in some ways what's needed in the. But there's, there's a lot of room for harm, I think, when we don't incorporate animal welfare into our conversations and the things that we do.

00:20:10 - Heather Taylor

What are some things that you notice where you're, know, I think that Watson needs a break. Like what are some things that you notice, know, in your practice that may also be reflective view? Like when do you need a break from this? Because it's a lot, it's a.

00:20:25 - Jocelyn Nand

You know, there's a few different signs for animal stress. I'm going to talk about the dog specific ones. So sometimes boredom, excessive sleep, excessive turning away from not being interested in what's kind of going on. Dogs do sleep a lot of the day, too, so sometimes it's figuring out, is it actual tiredness and fatigue that would be normal or is my dog disengaging from this client for a particular reason? That's where looking at the person's cues and what's going on for them is also helpful then. So all the context information, but otherwise, like excessive panting, if he's not really settling down, there's something that's going on for him. If the whites of his eyes are showing, like a lot of people for they, if they go to hug their dogs, which is not actually something the dogs are used to, except for Watson, who's done a lot of training, so he's kind of used to it. But most dogs, not so much. They give a stress response and so you see almost what looks like a smile, but then their eyes are kind of off and you see the corners being very white. And that's a stress signal. Their hackles kind of going up, their fur kind of starting to rise. That's a stress signal. Growling, excessive licking, even can also show boredom. So there's a lot of different signs that I'm kind of paying attention to, salivation also being one of them. But yeah, there's a few. And with each animal there's different cues and signs you would pay attention to. But the most familiar that I am is with Watson because I don't engage in the equine piece myself yet, although I have some training in it.

00:22:07 - Sarah Taylor

I'm curious, actually, how much training, extra training did you have to do to incorporate animals into your therapy?

00:22:14 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah, so I think there's like, I would almost describe it as different phases and stages of training. So first you're trying to kind of find a dog who has the right temperament, who is not going to respond to sensory stimuli in a way that is agitated or increases the risk for something happening, harm coming to the animal or the person in the room. So I remember I took a few different workshops. It was actually some I took from the, I think it was the Edmonton Humane Society. And they had done some therapy dog types trainings which are different than animal

assisted work. So therapy dog training is more where your animal is kind of accompanying you to different environments. And there's that tactile touch and regulating component. They're very grounding, but there isn't like clinical therapy that's kind of taking place with that. Right. And so in that class, we would have wheelchairs coming towards him, we would have walkers coming towards him, loud noises kind of going off and really kind of playing on that startle response and then getting him desensitized to some of those things. Same thing with touch. We always have limits in the room, and there's a lot of preparation that takes place before clients get to see the animal. So there's a sharing of what commands he knows what's the appropriate types of touch that can or can't be done and what would happen if it continues like those types of things. So then it's not uncommon for me when I was training Watson, to put my hands into his mouth and feel for his teeth, know, really feel his gums and touch his paws and play with his tail, all the different types of things that someone might do to him on purpose or accidentally.

00:24:06 - Sarah Taylor
Right.

00:24:06 - Jocelyn Nand
And kind of gauge his response. So there's that aspect of it. There's the actual obedience training aspect of it, which is used through positive reinforcement. That's the only thing that I support when it comes to training animals. And then there was the postgraduate training that I took. And so I did my training with a woman who's in the United States. Her name is Reese Van Fleet, and she's actually a published author and trainer in play therapy, as well as animal assisted therapy and animal assisted play therapy. And so we basically learned the foundations of what is canine communication? What is equine communication, what does it look like? Stress kind of body cues. And then it was building in the clinical aspects of, okay, you have these presenting concerns that come in. How do you kind of integrate the animal that you are working with and assist the client with whatever it is that they're struggling with? So different interventions or activities that might be good. So I'll give you an example. So, for instance, I have some little ones that come to see me, and they'll have separation anxiety, for instance, and some dogs, if they don't start with it at some point in their life, if you close the door and leave them in the room, they'll whine and whine and whine. And so, you know, I'll have my clicker and my treats handy. And, you know, Watson is having a really hard time being away from us, and what are some ways that we can help him with this? Right. So we're going to reinforce treats every time we come back, and he's waiting there quietly and comfortably and all the reassurance pieces that we might do. And I'm actively involving the child as they're doing this work with me. And so then they are building the problem solving skills as well.

00:25:49 - Heather Taylor
That's cool.

00:25:50 - Jocelyn Nand
Yeah. And then I'm kind of supplementing the pieces that may not have intuitively come to them.

00:25:55 - Sarah Taylor
Oh, that's so cool. Because it doesn't seem as scary. Maybe like, I'm not sitting on this couch

and this lady's not telling me, if you're feeling anxious, you should try this. Yeah, I think that's a wonderful example. I love.

00:26:11 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. Yeah, it totally is. And then, know what I had alluded to earlier? With kids who have impulse struggles or are very loud or social skills are kind of lacking, then we're able to kind of say, oh, I wonder what was going on for Watson when XYZ happened. And it's always through curiosity that we kind of put it out there, and they almost always have the right answer. Right? Not, there is a wrong answer, but they'll be like, oh, he did that every time I was loud, or he did that every time when I came up too fast towards him. And then once we do that piece, then I can kind of maybe bring it up to consciousness a little bit and say, I wonder if that's what happens with your friends sometimes. Right?

00:26:59 - Sarah Taylor

Yeah.

00:27:00 - Jocelyn Nand

And then there's that connection piece that happens. And so then work outside of therapy can then take place as well, where then they're like, oh, yeah. So that's maybe what it's like for my friends when I do that. They don't really like that, even though it's not my intention. So, yeah, the skills kind of go past the counseling room then and get applied into real life.

00:27:18 - Heather Taylor

So when you're working with patients and working with Watson, do you have a mix of sessions where sometimes it's Watson sessions and sometimes it's not Watson sessions?

00:27:28 - Jocelyn Nand

Yes. Yeah. Talk therapy isn't necessarily for everyone and know, the first thing that we go to all the time with clients, I've taken training in other areas as well. So art therapy being kind of one of those sand play and sand tray therapy, and then the animal assisted ones, you know, of. And then there's, like, parent child work that I'll do as well. So I'll alternate depending on what I see the needs being for the, um, and where their struggle is. So sometimes we might need to kind of do some more focused learning pieces where Watson maybe is more of a distraction in that moment. So maybe I'll do sessions without him for that and then come back to something different. Or if they don't want to necessarily confide in Watson and we're working through something that was a past trauma, for instance, it might be engaging them in an art activity where they might do something and make it, but then not necessarily have to share it with me, and they can kind of just bury it or put it just. The sky's kind of the limit when you have more options available.

00:28:33 - Sarah Taylor

I'm curious to hear how your life altered when you started bringing Watson into your practice and having him as an option in your line of work.

00:28:45 - Jocelyn Nand

It's interesting that you asked that question, because it's one that I often think about, because it's almost like the same level of commitment that you put into preparing for a child. Right. It's different having a pet and a mom and being a mom of children. I've experienced both now, but the preparation aspect of it kind of seems very similar, where it's like, okay, I got to ensure I've got all the things, and I got to ensure that there's not any reactions and food based things and all the things that I would worry about. But it's interesting because where he's home with me and I get to work with him, my attachment to him has increased as well. Right. This is the therapist in the room being impacted by what's being shared. Right. And so he's my co therapist. So he helps me kind of signal into something that I might not necessarily be queued in on because I'm focusing on the verbal aspect of it. Right. Or I might be focusing on the body aspect of it in another moment because there's something he did that kind of raised my attention there. I think it's also helpful sometimes for my own grounding. I mean, not that you need a therapy animal as a therapist to ground yourself, but he ends up being a grounding source for me as well, where if there's something that's kind of going on and I'm feeling that there's some stronger emotions coming from me. The client may not know it, but I can experience it in my body. And so I often find it regulating to have him in the room as well for myself. In a more, I guess, con. Negative component of it sometimes is sometimes when you have your own animal that is a part of your personal life and your personal family, and something happens in the room where it's kind of bordering on abuse or mistreatment of him, it's a little bit harder in that moment to put my own emotions aside then, like, okay, the focus still here is on everyone's safety. But then I also need to support this client in working through the issues that they are struggling with while not getting defensive and aroused, because my personal family member has also just had something happen.

00:31:08 - Sarah Taylor

To picture Watson being in the room with you and him looking at you like, hey, hey, mom, did you notice that, like, the co therapy aspect is just such a wonderful thing to just visualize? I think that's having an extra set of ears and eyes in the room with you must be so helpful.

00:31:24 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. Each dog has their own strengths, right? So another part of the training was, what is your dog's strength? So he's very scent driven. So scent and food driven. So it's really nice for to then have activities and interventions that really play in on that strength to be like, okay, we're going to play hide and seek in the room, but we're going to do it with treats. And your job is to give Watson cues to see where they are. And he's kind of using his nose to the ground and doing this work, and it's playful and it's fun. And then I never knew this about him, but when I started to do, like, sand play or sand tray work with clients, they would go to my shelves, and it's filled with different figures and different objects, all thematically organized for making pictures in the sand of anything, really. And what he started to do is he would follow them, and then every now and then, he would select something off of the shelf and just bring it to them, being like, I think you should put this in the tray. Sometimes they would use it, and other times they'd be like, oh, thanks, Watson, but I don't think I want to use that. But it was interesting. So I'm like, maybe he has, like, a sand play fetish in some. But again, like, that playful aspect. That's. That's a Watson thing. There are some things that I can't train in him, and there are. I can't train out of.

00:32:46 - Heather Taylor

Like, he's just like, I want to make art. Can someone let me make some art, please?

00:32:51 - Sarah Taylor

Come on. Dying to be an artist.

00:32:53 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. And when the weather is warm and nice, too, it can take us outside of the counseling office, too, where it's like, well, maybe we're talking and we're outside and he's playing fetch, or we're just walking in general and they're petting him, and it's just, again, calm and regulating. There's movement attached to that.

00:33:14 - Heather Taylor

I like that. What are some misconceptions that you think are out there about animal therapy?

00:33:21 - Jocelyn Nand

I think sometimes, while it's true that with any animal, there's always risks, I know one misconception I often come across is if someone has had negative experiences with an animal before, that animal cystic therapy isn't going to be ideal for them. And that's actually not always the case. It can actually be a really good way of working through that because we think about things that we're anxious of and do we really want someone to continue being anxious of something long term if we can come in and kind of do some work around it? I think some of the other pieces that are common misconceptions is any of the language that I find, like the language ends up being kind of disheartening where it's like, well, the dog is almost seen as an object, as a tool. And I'm very careful, even as I was giving my responses, I was very careful in what I said about him and how he's integrated into my work. I don't say used. There's certain language that I just don't utilize because it kind of gives that misconception that he's just something that I get to take in and take out and there's no consideration for him. And aside from that, I think, again, with just different presenting concerns where it's like, well, my child has a lot of sensory struggles, and I just don't know because what if this or what if that? But sometimes because of, again, the playful aspect of it, they're maybe able to tolerate his licks, whereas normally they would hate getting wet. One experience I think that recently happened was in regards, well, Covid has been really interesting for that. Right. So I can put in limits and things in place and can prepare clients really well. But sometimes when the clients do something that they're not supposed to do, it's a little bit harder to then say, well, we can have therapy in the parameters that was set. So when masks were on and people had just come from eating, then I had a dog who was in their space licking the mask, all these pieces. Right. And so then I'm sitting here being like, okay, this is why we have limits. This is why we have these pieces. But sometimes it doesn't go as planned or someone says they comprehend something, but then in practice it looks different. And so it can be a little bit of a struggle to then let clients know that we're going to have to change something up. And not all presenting concerns, and not all clients are actually suitable for doing this type of work. Right. So if someone has had a long history of lots of animal cruelty, am I going to begin with Watson right away? Probably not. There's a lot of different risk factors that I'm going to look through first. Yeah, I would say those are some of my top ones that come up also emphasis on language of the good dog versus the bad dog. Right.

And so there's a lot of socialization that needs to take place. And so I don't think any animal is really good or bad, especially when we talk about a therapy setting or even in pet ownership in general. I think it's a lot about socialization and research and helping people understand what's involved, because sometimes we place a lot of responsibility on the animal to not do something or to do something, and that's actually not okay. And it's kind of sad because that's why a lot of them end up in rescue shelters or, sadly, even get put down.

00:36:45 - Heather Taylor

Yeah, I'm going to kind of just jump off the back of what I just asked about misconceptions, because, okay, animals are in so many films and so many tv shows to the point that there's a movie out right now called dog like. I mean, they're not even hiding it. No, I'm joking.

00:37:00 - Sarah Taylor

It was actually good. I watched dog. I like dog. Anyway, continue.

00:37:04 - Heather Taylor

I was trying to be funny. It wasn't that funny, but it's okay. But I'm curious, what kind of things would you love to see more in the media that we see? Maybe that could help around some of these misconceptions? Because it's not just about therapy. It is about dog ownership, or, sorry, not just dog ownership, but animal ownership. So what would you like to see more when we're thinking about the television shows and the movies that are being made and created?

00:37:29 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. Well, I'll start with the one thing that I think that they always get that's really solid. And the one thing that I think is a positive depiction is the actual bond that can be formed. Right. Hollywood gets that really well, and they portray that very well. I think some of the pieces that aren't portrayed well or then lead to misconceptions or things that make me cringe are just, again, not really a regard for the actual animal and its well being. So it's like, when you were shooting, did that animal have, like, how many breaks did that animal have expected? And how was the training itself done? And was it positive reinforcement? I think in an ideal world, if three people could kind of get together to make a book, I would say they should consult a therapist who does this type of work. They should have a veterinarian and then an animal trainer that uses positive reinforcement all come together to write a book or make a movie because I think people are misinformed about what is okay and not okay to do around animals. And there's a lot of outdated stuff that's still out there. So any depiction of this alpha attitude of having to dominate the animal, that's actually not healthy or helpful. There was also, like, Caesar Milan's pack mentality. Stuff like that's been debunked, like, ages ago, but it's still out there. Shock collars and even just not knowing that it's probably better for a dog to have a harness on their back versus a collar around their neck and pulling at it and what kind of damage that does over time. And so that's where I kind of go back to the. If three people could get together and write a book, it would be a really good book, because then talk about all the different things and in a healthy, positive way. Same thing with treating animals like objects. So painting them, dressing them up, anything where it's very clear that they're stress signals and the humans are like, oh, look, what a great thing. But the animals are. If you look and pay attention to the animals, they are not saying the same thing through their communication. And it's hard, I think, because of

this concept of anthropomorphism, where we assign human characteristics and traits to animals. Right. And so, on the one hand, there's great bonding that happens because of it, but on the other hand, we project a lot of stuff that actually is not theirs. And in doing so, I think that's where some of the harm takes place. Right.

00:40:12 - Heather Taylor

Okay, so if you could make tomorrow a movie, what would you love to see featuring Watson?

00:40:18 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah, I think it would know the human bond to animals would definitely still be there. I think anything that comes from Watson's vantage point of what it's like for him to engage in any of the work that he's know his cues, his stress, having someone actually comment on what's taking place be great, rather than the human just doing whatever they're doing, and the dog just kind of going along and it just being this, oh, look how cute that is. Moment, rather than a. Actually, this is what happened. So, yeah, I would say something along that lines, and then just, I think the positive attributes of having any animal that you get to kind of be with and how grounding it can kind of be and what a positive experience it is for healing as well. I would love to see a depiction of someone who's gone through a mental health struggle and them talking about how it was beneficial for them, and then having clips on the dog, kind of more of a focus on the dog. So you hear the voice of the person and what they're struggling with, but more of, like, that vantage point of the camera being on the dog, being like, what's the dog doing right now? Kind of something like that would, I think, be really neat and fascinating because then it kind of takes your perspective and your framework into that space rather than just on the person. Right.

00:41:50 - Heather Taylor

Yeah.

00:41:51 - Jocelyn Nand

So definitely that. That's cool. I'd watch that.

00:41:55 - Sarah Taylor

I like that.

00:41:55 - Heather Taylor

Let's go, dog two, Watson.

00:41:59 - Sarah Taylor

And also, I feel like you need to write a book with a dog trainer. That's your next thing to do, write that book.

00:42:07 - Jocelyn Nand

Maybe I need to talk to my veterinarian, all of this stuff and talk to the lady who did my training.

00:42:13 - Heather Taylor

Exactly.

00:42:14 - Jocelyn Nand

It's always interesting to think about my own experience of having a dog in my home and in my life and then the therapy aspect of it as well. And I think about even, like, the aspect of dog loss or animal loss.

00:42:29 - Sarah Taylor

Right.

00:42:30 - Jocelyn Nand

People are like, oh, don't own one because eventually they're going to go and it's going to be this horrible thing because you're going to hurt and grieve and all those things. But I think our animals end up being a little bit like record keepers for us. Though they may not be able to speak, they do witness us in whatever we lived through. Right. And that was no different for me. When I lost my first dog, I realized how much she kind of held for me in something. Right. Because I went from high school to undergrad to grad school and then got married and then had a kid, and she was with me through all of that. And so when she left, I was like, oh, here's this presence that I no longer have. And yes, it's heartbreaking, but I think it's also a good learning experience, especially for a younger age group on loss, because we don't really get a good, healthy version of that. I mean, there's a lot of things we don't get good, healthy versions of, but that's another taboo topic. Right. We're almost better in society talking about sex than we are about loss and grieving. And so I almost wish that there was more. Even in. In that area. There's all of these movies. Maybe we'd have to do episodes.

00:43:49 - Sarah Taylor

Yes, maybe it's a tv show. Well, that leads us to, do you have any resources that you could recommend to our listeners to engage in animal therapy?

00:44:00 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. So the sad thing is that when you go to Google Animal assisted therapy, what comes up is a bunch of training information, but nothing really specifically geared towards people who need to understand what this work looks like. And so I would say anywhere in the city that when you search in animal assisted play therapy or animal assisted therapy in Edmonton, there are different organizations. So us being one of them, there's dream catchers is another one, hooves of hope is another. And these are all filled with different resources or just a small enough breakdown of what to expect and what the benefits are. And regardless of whether they think they're going to pursue it or not, they can always ask, depending on the place, for just a consult, for a free consult on, like, tell me a little bit about why this would be beneficial if I'm coming in with this presenting concern, and I think a therapist who's trained in that area is able to then really kind of get to the heart of what some of their hesitancy is around, or where this would be really great as a fit, or where it maybe wouldn't be a good fit right now in this moment until some other things maybe took place.

00:45:13 - Heather Taylor

And if someone wanted to pursue being a therapist like you did, I know you said you had to go to the states for training. There are places that people. We'll have listeners. Well, we have

listeners from all over the world, but where can people start to look at, how do I start to incorporate this? Or even I'm going to add another thing about positive reinforcement and the kind of theories behind that.

00:45:37 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah, I think when you search up positive reinforcement, dog training, there's at least a plethora of things you can find there. One of my favorite books, just in helping families of all ages kind of come to terms with a dog in their home or a pet in their home is this book. It's called kids and Dogs Professionals guide to helping families. And this one kind of goes through the misconceptions, some of the body cues. So that's a really good one to just kind of start with as a precursor. As far as doing what I do, you don't necessarily have to be a psychologist. You could be a counselor, you could be a social worker. All of them kind of have different, depending on which route you kind of take. They all have their different requirements as far as education and then their respective licensing body, but postgraduate training, even though this woman, Reese Van Fleet, she's out in the states, she had actually come to Vancouver and had hosted a training. So I had done it there. And then she's got a facility. I believe dreamcatchers also has a lot of training that they put on whose of hope does the same thing. So there's lots of training that people can take even if they don't utilize know as a social worker, as a therapist, as a counselor, as a psychologist if they're interested in it. And they almost maybe get to start there first in some ways. But there might be limitations where the clinical information may not make as much sense to them if they don't have some of those prerequisites ahead of time. But I do think it's an area that we need more qualified and trained people to be in because there's just so many benefits and why not utilize it?

00:47:27 - Sarah Taylor

One last thing. If anybody is in the Edmonton area and would like to come to your practice, where can they find you?

00:47:34 - Jocelyn Nand

Yeah. So if you search WW familycounselingscenters.com, all of our office locations are there. And specifically for me, I work out of the Edmonton and Belmont location right now. And then once my children are a little bit better at being independent, then I'll also have some hours in Laduke over time. But right now I'm in Edmonton and Beaumont, and those are the offices I practice out of. And there are a number of therapists who have also done the same level of rigorous training that I have, and so they are also able to support. And those names are Chantel Thorlickson. There's also Sierra Chimlier. I hope I pronounced her last name right. Danny Newfeld. Those are clinicians also at our office that specialize in that they've taken extensive training in the area. Some work with equines, so with the equine assisted model, just with horses. Others do a combination of both. Some have therapy animals of their own, some do not. But there's options. And like I said, there's other places in the city as well.

00:48:40 - Heather Taylor

Fantastic. Well, just want to say thank you so much for joining us. This has been fantastic. I've learned a lot. I know very little of it. I know about animals, but I just thought it was so fascinating.

I love that Watson is your co therapist. I think when you said that, I was like, of course he is. And what a wonderful title to have.

00:49:00 - Jocelyn Nand
Yeah.

00:49:01 - Sarah Taylor
I want to meet Watson. Yeah, I love him already.

00:49:05 - Jocelyn Nand
I should have brought him in. It's been a pleasure chatting with you ladies, and it's nice to know that even opportunities like this exist for people to kind of tune into and learn about things that may not be discussed in any other platform. So this is great work that you're.

00:49:23 - Sarah Taylor
Thank you.

00:49:24 - Heather Taylor
Thank you.

00:49:24 - Jocelyn Nand
Yeah.

00:49:27 - Sarah Taylor
Chatting with Jocelyn reinforced why I have such a strong relationship with my pups, which is awesome and reminded me how we can affect our dogs, too, or animals. So it's just something that I've been thinking about. But the really awesome thing that I just did this weekend, which is very kind of perfect timing for this episode, is finally, I finally rode a horse. I've never gone horseback riding, and in my line of work, I've done a lot of documentaries and tv series that kind of surround horses. So I've learned about how you ride a horse. I learned how you groom a horse. And I've done segments of that in French and in, like, very well versed in the knowledge about horses. But myself have never been on one. And so me and my daughter were in Jasper, and I decided we're going to go horseback riding. So we were horseback riding in the mountains. Oh, wow. It was beautiful. I took some video, which we will share. I was on the biggest horse. His name was Charlie. He was one of those Clydesdale horses that has the fur legs. He was huge. And at first I was a little nervous, but he knew. He was just like, whatever, we're just going for a walk. It's cool. When we first got to the stables, we got to say hi to a bunch of horses. This one horse I went up to, and I actually felt an overwhelming calm when I was petting him. And I was like, oh, my gosh, I get it now. I get why this works for people, because I probably was feeling a little nervous going horseback riding for the first time with my six year old daughter. Like, what if something goes wrong? There were some nerves there. And then one point during the ride, I realized this was like a big moment in my brain is I have done so much work where I've watched people experience life through editing. So I've been around the world, which is really exciting. That's the fun part about my job. I've been around the world experiencing these awesome experiences through other people's eyes. And it was the first time

that I was sitting on this horse, seeing the same views I've seen in the footage I've worked with, but experiencing it in real time with myself. And I just, like, started to cry as I am now. It was a really special moment, and I feel so lucky that I got to experience that.

00:51:44 - Heather Taylor

That's so amazing. I have an awesome thing that is based in the world of science, as always, per usual. So this is something I saw actually go around the Internet a couple of days ago, and it actually came from a 2014 article in the Atlantic, and it was basically about the idea of neurochemical research that shows that the hormone release when people are in love is released in animals in the same intimate circumstances. So I thought that was super cool.

00:52:15 - Sarah Taylor

Yes.

00:52:16 - Heather Taylor

So the example basically was they were looking at oxytocin levels in animals. And so they basically, in the animal experiment, 100 participants came into the lab and they obtained blood samples from them to just establish, like, their baseline state. And then they went to a private room and played with a dog or cat for 15 minutes and then did a second blood draw and then had participants interact with each other to see how they behaved towards humans, too. If animals cause oxytocin release in humans, it would explain the attachment that we would have to animals.

00:52:49 - Sarah Taylor

Totally, yeah.

00:52:50 - Heather Taylor

And so basically, previous studies showed that when humans engage in social activities with each other, oxytocin levels typically increase between 10% and 50%. So you can measure it in your blood. And so it really depends on who it is. Your daughter running to could be 100%. A stranger shaking your hand could be 10%. So the dog and cat study showed that neither species consistently increased it in humans. Only 30% of participants had an increase in oxytocin after playing with an animal. And basically they said the one factor that predicted whether playing with a dog would increase it was the lifetime number of pets that a person had owned, and same thing with cats. So it's just basically greater lifetime pet ownership caused it to fall where it fell. Dogs reduce stress hormones better than cats. Probably not a surprise. Cats can be assholes.

00:53:38 - Sarah Taylor

Don't really care.

00:53:38 - Heather Taylor

I love cats because they're just like, they're assholes sometimes and I just love that about them. Basically, there's this human canine bond that's really powerful and important. Now, what I really wanted to talk about, so I just wanted to give you that as a preamble. The thing that I'm super

excited about is that they basically, dogs and other mammals exhibit play like the human like behavior of play. So this person was interested and curious if animals can form friendships with other animals. So they took apart the small scale experiment for BBC, where they tested it. They wanted to see if cross species animal play could cause this oxytocin synthesis. So it would be biological evidence for animal friendships. So essentially, at an animal refuge in Arkansas, where a large variety of animals do interact with each other, they obtained a blood sample from a domestic mixed breed terrier and a goat that played with each other. So their plays, like, chase each other, jumping around, engaging and fighting like things that bearing teeth and snirling, they're both young males so they place a dog and goat into an enclosure together and let them play. So they did their blood sample first, and then they let them play, and a second blood sample is done. So they found that the dog had a 48% increase in oxytocin. So this showed that the dog was quite attached to the goat. So they're like. The moderate change would suggest that the dog viewed the goat as a friend. The more striking results was the goat reaction to the dog. It had a 210% increase in oxytocin.

00:55:13 - Sarah Taylor

Oh, my gosh.

00:55:14 - Heather Taylor

And at that level increase, they realize that that's more about love. So they think the goat might be in love with the dog.

00:55:20 - Sarah Taylor

Oh, my goodness.

00:55:21 - Heather Taylor

So I thought that was amazing. But also, just the fact that animals can love and animals create bonds with each other as well as they do.

00:55:32 - Sarah Taylor

With humans reminds me, another cute animal story is we came home from Jasper, just my daughter and I went. And so the dogs, we have three dogs. They stayed home with my husband and my penny. She is very kind of, as a sad dog, she kind of has sad eyes. She's not like the typical dog that you see where they're. Looks like they're smiling. Even though Jocelyn said dogs don't really smile. But when I come home from being away, she does have that happy face, the face that she has when she's outside running in the dog park and excited, she'll have that just looking at me. And so we always call it, she's giving me hard eyes and it's so cute. And then I get hard eyes and everybody's hard eyeing all day long.

00:56:15 - Heather Taylor

That's amazing. I hope that you all enjoyed our discussion around animals and the impacts they have on humans and that impacts humans have on animals and all the things in between. And we really hope we get dog two with Watson because that would be amazing. With that, I'll say. Thank you so much for listening to today's episode of braaaains. Braaaains is hosted and

produced by Heather and Sarah Taylor and mixed and mastered by Tony Bao. Our theme song is by our little brother, Deppisch, and our graphics were created by perpetual notion.

00:56:44 - Sarah Taylor

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00:57:04 - Heather Taylor

And your host, Heather. Bye.