



Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence

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INTRODUCTION

When abusers use violence in the home as a means of controlling and threatening the partners and children, it can be—and often is—directed at the pets as well. Pet abuse is one of the forms of intimidation listed in the [Power and Control Wheel](#) used by advocates for victims of domestic violence, and in fact is one of four significant factors associated with battering. [Walton & Moss, B.J., Manganello, J., Frye, V., & Campbell, J.D. (2005) Risk factors for intimate partner violence and associated injury among urban women. *Journal of Community Health, 30*, 377-389.] In the past 20 years, many programs and policies have addressed this connection between domestic violence and animal abuse, and meaningful partnerships among domestic violence advocates and animal rights activists have been developed. The articles in this newsletter address some of the ways these two communities have worked together to ensure safety for all victims of domestic violence.

The Human-Animal Bond in the Context of Domestic Violence

The human-animal bond begins at an early age. When asked to identify the 10 most important individuals in their lives, two of the ten listed by 7- and 10-year-old children were their pets. In another study, 42 percent of 5-year-olds spontaneously mentioned their pets when asked, “Whom do you turn to when you are feeling sad, angry, happy, or wanting to share a secret?” [Foer, J.S. (2006, November 27). My life as a dog [Op-Ed]. *New York Times*, p. A6.]

This bond can be especially strong in a home where domestic violence is occurring. Domestic violence victims live in great stress. A parent comforts and protects her child. Who can comfort parents who also are victims of domestic violence? Often it is their pets. The human-animal bond can facilitate healing, aid attachment, and provide a source of comfort, love, and support for survivors and their children. Relationships with pets help a person respond to grief and loss. Click [here](#) for more information about the human-animal bond.

Unfortunately, there is a dark side to this attachment - a clear and persistent link between pet abuse and domestic violence. For example, a recent study found a significant association between adult animal abuse and the perpetration of physical and severe psychological interpersonal violence. [Febres, J., Brasfield, H., Shorey, R.C., Elmquist, J., Ninnemann, A., Schonrum, Y.C., Stuart, G. (2014). Adulthood animal abuse among men arrested for interpersonal violence. *Violence against Women, 20*, 1959-1077.] For more information, click [here](#).

Much of the discussion about this link has focused on how pets in the family are often threatened, harmed, and sometimes killed as a way to control, intimidate, and harass the domestic partner. Not only do survivors worry about their own safety and that of their children, but they also worry about the safety of their pets. Because that bond is so strong, many survivors will risk further victimization by delaying seeking shelter, and/or by returning to an abusive partner, out of concern that their partners may harm their pets.

In response to this attachment between domestic violence victims and their pets, “safe havens” for pets of domestic violence victims have emerged across the country. The Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) provides a [zip-code-searchable database](#) of approximately 1,400 such programs which offer assistance by putting pets in foster care, boarding them with local veterinarians or animal shelters, providing other forms of off-site housing, or housing the pet on-site near the family in a separate kennel or together with their families in the domestic violence shelter. One of the keys to directing survivors to the right service is ensuring that questions about pets are asked by domestic violence advocates during hotline calls and during intake.

For more information:

Click [here](#) for an article on the human-animal bond in the context of intimate partner violence.

Click [here](#) for a PDF version of *A Common Bond: Maltreated Children and Animals in the Home*, a booklet containing guidelines for human service personnel in dealing with pets, domestic violence, and children.

Click [here](#) for Colorado’s Research Project on Domestic Violence, Children, and Pets: A Report to the Community.

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