



Idaho State
University

Animal Assisted Crisis Response: Ethics and Applications

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ROAR



Introduction & Tentative

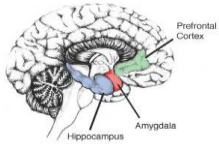
Agenda

The Human Side of Crisis & Trauma

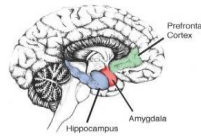
- The Human Stress Response
- Key Terms and Concepts
- The Crisis Responder's Role



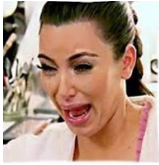

AACR as a Specialty Area

- Benefits of AACR
- Role and Scope of AACR
- Training for the Human End of the Leash



The Human Stress Response: A Quick Brain Refresher



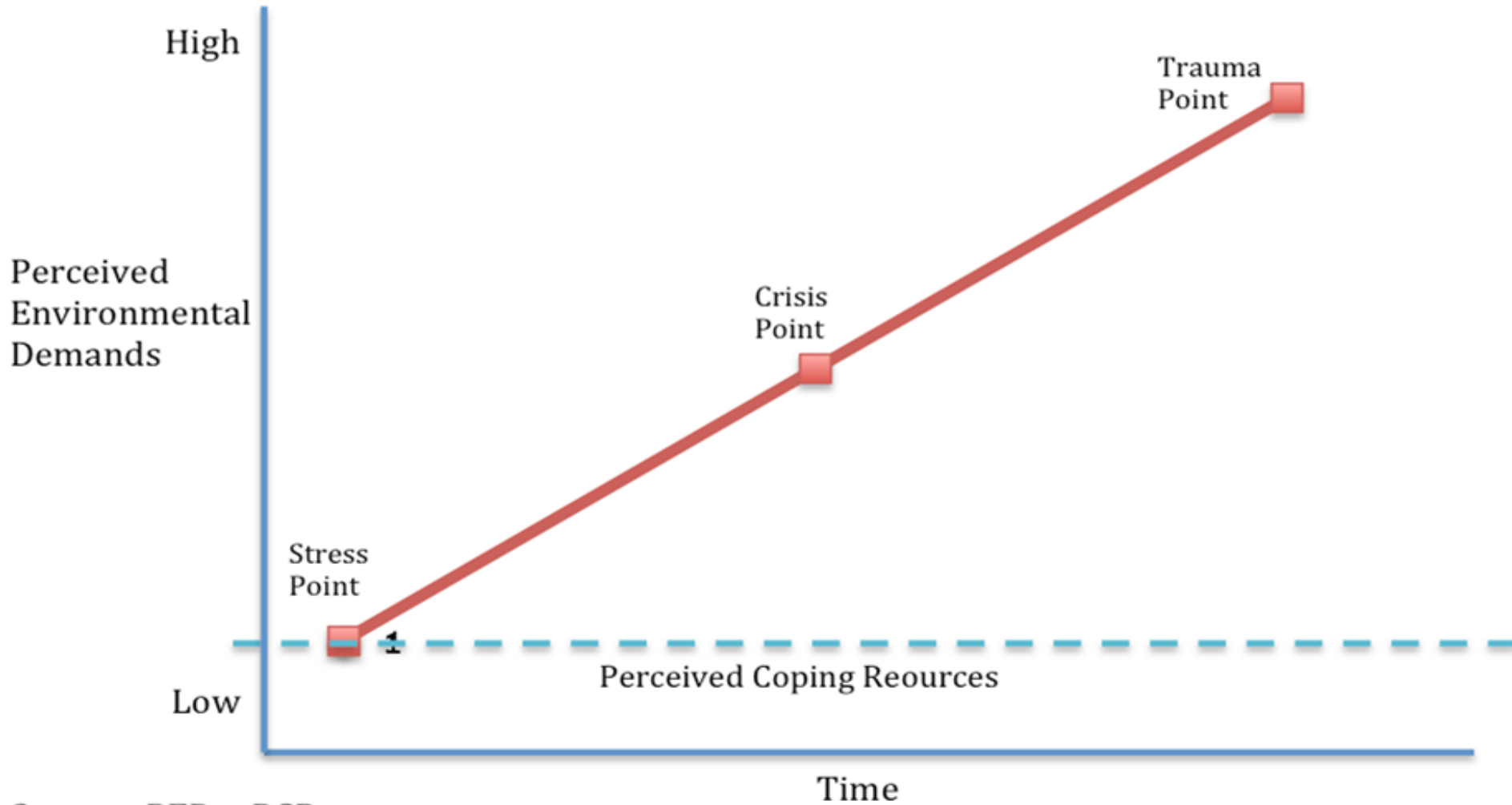
<u>Amygdala + Brainstem</u>	<u>Hippocampus</u>	<u>Hypothalamus</u>	<u>Neocortex</u>
			
Fear & Anger	Factual & Episodic memory, turns STM to LTM	Maturational & procedural learning	Higher order thinking
Fight/Flight/Freeze	Calming & Recovery	Contextualizes Experiences	Decisions, inhibition, judgement, logic, abstract reasoning
'Autopilot'	Weakened by stress/high amygdala activity	De-emotionalizes memories processed by the Hippocampus	Helps regulate amygdala activity
Can be activated by negative thoughts	Can be activated by positive thoughts	If memories are not processed here, they become triggers	Needed for meaning making, and strengthened by counseling/psychotherapy

The Human Stress Response: But Why?

- In nature, humans rely on hypervigilance to stay safe (since we are not terribly physically hardy)
 - Allows brain to bypass “thinking” response and move straight to emotional/physical response (four F’s)
 - Efficient and effective when seconds count!!!!
 - “Acute” Stress
 - High amygdala involvement
- The brain/body cannot distinguish between a physical threat, a psychological threat, a social/emotional threat, or a threatening memory.
 - Responds the same way to all
 - We need help to access the brain structures that address the “Four F” symptoms

Essentially, this means that the “thing” *does not actually matter*.
It is impossible to predict/assess the stress response based on ‘severity’ of external events.

The Human Stress



Stress = $PED > PCR$

Crisis = $PED \gg PCR$ & CR Regress

Trauma = $PED \gg \gg PCR$ & Meaning lost

The Human Stress Response: Similar but Different

Crisis

- Specific, identifiable event
- PED greatly outweigh PCR *and* coping skills deteriorate
- All people and systems must encounter environmental challenges and crises
 - Unusual stress temporarily causes temporary inability to direct life effectively
 - Usual coping skills do not provide relief
 - A person often experiences feelings of fear, anger, grief, hostility, helplessness, hopelessness, and alienation

Examples:

- Natural disaster, mass shooting, or terrorist attack
- Car accidents, physical assault, sexual assault
- Greif or traumatic loss
- Loss of resources essential for daily living

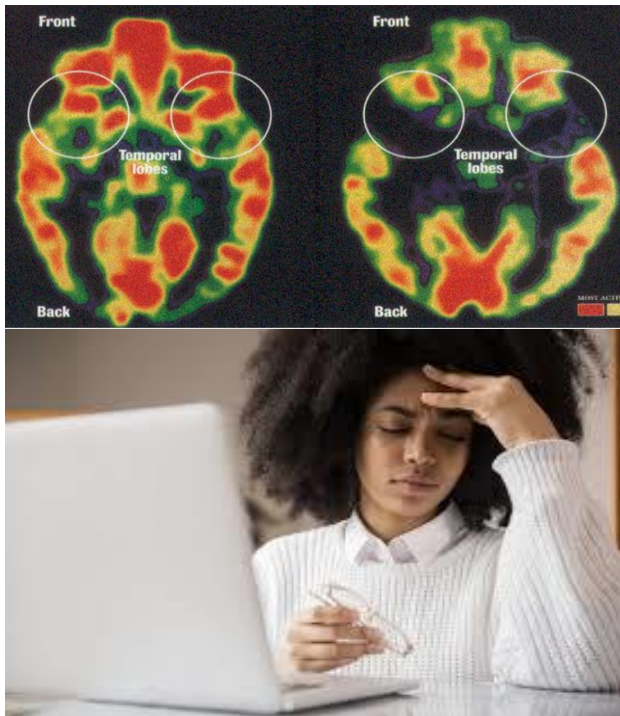
Trauma

- Specific or unspecified event/series of events
- PED greatly outweigh PCR, coping skills deteriorate, *and* 'meaning' is destroyed
- No reliable/valid measure of trauma severity or intensity
 - Traumatology may be overly focused on PTSD, but today's "new researchers" emphasize that trauma is multidimensional and multi-layered
 - Person experiences impairment in relationships, sense of self, and performance

Examples:

- IP/Domestic Violence
- Torture
- War
- Child Abuse
- Secondary/Vicarious Exposure**

Recognizing the Human Stress Response: Observable Impact 'Crisis'



Behavioral

- Performance failures
- Restlessness
- Tremors
- Insomnia
- Avoidance of challenging situations

Emotional

- Self-preoccupation
- Irritability
- Anxiousness
- Dysphoria or hyper-emotionality

Cognitive

- Attention Deficits
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Cognitive rigidity & loss of creativity
- Memory failures

Recognizing the Human Stress Response: Observable Impact 'Trauma'



Performance

- Inability to concentrate on present tasks & unable to follow directions
- Memory loss, inability to recall from short term memory
- Hyperactivity, inability to be still for periods of time
- Lethargy and exhaustion, even with adequate rest
- Loss of enthusiasm or reward toward work or recreation

Arousal

- Hypervigilance, needing reassurance repeatedly throughout the day
- Hyperactivity, inability to be still for periods of time
- Lethargy and exhaustion, even with adequate rest
- Sleep disturbance
- Heightened Startle Response
- Change in hygiene
- Change in appetite

Interpersonal

- Irritability, presentations of anger outbursts
- Aggressive and/or reckless behavior
- Apathy/Disengagement
- Inability to experience or recognize 'positive' emotions, events or behaviors in self and/or others
- Change or loss in friend group/social network
- Cynicism/Negative frame of reference
- Persistent sense of isolation
- Lack of healthy boundaries



Stages of Crisis Response

Impact Stage

1. Immediacy

- Relieve anxiety
- Contact & engagement

2. Control

- Provide safety and comfort in chaos
- Appear stable, supportive, and structured
- Listening & empathy
- No false promises
- Gain client attention:
 - May need to be creative
- Encourage movement away from crisis situation if needed

*The goal of ALL crisis response is to prevent a crisis from becoming a trauma.
The volunteer responder's role is to establish contact in the impact stage to pave the
way for provider interventions.*



Responder Risks: Burnout & Vicarious Trauma

- Emotional stress placed on responders* working under overwhelming conditions
 - “A cumulative state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations” (Figley, 1995)
 - Exhaustion and fatigue
 - Lack of motivation & loss of satisfaction
 - Sense of detachment & dehumanization with others
 - Feelings of depression & inadequacy
 - Performance failures, lack of physical or mental presence, and emotional/interpersonal instability**
 - Can create a trauma response in responders and closely mimics symptoms of primary PTSD, increasing risks for:
 - Maladaptive coping strategies
 - Chronic stress response
 - Destroyed sense of meaning
 - Relational/Identity disruptions
 - Suicide and self-harm



THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND (HAB)

“A mutually-beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals”
(AVMA, 2017)

HAB: Not a New Phenomenon

Anthropological evidence reveals the significance of animals in human lives since before cave paintings (Fine, 2015).

Animals have been psychologically linked to our survival and in cultural myths/spirituality. Evidence exists that animals have been assisting human healers for thousands of years.

Biophilia Hypothesis linked to human origins.

However... The formal study and professionalized application of the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) is relatively recent.



PLETHORA OF CONFUSION



Many are curious about the role of Human-Animal Interactions (HAIs) in human wellness.

- Much confusion and misunderstanding occurs about the role of animals in human wellness.
- Terminology and taxonomy relevant to HAIs are still in development and will likely continue to evolve.
- Sensationalized and inaccurate media coverage and inaccurate professional writing contributes to many false assumptions and misunderstanding.

Many different applications of the HAI exist, each promoting unique wellness goals, and requiring different preparation.

HAIs are NOT:

A Panacea

One-Size-Fits-All

Universally Beneficial

Just about the Benefitting the Human

ROAR

Human-Animal Interactions (HAI)

Potentially beneficial interactions between humans and animals, specifically relevant to health and wellness

(AVMA, 2021)

Human-Animal Bond (HAB)

Animal- Assisted Interventions (AAI)

Certain Conditions Must be Met, but No Training or Evaluation Required

Training and Evaluation Required of Animal and Human Handler

Any mutually-beneficial, non-exploitative experience between a human and an animal.

May be direct, indirect, observational, or interactive.

Examples: Relationships with pets, interactive experiences with familiar or unfamiliar animals, observational experiences with wildlife, etc.

Animal Assisted Therapy

Goal oriented, delivered by licensed healthcare professional

Animal Assisted Education

Goal oriented, delivered by professional educator

Animal Assisted Activities

No treatment goals, delivered by volunteer

Up-and-coming Category: Animal Assisted Special Programs. Will likely include Animal-assisted Crisis Response, Prison animal programs, reading dog programs, diamond model of service

TAXONOMY MATTERS: THE ANIMALS

Companion Animal

A personal pet of any species which functions as companion to a human caregiver

Working Animal

Animals are specially trained to perform work functions that assist a human
Might simultaneously offer companionship in some cases

Emotional Support Animal (ESA)

An animal of various species (excluding venomous animals or wildlife), supported by a physician or mental health professional based upon a disability-specific need. Does *not* perform specific tasks (FHA, 1986).

Therapy Animal

A specially trained and evaluated animal, meeting specific criteria, which is included as an integral part of a goal-directed treatment process which must be directly relevant to a person's overall treatment plan.

Service/Assistance Animal

Any dog that is individually trained to do perform specific tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. Including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability (ADA, 1990).

Other Working Animals

Animal of various species that is specially selected, trained, and prepared for a working role. Examples include, but are not limited to: herding dogs, flock guards, pack/draft animals, military working dogs, police dogs, FEMA dogs.

Impact of HAB



- Decreases need for verbal language (Stewart et al., 2013)
- Facilitates therapeutic metaphors (Stewart et al., 2013)
- Offers unique opportunity to incorporate therapeutic/safe touch (Fine, 2015)
- Results in elevated levels of the neurotransmitter Oxytocin *in both the human and the animal* (Chandler, 2012).
 - Pro Tip: Oxytocin facilitates social bonding AND counteracts some harmful stress hormones.
- Enhances 'here and now', grounding experiences in (Stewart et al., 2014)
- May help reduce burnout and vicarious trauma symptoms in counselors (Stewart et al., 2014)

What is AACR?

Animal-assisted crisis response (AACR) is a specialty area within AAls

- Trained human-animal response teams provide interventions to those impacted by crises, trauma, and disasters
 - More effective in Impact Stage interventions than non-animal-assisted crisis response
 - Assists with establishing psychological contact
 - Facilitates sense of safety and comfort
 - Anxiety reduction
 - Increases verbal communication from victims
 - Humans handling well-cared for animals are perceived as more trustworthy and approachable than those without
 - May temporarily ease physiological stress symptoms
 - Often serve as intermediate between survivors and practitioners
 - Often provide much needed support to first responders, medical professionals, and mental health professionals
- AACR Handlers are typically volunteers, rather than mental health professionals
 - Crucial for the safety of the animal, the handler, the survivor, and other professionals

The History of AACR

- FEMA requested the presence of therapy dog-handler teams in the aftermath of the Murrah Building bombings in Oklahoma in 1995 (Shubert, 2012; Lackey & Haberstock, 2019)
- Since then, animal-handler teams have been invited to assist crisis responders in numerous natural disasters and episodes of mass violence
- Cindy Ehlers, founded a non-profit organization now known as Hope Animal Assisted Crisis Response (HOPE) in 1998 (Lackey & Haberstock, 2019; HOPE AACR, 2017).
- HOPE AACR is credited with formalizing AACR and setting a precedence for the specialized and formal training necessary for safe and ethical AACR (Lackey & Haberstock, 2019).
- When applied with appropriate knowledge and skills, AACR teams have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of some crisis response efforts.



The Role of AACR

AACR is a Specialized Class of AAA

- Highly trained and certified/registered volunteer human-animal teams assist crisis responders
- Support the psychological and physiological needs of impacted individuals (Lackey & Haberstock, 2019; Pet Partners, 2019).
- Differs in boundaries, scope, and delivery from the AAT provided by licensed mental health providers during counseling/psychotherapy for individuals experiencing symptoms of trauma.

While AACR teams are trained in foundational principles of crisis response, they themselves are not considered to be crisis responders (Greenbaum, 2006).

- The role of an AACR handler is mutually exclusive to the role of a professional crisis responder, even if the handler is qualified to serve as a crisis response mental health professional.
- For the wellbeing of all humans and animals involved, crisis responders must not simultaneously perform both the role of professional crisis responder and crisis response mental health professional

AACR handlers seek to connect the survivor with a crisis responder after facilitating the human-animal interaction.

- Handler's primary focus is on the animal and facilitating safe and comfortable human-animal interactions with survivors, grounded in the knowledge of the unique, species-specific ethology of their animal partners

Impact of AACR

Common Themes across Current Literature

- AACR teams engage withdrawn, isolated, or unresponsive survivors more effectively than human-only responders,
- AACR teams assist survivors in grounding and anxiety reduction quickly,
- Dogs involved in AACR are perceived to help identify individuals who need the most support from crisis responders, and
- AACR teams are heavily sought out by crisis responders for their own stress.



Supportive Strategies

- **Contact & Engagement**
 - Many human crisis responders experience difficulty establishing psychological and verbal contact with isolated and withdrawn survivors.
 - AACR teams may help crisis responders engage survivors more quickly and effectively, while simultaneously providing opportunities for the survivor's brain and body to calm and heal.
- **Safety & Comfort**
 - Non-verbal avenues for expression and communication
 - Trust and social bonding boost
- **Anxiety Reduction & Grounding**
 - May provide relief from some immediate physiological and psychological fight/flight/freeze responses
 - Connection to the five senses and grounding in the present moment
- **Connection with Professional Responders**
 - Most important task of an AACR team
 - Facilitate that connection more quickly and with greater ease
 - Support to the first responders, medical professionals, and mental health professionals



Specialized Competence Required

- Ethical & effective AACR teams must:
 - Develop knowledge and skills relevant to Impact Stage Crisis Response without an animal
 - Roles and goals
 - Boundaries of interventions/competence
 - Ability to reliably respond to ever-changing, chaotic conditions appropriately and ethically
 - Ability to identify and manage symptoms of vicarious trauma
 - Awareness of stress response/vicarious trauma in first responders
- Develop knowledge and skills relevant to YAYABA in chaotic, stressful, unpredictable situations
 - Marked increase in YAYABA skills required for AACR to maintain human and animal welfare and safety
 - Implications related to YAYABA, as an impaired/compromised handler cannot effectively advocate for and respond to the needs of the therapy animal



Credentials & Standards

- **Animal Assisted Crisis Response National Standards** (National Standards Committee for Animal Assisted Crisis Response, 2010)
 - Concrete, specific criteria for AACR handler training, animal training, experience, evaluation and certification/registration, and standards of conduct for AACR teams.
- **FEMA Courses**
 - FEMA IS-100.c
 - FEMA IS-200.b
 - FEMA IS-800.c
- **Certification or registration through a nationally-recognized AACR organization**
 - HOPE AACR (<https://www.hopeaacr.org/>)
 - National Crisis Response Canines (<https://crisisresponsecanines.org>)
 - Pet Partners AACR (<https://petpartners.org/act/aacr/>)
- **Appropriate credentialing is an ethical requirement before setting foot at any crisis or disaster, even if specifically invited**



Additional Ethics

- AACR teams should only approach survivors when given a clear indication that the survivor wants to interact with the animal.
 - Inexperienced or overly enthusiastic AACR teams may inadvertently cause further withdrawal if the animal's approach is unwanted or perceived as intrusive by the survivor.
- AACR handlers avoid assuming that all individuals enjoy human-animal interaction
 - Sensitive to both verbal and nonverbal indicators of consent for an animal's proximity or approach
 - Demonstrate skills in accurately assessing comfortable versus uncomfortable body language during animal interactions.
- Not all animals appropriate for general AAls are appropriate for AACR
 - Therapy animals should not be brought to crisis situations unless it has been evaluated for exceptionally high tolerance for stress, chaos, and noise;
 - Consistently responds to handler cues in the presence of distractions;
 - Highly sociable in almost all environments towards almost all people.
- Not all AAI human handlers are appropriate for AACR. AACR Handlers must be:
 - Experienced,
 - Tolerant of chaotic and stressful situations,
 - Knowledgeable about crisis response,
 - Currently emotionally and psychologically stable
 - Demonstrated effective advocacy for animal welfare in all situations
 - Handlers who are currently navigating their own crisis situations or mental health concerns should pause their AACR availability until those concerns are appropriately addressed.



Key Points

- AACR is a flexible and engaging specialization that aligns with many crisis response models and current neurobiological knowledge of the human stress response.
- AACR requires extensive formal training, evaluation, and certification/registration beyond what is required for other Animal Assisted Activity teams.
- AACR is not therapy and is not intended to help survivors heal long-term mental symptoms of trauma.
- AACR teams assist and support the efforts of first responders, but do not directly provide first responder services.
- AACR handlers must safeguard and attend to risks associated with animal welfare, scope of practice, and their own wellness.
- More empirical research is needed to fully understand AACR's agency and efficacy as a specialized intervention.



Resources

- Industry-Leading Organizations
 - HOPE AACR (<https://www.hopeaacr.org/>)
 - National Crisis Response Canines (<https://crisisresponsecanines.org>)
 - Pet Partners AACR (<https://petpartners.org/act/aacr/>)
- Foundational Resources
 - Greenbaum, S. (2006). Introduction to working with animal assisted crisis response. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, 8(1), pp. 49-64.
 - Lackey, R., & Haberstock, G. (2019). Animal-assisted crisis response: offering opportunity for human resiliency during and after traumatic incidents. In Tedeschi & Jenkins (Ed.) *Transforming Trauma: Resilience and Healing Through our Connection to Animals*. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette: IND.
 - National Standards Committee for Animal-Assisted Crisis Response. (2010). *Animal-Assisted Crisis Response National Standards*

Want More?

ISU Department of Counseling Resources

- Research on Anthrozoological Relationships (ROAR) Lab
 - Community Programming
 - Workshops and Trainings
 - Research Collaborations
- Certificate Program in Animal Assisted Interventions
 - Formal Coursework for Health Professionals to Integrate AAls in Clinical Practice (<https://www.isu.edu/counseling/programs/animal-assisted-interventions-certificate/>)

Contact for Both:

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The logo for the Research on Anthrozoological Relationships (ROAR) Lab, featuring the word "ROAR" in a bold, white, sans-serif font on an orange background.