

Teens Learn a Better Way to "TTouch"

by Tina Hutton
TTouch Practitioner Level 3

In Grass Valley, California, there is a unique school for teenagers called the Charis Youth Center. It serves troubled youth, ages 14 to 17, in a residential foster care and High School program. As part of their educational experiences, this program provides classes in dog handling, based on the Linda Tellington-Jones "TTouch Method" (tee touch).

The Tellington TTouch Method is an internationally recognized technique that features a humane, hands-on method for helping animals to be calm, focused and relaxed. Among the many benefits of TTouch work are stress reduction, relief of fear and tension, relief of pain, improving connection and co-ordination, and improving the communication between animals and humans. The positive results are seen in both the animals who receive and the humans who use these special techniques.

This method was developed by Linda Tellington-Jones nearly 30 years ago. It is a blend of gentle bodywork and a finessed style of leading a dog through an assortment of intriguing ground exercises on the "confidence course of higher learning". This method can be used for obedience improvement, physical therapy and re-education, for calming tense animals, and to help speed recovery from injuries.

The Tellington TTouch was influenced in its early days by the Feldenkrais® Method. The Feldenkrais Method was developed by an Israeli scientist named Moshe Feldenkrais. Linda studied with Moshe Feldenkrais in the mid 1970's. During the course of her training in this human format of body awareness education, she wondered if these same principles would apply to horses. She experimented with horses all over the world and created the Tellington-Jones Equine Awareness Method (TTEAM). This work has

developed into a cellular work that seems to affect the connections of cells, offering aid to optimizing cellular function. Research information from sources, such as Candace Pert's book, in "The Molecules of Emotion", support this amazing idea.

As Linda's work was applied successfully to many other animal species, it became known as the "Tellington-Jones Every Animal Method." (TTEAM) Recently, this organization has become the "Tellington TTouch Training", as it is now being utilized on human clients as well as animals. There are certified practitioners spread all over the world.



This Tellington Touch, also known as TTouch, is the basis of a youth program that has been developed by Tina Hutton of Auburn, California. She has spent over 20 years studying the method under Linda Tellington-Jones and is among the top rated horse TTEAM practitioners in the world. Tina has a wide ranging educational background in

many areas of expertise. To create this program, she drew from her training in self-motivation education, body awareness education, singing and speaking lessons, and over 18 years teaching TTEAM horse/rider problem solving clinics. Besides being a TTEAM/TTouch practitioner, a Centered Riding instructor, and a certified (human) massage therapist, she also became a certified practitioner of the Mia Segal Feldenkrais Method.

In the classes at Charis Youth Center, a dedicated group of local "certified therapy dogs" and their owners come in each week to experience this work with the students. Some of the dogs are certified as Canine Companions, and help disabled clients who are in wheelchairs. Some are Therapy Assistance dogs, and go to visit elder care homes, group homes, hospitals,

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and psychiatric hospitals. The Charis students work with a variety of dog breeds, including Great Dane, English Mastiff, Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, Papillion, Lhasa Apso, Doberman Pinscher, and a few mixed breeds as well. The dogs range in age from senior citizens to 3-month-old puppies.

All of the therapy dog owners come to appreciate the visits to the Charis Youth Center as they watch their dogs benefit from the peaceful atmosphere while receiving the quiet, relaxing techniques that the students practice on them. For many of these "working" dogs, this facility is seen as a "safe" place where the dogs can receive as much as they give.

For these students, the once a week class is a place where they also learn to observe dog behaviors/body language in order to better understand what they mean. The students learn to conduct owner interviews that can offer valuable information before handling each dog. Some are older dogs, with some body discomfort due to arthritis. Students then can be more careful and respectful of any areas that may be more sensitive than other parts of the dog's body on that given day. It is also good to discover when a dog has had any recent veterinary interactions. TTouch is a useful tool to help release residual tension or fears about handling around the ears, mouth or other areas treated at the vet clinic or grooming facility.

Some are young dogs that are learning to improve their social skill with humans. On one occasion, a puppy had been full of energy during the recent TTouch class time. It could only be still and quiet for a few minutes at a time, and then launched into action mode again. During the course of the session, it was hard for the students to tell if they had made any improvements in the puppy's behavior to calm itself. However, the owner later wrote an email to say that on the same afternoon, the puppy had to accompany her

into a local bank. A toddler was in a nearby line and was excited to see the puppy. In minutes, the happy chortling and body gestures of the toddler had excited the puppy as well. After a couple of barks, the owner reached down to the puppy's ear to try some of the gentle ear work the Charis students had taught her. She was happy to report that in moments, the puppy calmed itself and sat down quietly next to the owner for the rest of the visit. That owner is convinced that TTouch really works, even if you don't see the changes occur in the first session.

In addition, the students are taught to use a variety of body language "calming signals" as part of the methods for calming a stressed animal. Dogs have a variety of physical gestures that they use in their own groups for seeking calm in themselves as well as others of the pack. Turning the head away, avoiding direct eye contact and frequent licking of the lips may be used. Another good calming cue is to take slow, deep breaths that end with long, slow, audible exhales. This technique has been successful in calming the students as well as the dogs. After observing the effect of breathing work on the students, several of



the staff and therapists often use this cue to help students calm themselves in other stress related situations. In fact, the TTouch class has come to be seen by the administration of this school to be one a valuable tool in helping these challenged teens to overcome some of their own issues. One therapist is quoted as stating:

"The effect of this TTouch program with our students is off the charts. We have been able to bond quickly with new resistant clients, softened our hardened youth, encouraged career goals in the veterinary field for numerous clients, and motivated the unmotivated to stick with our program and even succeed. The respect you teach for the animals translates across various inter/intrapersonal relationships. When they take

into consideration the needs of an animal, the clients learn how to have empathy. Additional benefits include using the techniques on themselves when agitated, and incorporating the skills with the animals at their residence sites.

I have listed the expanded list of benefits to our clients that I have observed about the TTouch with Dogs program:

- 1) Increased self esteem
- 2) Environmental and self awareness
- 3) Significant increase in client vocabulary (as tested by TTouch teacher)
- 4) Teaching empathy and respect for all (i.e. people, self, and animals)
- 5) Increasing social skills
- 6) Role-modeling appropriate professional relationships
- 7) Emphasizing appropriate boundaries
- 8) Teaching flexibility and accepting change

This program is a valuable part of our treatment program"

Below are experiences written by some of the Charis students themselves:

From R.B.

"When I first started TTouch, I never really had any animal experience. TTouch helped me to gain that experience. TTouch taught me to be more respectful of an animal's space or state of mind by reading body language. TTouch also showed me how to calm and pacify a dog's space by using my hands.

Example: Pipin, a part Pit Bull mix, was a dog that had bad experiences with men. We showed Pipin a different experience, that not all men are bad. We used body language such as deep, slow breathing and lowering our height to get to Pipin's level. We also approached Pipin as slowly as possible and less threatening as we could. By not looking at Pipin straight in the eyes and approaching him from side in-

stead of directly towards him.

We used our hands to do body work to relieve stress and muscle tension in Pipin.

After a couple of weeks of successful work, Pipin was able to be in the same room with a man and not be stressed at all. Pipin was able to be more open to more people and calmer around men."

From G.B.

"What I learned in this class is how to read body languages of animals. I also learned how to clam down an animal by yawning. When you approach an animal, you must move slowly and not too fast, or else you'll startle them. Being in the Tellington-Jones TTouch

class let me learn so much how to give animal therapy and not simply a massage. For example, when a dog has a sore spot, you would want to do a circle and a quarter motion in the muscle around that are. By using the backside of the last section of the fingers is less threatening to a fearful animal. That TTouch is called the Chimpanzee TTouch. I have learned how to do a variety of hand movements. For the

whole year and a month that I've taken this class, I've loved how I got to do a hands-on program.

We also dealt with some pretty unique puppies. At first, they were jumping all over the place. But soon after we did some work on them, they calmed down. We yawned and did physical therapy on them. One rolled over onto its back and the other one laid down like a frog...literally legs out in back of its body, like a frog! The types of TTouch we did on these puppies included the Chimpanzee TTouch, the Llama TTouch, and stroking with the backs of our hands. One of my peers did the Abalone TTouch as well."

From B.J.



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"Before I came to Charis Youth Center, I worked for 8 months at an animal hospital. My duties included calming the animals, stocking supplies, cleaning kennels, giving dogs food and water, bleaching the cages of sick animals, and giving dogs and cats attention. My experience at a vet's office was my best experience ever. I am trying to become a veterinarian technician.

To be a better vet tech, I have learned how to approach an animal more safely. I have learned the TTouch method to calm animals and to make them comfortable around me. Before approaching an animal, you should ask the owner about the dog or cat's behavior, such as where it likes and dislikes being touched. After that, you approach the animal slowly and let it smell your hand to see how it will react to your hand. Then you perform a series of TTouches to relax the dog or cat. The work is called the Tellington-Jones TTouch."

From M.R.

"When I went for a job interview at a local pet store, I brought up that I work with animals through the TTouch method and it has helped me get closer and earned more respect for animals. I did get the job, and now when I clip bird's wings and nails, I know how to help make them more relaxed. One example is when I had to give a Pekingese dog some ear medication. When I did it the first time, I began by doing ear work on her. Then I put the medication into the ear. After that, I did more ear work to help make her feel better and happier.

One thing that I thought that I would never do on a dog is to do mouth work. I first started doing mouth work on a dog named Bandit. He is a three-year-old English Mastiff and weighs about 205 pounds! I had a weird feeling inside me that was not cool, and I thought that the dog was going to bite me for sticking my hand into his mouth. He did not bite, but at first, he did not like me doing the mouth work on him. After a

while, he started to relax and let me work under his lips and on his gums. It was very relaxing to him and to me.

In my line of business, I have to give dogs medication in the mouth. Now I work on my dog's mouth, so that they get used to stuff being put into the mouth. So in my free time, I work on their mouth. So when it comes to medication time, they are not so bothered by it."

The TTouch for Animals program at Charis Youth Center continues to bring new levels of self awareness, self control and stress relief to all who participate in the class. As the developer and instructor of this program, Tina reports that she looks forward each week to spending time with teens and dogs. Watching

the animal/human connections take shape and grow into something so peaceful and self-empowering for these students as they hone their skills with the dogs is reward beyond measure for her.



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