

Quick Facts:  
**Why is The Link important for...Animal Care & Control?**



**Animal protection organizations may be first responders.**

- An animal may serve as a barometer of family violence. Because abused or neglected animals may be outside and may howl when hurt, neighbors may report suspected animal maltreatment more readily than child abuse or domestic violence. SPCAs, humane societies, and animal control agencies are frequently the first point of social services intervention for families experiencing violence (Arkow, 2003).

**If he's hurting animals, people may be next.**

- Pets become pawns in the game of power and control that batterers use to coerce and humiliate their victims. Pets may be beaten, killed, or sent to animal shelters to be euthanized to intimidate victims.
- Batterers may force victims to engage in bestiality as a form of humiliation.
- While victims frequently excuse their batterers' actions upon themselves, they may not be willing to forgive acts of violence against animals (Maxwell & O'Rourke, 2000).

**Domestic violence results in animals surrendered to shelters.**

- Many surveys have reported from 25% to 40% of battered women say they delayed seeking safety out of fear for their animals being harmed or neglected. Many of these animals are surrendered to shelters by victims who have nowhere else to turn or by batterers to punish their victims.
- Many animal shelters have established "Safe Haven" partnerships with women's shelters to provide temporary, long-term foster care for the animal victims of domestic violence (Ascione, 2000).

**Family violence harms animals.**

- In addition to the emotional and physical impact upon pets in homes with child abuse, elder abuse, and domestic violence, the emotional damage to these animals may be significant.

**Pet owners have strong emotional ties to their animals, which makes them vulnerable.**

- Only 2% of pet owners consider animals as "property": 51% consider animals as "companions" and 47% consider them as "members of the family" (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2002).

- For many battered women, pets may be sources of consolation and social support. Batterers may take advantage of victims' attachments to pets to exert power and control (Ascione & Arkow, 1999).

**Clients may be more willing to talk about animal abuse or neglect than other forms of family violence.**

- Victims may be reluctant to discuss their situation with counselors or police, and often make apologies for the behavior of the perpetrator. But because people enjoy talking about their pets, you can use this to your advantage.
- When an animal protection investigation uncovers other forms of family violence, officers should be prepared to refer victims to child protection services, adult protective services, or domestic violence agencies (Arkow, 2003).

**Being part of the human services network elevates the stature of your organization in your community.**

- Animal abuse is also a human welfare issue (Arkow, 2006). Demonstrating to the community your involvement with family violence shows that animal protection workers are not marginalized. Business leaders, donors, legislators, educators, and the media will take your work more seriously, and your shelter can be perceived as a community resource.

**Animal abuse is a crime.**

- The United States has the oldest laws in the world preventing cruelty to animals, dating to the Colonial era of 1641 (Animal Welfare Institute, 1990). All U.S. jurisdictions have prohibitions against animal maltreatment, and over 42 states declare some forms of animal abuse to be felonies.

## **Resources for Animal Care & Control Officers**

American Humane Association. (1995). *A training guide for recognizing and reporting child abuse for animal control officers and humane investigators*. Englewood, CO: Author.

Arkow, P. (2003). *Breaking the cycles of violence: A guide to multi-disciplinary interventions: A handbook for child protection, domestic violence, and animal protection agencies*. Accompanying video. Alameda, CA: Latham Foundation.

Arkow, P. (1996). The relationships between animal abuse and other forms of family violence. *Family Violence & Sexual Assault Bulletin*, 12(1-2), 29-34.

Ascione, F. R. (2000). *Safe havens for pets: Guidelines for programs sheltering pets for women who are battered*. Logan, UT: Utah State University. Available via [FrankA@coe.usu.edu](mailto:FrankA@coe.usu.edu)

Ascione, F. R., & Arkow, P. (Eds.). (1999). *Child abuse, domestic violence, and animal abuse: Linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Duel, D. K. (2004). *Violence prevention & intervention: A directory of animal-related programs*. Washington: Humane Society of the United States.

Humane Society of the United States. (2004). *Starting a safe havens for animals program*. Washington, DC: Author.

Loar, L., & Colman, L. (2004). *Teaching empathy: Animal-assisted therapy programs for children and families exposed to violence*. Alameda, CA: Latham Foundation.

Maxwell, M. S., & O'Rourke, K. (2000). *Domestic violence: A competency-based training manual for Florida's animal abuse investigators*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Institute for Family Violence Studies.

## **What Can You Do?**

- Invite officials from child protection, adult protection, and domestic violence agencies to provide training for your staff on how to recognize and report all forms of family violence.
- Establish lines of communication with these agencies, so when your work uncovers another form of family violence, you are prepared to make a report or referral as needed.
- Maintain a list of community agencies that provide services and resources for victims of child abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, and animal abuse. Make this list available as handouts for field officers and as fliers in your shelter.
- Be aware of the psychological importance of pets in the lives of families.
- Add questions about the presence of child abuse or domestic violence to all risk assessments, intake interviews, and cruelty investigations. People often talk easily about their pets: use this to your advantage to initiate conversations in stressful situations. The information revealed will help you to better understand the family's patterns and identify others who may be at risk.
- Work with women's shelters to establish "Safe Haven" programs to provide foster care for the animal victims of domestic violence.
- Encourage women's shelters to revise their literature to include provisions for the safekeeping of animals in Safety Plans.
- Provide short-term emergency housing, low-cost services, or adoptions for the animal victims of family violence.
- Help domestic violence victims establish their ownership of pets by making sure that all pet licenses, vaccinations, and veterinary bills are in the name of the victim. This could become important in custody disputes and property settlements.

- Maintain a list of long-term or permanent housing options that are pet-friendly.
- Participate in multi-disciplinary community coalitions addressing family violence. Join councils concerned with child protection, crime prevention, or violence reduction. Expand your humane education efforts with targeted interventions that help at-risk youths and juvenile offenders to develop empathy and compassion.
- Lobby for laws that would add animal care and control officers to those mandated to report suspected child abuse and neglect, and child protection services workers to those mandated to report suspected animal cruelty, neglect, and abuse.
- Sponsor a workshop to educate your colleagues about The Link. American Humane has a speaker's bureau to provide these presentations.

## Bibliography

Animal Welfare Institute. (1990). *Animals and their legal rights*. Washington, DC: Author.

American Veterinary Medical Association. (2002). *U.S. pet ownership & demographics sourcebook*. Schaumburg, IL: Author.

Arkow, P. (2006). Old wine in a new bottle: new strategies for humane education. In, Fine, A. (Ed.). *Handbook on animal-assisted therapy: Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Arkow, P. (2003). *Breaking the cycles of violence: A guide to multi-disciplinary interventions: A handbook for child protection, domestic violence and animal protection agencies*. Alameda, CA: Latham Foundation.

Ascione, F. R. (2000). *Safe havens for pets: guidelines for programs sheltering pets for women who are battered*. Logan, UT: Utah State University.

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