



Office for the
Prevention of
Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: Strategies and Options for Survivors and Their Pets

Alicia Borns

Director, Bureau of Family and Victim Resources

The Human-Animal Bond

“No-one who looks at the evidence can doubt that animals ... improve the quality of modern human life...”

The Biophilia Hypothesis



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Social and Support



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Health and Healing



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Education and Empathy



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Safety and Security



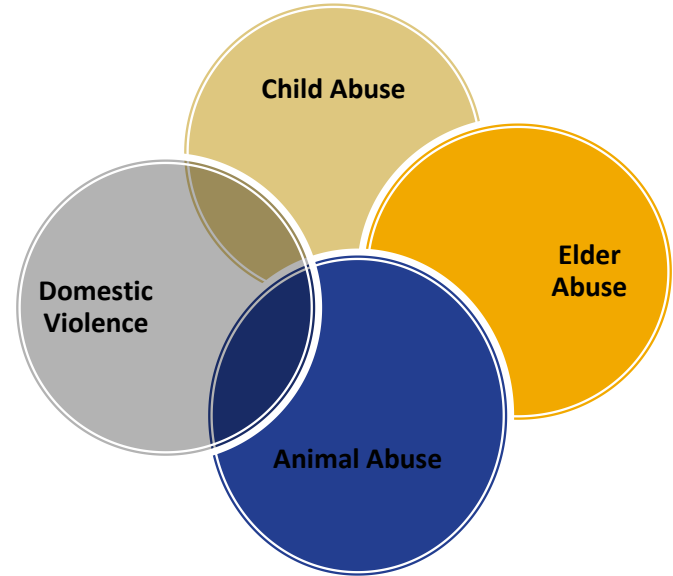
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“The Link” Between Animal Cruelty and Domestic and Family Violence

The “Link”

When animals are abused,
people are at risk;

When people are abused,
animals are at risk.



(The National Link Coalition)

Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty

- 1,677 cases of animal cruelty
- 21% involved some sort of family violence
 - ❖ Domestic Violence 13%
 - ❖ Child Abuse 7%
 - ❖ Elder Abuse 1%

National Domestic Violence Shelter Survey:

71% of DV shelters reported abusers threatened, harmed or killed animals.

(Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997)



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Domestic violence abusers use animals to:

- demonstrate power and control;
- isolate victims and children;
- perpetuate fear;
- prevent victims from leaving;
- coerce victims to return;
- carry out abusive acts (animals as weapons).

Animals as Weapons

Abusers often:

- train pets to attack partners, children, others;
- reward pets for harming/threatening responders.

As a result, animals are often:

- hurt while attacking others;
- euthanized for seeming unsafe and “vicious.”

Domestic Violence, Pet Abuse, and Children: Consequences of Exposure

Abused children and pets are often

- Considered expendable;
- Lack confidence in adults to protect them;
- Struggle to communicate what abuser is doing;
- Are conflicted by feelings of loyalty and fear;
- Become desensitized to violence;
- Experience decreased empathy for others;
- Imitate the violence (“modeling” behavior).



In a domestic violence shelter survey:

“50% of children said they had protected their pet by intervening against the abuser.”

(Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997)



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Gullone study (2011)

- Strong connection between child witnessing of animal abuse and engaging in animal abuse & bullying behavior
- Of children in DV shelters:
 - 67% reported witnessing abuse of family pet
 - 60% were very upset about harm to pet(s)
 - 37% progressed to harming or killing pets

Considerations for Working With Survivors and Families



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Pets are often barriers to safety:

- Victims reported living in cars with pets for up to four months until opening was available at a pet-friendly safe house.
- Twelve (12) independent surveys report 18 – 48% of victims delayed leaving/returned out of fear for welfare of pets.

(Kogan et al., 2004).

Pets may help victims disclose

- Victims unable to disclose victimization often able to disclose abuse of pets.
- Children may not talk directly about pet abuse, but may report having many pets that have died or disappeared without explanation.



In a recent study, victims:

- Reported abusers' use of animals as control tactic;
- Wanted to be asked about pets at intake;
- Felt lack of control over inability to leave pet;
- Requested safe options for pets;
- Wanted vets to offer safe, affordable pet housing;

(Hardesty et al., 2013)

When working with victims, consider:

- Including questions about threats/injuries to current/former pets on intake questionnaires;
- Including pets in safety planning;
- Adding animals to OP petition.



Prevention and Response

- **Screen for pet/animal abuse**
 - “Are there animals at home?”
 - “How are they cared for?”
 - “Are you worried about them for any reason?”
- **Report Abuse**
 - Document *facts*, direct quotes, specific observations, and any actions taken.
- **Develop Interdisciplinary Task Forces and Coalitions**
 - Cross training
 - Cross reporting
 - Develop Partnerships



Conclusion

- Animal abuse *must* be included as a part of the response to family violence.
- **Asking** the questions, **documenting** answers and **developing** resources are critical to assessment, intervention, and prevention.



Resources

- **American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) Humane Law Enforcement Division:** <http://www.asPCA.org/fight-cruelty>.

Agency within ASPCA that enforces animal related laws, and investigates reports of animal cruelty.

- **National Link Coalition:** <http://nationallinkcoalition.org>

Resource Center on the link between animal abuse and human violence

- **Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T):** <http://alliephillips.com/saf-tprogram/>

Provides information, training, and assistance regarding pet friendly domestic violence shelters.

- **Ohio Domestic Violence Network:**
http://www.odvn.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=featured&Itemid=101

Go to the “Resource Center” tab and click on “Domestic Violence and Animal Issues”



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Thank you!

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