Flexible Therapeutic Tools for Treating Nonhuman Animal Abusers


Shapiro and Henderson acknowledge that adults who abuse animals are not a homogeneous group and there is not one method or solution for dealing with this population. Therefore, this book begins with a summary of the relevant history, background, and research to lay the necessary foundation for the practical tools it offers to health-care professionals working with adult animal abusers.

After providing a short review of pertinent literature, the book moves to identification and assessment of animal abuse. A theme of usability and practicality pervades this book. In addition to information on relevant topics, it offers numerous examples of exercises and homework assignments that health-care professionals can select or tweak to meet their needs. The theory behind the assessment and intervention offered is eclectic, with examples provided of several theories, including cognitive-behavioral, trauma-based, attachment, and psychodynamic. In this way, regardless of theoretical orientation,
professionals will find this book useful. The book ends with several useful appendixes and a section on animal hoarding.

The book, appropriate for both laypeople and professionals, offers guidance to more easily identify and assess animal abusers, provides concrete methods to work with animal abusers either as a stand-alone intervention or in combination with other therapy focuses, and details practical tools to supplement one's own therapeutic tools and techniques.

As mentioned earlier, the book begins by focusing on the current literature surrounding animal abuse and then uses this review to discuss current policy implications. Three levels of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary) are briefly discussed to help make it clear there are many possible opportunities for intervention.

The next section focuses on the identification and assessment of animal abuse. Although it is usually human health-care providers who provide treatment, the book identifies others who may play a role in the assessment or referral of those suspected of abusing animals. The book’s coverage of assessment can be useful to both those experienced in this realm and those new to the area of animal abuse. The handbook suggests that rather than using one method or assessment tool to identify abuse, a more holistic psychological portrayal of a client—obtained through semi-structured interviews—can be useful. Specific areas that are detailed in the assessment description and checklist include severity, culpability, motivation, attitude/beliefs, emotional intelligence, family history, and other mitigating factors. These mitigating factors focus on the clients’ willingness and ability to deal with the issue constructively, and their desire to be cooperative in the process.

The nuts and bolts of specific intervention strategies offered in the text are designed to be used as is, or modified to fit within other therapeutic environments. This is an important aspect of the treatment, since, for most clients, animal abuse does not exist in isolation and there are differing views on whether to treat it as a primary or secondary problem. The flexibility offered in the AniCare approach removes the potential difficulty in implementing it within therapy focused on another related issue.

As with all therapeutic relationships, AniCare begins by focusing on establishing a working relationship. How to join the client, deal with countertransference, and frame the therapy (including goal setting, confidentiality, and honesty) are all described. It is at this point of the text that potential exercises are introduced to help therapists find options that can best work for them. Most of the exercises focus on interpersonal skills, since they are seen as such a critical aspect of therapy for this population.