

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ANIMAL ABUSE

Statistics

- 70% of women with pets who reported domestic violence indicated that their pets had been threatened, hurt or killed by their abusive partners. *The Humane Society, 2006 First Strike campaign* www.hsus.org/firststrike
- Up to 40% of women did not want to go to a shelter because they feared what would happen to their pet. <http://www.cvm.uiuc.edu/petcolumns/index.cfm?function=showarticle&id=413>
- Several studies of violence of incarcerated men indicate that animal abuse may be characteristic of the developmental histories of between one in four and nearly two in three violent adult offenders. Source: *NCJRS, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, September 2001, Animal Abuse and Youth Violence.*

Overview of the Issue

- Animal cruelty usually occurs within a context of family violence and is an indicator for other types of abuse including spousal abuse, child abuse, or elder abuse. The use or threat of abuse against companion animals is often used as leverage by the violent family member to control the other members.
- Batterers abuse animals through neglect of food or socialization, physical injury or abandonment. They do it to establish control, maintain terror and increase isolation. It may be committed by those who feel powerless and under someone else's control, like abused children.
- A child who abuses animals may do so because of abuse they have suffered or because they live in and accept an environment of violence as normal. Without intervention, that child is at a high risk of becoming a violent adult.

What You Can Do

- Check the physical condition of pets of elderly neighbors, friends or loved ones who may be in abusive relationships. Ask questions. Pets may be malnourished, frightened and withdrawn, or aggressive and overly protective. Show concern.
- Take animal cruelty seriously. It is a warning of past, present or future violence. If you know of someone who has abused an animal, even a child, report it.

Impact on Victims

- The emotional distress and social isolation caused by domestic violence situations may increase the importance of human/animal relationships for the DV victim. Animals may help reduce stress, provide unconditional love, affection, acceptance and companionship. It is important that safety plans include provisions for loved animals, such as keeping all papers up-to-date and secure and finding a safe place for them to stay.
- Neglect and/or abuse of animals damage a child's sense of safety. It teaches them that they and their pets are dispensable. Desensitization to hurting others may cause them to hurt animals themselves. Positive experiences with animals, like animal therapy, can help them reestablish empathy and compassion, heal and break the cycle of violence.

Quotable

Animal cruelty occurs within a pattern of child, spouse and elder abuse. It is always a sign of a larger context of violence. As more than half the households in the US (approximately 150 million people) include either dogs or cats, it is important that we look out for our animal friends and neighbors as well as our human ones. Remember that animal cruelty is a crime. Call the police, adult protective services, local animal shelters or the Humane Society at 800-213-0956.