

Quick Facts:
Why is The Link important for...Domestic Violence?



If he's hurting animals, the women and children could be next.

- Household pets become pawns in the game of power and control that batterers use to coerce and humiliate their victims. Over 71% of battered women reported that their batterers had harmed, killed, or threatened animals: more than 75% of these incidents occurred in the presence of the women or children to coerce, control and humiliate them (Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997).
- Pets may be beaten, killed, or sent to animal shelters to be euthanized as ways to intimidate victims.
- Batterers have been reported to force victims to engage in bestiality as a form of humiliation.
- While victims frequently excuse their batterers' actions upon themselves, they may find it harder to ignore acts of violence against animals (Arkow, 2003).

Many women are unable to leave abusive situations out of fear for what will happen to their pets or livestock.

- Numerous surveys have reported that 25% to 40% of battered women report they delayed their decision to seek safety out of fear for their animals' welfare (McIntosh, 2002).

Domestic violence and animal abuse have significant impacts on children.

- Between 3.3 million and 10 million children each year are exposed to domestic violence, with significant negative effects upon their behavioral, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Children in these environments learn that there is no safe place for them, and that the adults cannot protect them or each other. They may develop ambivalent feelings toward the batterer and take on the responsibility of protecting the adult victim. Their chronic fear often leads to aggression.
- Children in homes with domestic violence are abused at rates 15 times greater than children in non-violent homes (The David & Lucille Packard Foundation, 1999).

Pet owners may have strong emotional ties to their animals that make 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 exercise power and control by taking advantage of victims' attachments to pets.

Animal welfare organizations are often first responders.

- Animal abuse may be easier for neighbors to see than domestic violence because animals may be outside and may howl when hurt. Because neighbors often report suspected animal maltreatment to SPCAs and humane societies, animal protection officers may be the first point of social services intervention for families experiencing domestic violence.

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

- Victims who are reluctant to discuss their situation with counselors or police, or who make apologies for the perpetrator, may be willing to talk about their pets. You can use this to your advantage by initiating a discussion about the animals in the household, and use this information to uncover patterns of violence and control which can better inform the investigation. Showing interest in the family's animals is a way to build a relationship of trust.

Investigation can help animals in crisis.

- Your interviews may identify animals at risk who need to be referred to a humane society, SPCA or animal control agency.
- Many women's shelters and animal shelters have established "Safe Haven" programs to provide foster care for the animal victims of domestic violence. These arrangements remove one barrier to escape.
- Pets need to be included in safety plans.

Animal cruelty 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 Domestic Violence Workers

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What Can You Do?

- Take reports of animal abuse and neglect seriously. Animal abuse is often just one form of family violence in the home. Animal abuse investigations often uncover other crimes.
- Be familiar with anti-cruelty laws in your community.
- Invite officials from child protection, adult protection, and animal protection 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 other forms 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 to your staff and clients. Humane societies, SPCAs, breed rescue groups, animal control agencies, and veterinarians may provide emergency housing, low-cost services, and adoptions for animals.
- Be aware of the psychological importance of pets in the lives of the families.
- Add questions about the presence and welfare of household animals to risk assessments, intake interviews, and clinical sessions. People often talk easily

- about their pets: use this to your advantage to initiate conversations in stressful situations. The information gathered will help you describe the family history and identify others who may be at risk.
- Work with animal protection groups to establish “Safe Haven” programs to provide foster care for the animal victims of domestic violence.
 - Revise your literature to encourage women to create Safety Plans that include provisions for the safekeeping of their animals.
 - Make sure pet licenses, vaccinations, and veterinary bills are in the name of the victim to help establish their ownership of pets, which could become important in custody disputes and property settlements.
 - Assist your clients to retrieve their animals through abuse prevention orders, vacate orders, or restraining orders.
 - Identify long-term or permanent housing options that are pet-friendly.
 - Participate in interdisciplinary community coalitions addressing family violence.
 - 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 speakers bureau to provide these presentations.

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