

ASSISTING SURVIVORS WITH PETS IN THE WAKE OF A PANDEMIC

Sheltering Survivors and their Pets

The bond between humans and their companion animals is a determining factor in when and where victims of domestic abuse seek help. In the wake of COVID-19 and social distancing orders, many victims are trapped with fewer means of leaving violent abusers. In addition to the pandemic being an added safety risk for victims,¹ it has made it harder for shelters to maintain sufficient services and resources for survivors and their pets. It is crucial for advocates to be able to assist survivors with companion animals to find opportunities that make it safer to leave an abusive situation for themselves and their pets.

Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence

- 85% of domestic violence shelters across the U.S. reported that the women seeking safe haven also experienced incidents of animal abuse by their abusers.²
- In many studies, batterers use harm or the threat of harm to their victims' companion animals in order to control the victim.³
- Abusers may also use abuse of a pet as a means of coercing the victim into participating in illegal or harmful acts.⁴

Animals and the Human Bond

The bond between humans and their animals is especially strong in abusive homes.⁵ In situations in which a victim may be isolated from friends and family, animals play an important role as companions and sources of comfort.⁶ A 2017 study indicated that 56% of victims stated that they stayed in a violent situation because they feared leaving their pets in an abusive environment.⁷

¹ Campbell A. M. (2020). *An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives*. *Forensic Science International: Reports*, 2, 100089. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsir.2020.100089>.

² Blaney N. et al., *Protecting Domestic Violence Victims by Protecting their Pets*, *Juv. and Fam. Just. Today*, Spring 2010, at 16, 17.

³ Loring M.T & Bolden-Hines T. A., *Pet Abuse by Batterers as a Means of Coercing Battered Women Into Committing Illegal Behavior*, *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 27 (2004).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.* at 17.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Barrett B et al., *Animal Maltreatment as a Risk Marker of More Frequent and Severe Forms of Intimate Partner Violence*, *J. of Interpersonal Violence*, 2017, at 26.

COVID-19 and Pets

- The current risk of contracting COVID-19 from a pet is low according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)). However, the CDC still recommends that owners maintain good hygiene and practice healthy habits when interacting with animals.
- The Humane Society recommends a preparedness plan in the event that an owner becomes sick or has to leave a pet temporarily for a non-pet-friendly location. A sample preparedness plan checklist can be found on their [website](#).
- [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) has information on [safety planning for pets](#).
- Although shelters have more limited resources under the current pandemic restrictions, the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#) offers a guide for shelters and veterinarians in the event an animal is exposed to COVID-19 and must be temporarily sheltered.⁸

Resources for DV Programs

Assisting Survivors with Pets

- The Pet and Women's Safety Act (PAWS) provides a federal grant program, [Emergency and Transitional Pet Shelter and Housing Assistance Grant Program](#) for victims of domestic violence seeking shelter for or with their pets, offering funding for boarding and/or the animal's veterinary fees.⁹
- [RedRover's Safe Escape grant](#) helps pay the costs of boarding a pet or covering veterinary fees while the client is staying in a domestic violence shelter that does not allow animals.
- Additionally, [Purina's Purple Leash Project](#) donates funds to RedRover to provide the resources that would make domestic violence shelters more animal friendly.

Using Protection Orders to Protect Survivors and their Pets

- Nine states acknowledge violence towards a companion animal within their definitions of abuse by including animal cruelty as an element of domestic violence. These states are: [Alaska](#), [Colorado](#), [Indiana](#), [Michigan](#), [Nevada](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Tennessee](#), [Utah](#), and [Wisconsin](#)
- Currently, 33 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico¹⁰ have extended domestic violence protection orders to cover household pets/companion animals as well as the petitioner.
- Military-connected victims may also request that their Military Protective Order (MPO) incorporate pet protection by seeking reference to animals under Section 7 (m), "other specific provisions of this Order" of DD-Form 2873 "Military Protective Order." Victims may also choose to include information regarding pets, including threats or harm to animals by the abuser, under Section 5 of the MPO form, "information supporting issuance of this MPO."¹¹

⁸ Domestic Violence and Pets, Red Rover, <https://redrover.org/resource/domestic-violence-and-pets/> (last visited June 4, 2020).

⁹ Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 115 P.L. 334 § 1458A (b) (4) (B).

¹⁰ Map of State Laws Allowing Domestic Violence Orders to Include Pets, Michigan State University College of Law Animal and Legal Historical Center, <https://www.animallaw.info/content/map-state-laws-allowing-domestic-violence-orders-include-pets> (last visited September 14, 2021)

¹¹ Military Protective Order, DD FORM 2873, February 2020, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/forms/dd/dd2873_2020.pdf

Collaborating with System Actors

Attorneys, advocates, and allied professionals must work collaboratively to address the ties between domestic violence and animal abuse. Examples include:

- Veterinarians identifying animal abuse cases and reporting them to the appropriate authority.
- Law enforcement responses to animal cruelty cases may include a further investigation into the abuser's violent tendencies and potential domestic violence issues.¹²
- Multidisciplinary teams including animal control and/or animal welfare agencies in coordinated community responses to domestic violence.
- Cross-training between domestic violence and animal welfare agencies to encourage cross-reporting.
- Domestic violence advocates including questions about animal welfare in intakes and safety plans.
- Civilian domestic violence programs supporting military-connected victims may elect to coordinate with the Department of Defense's [Family Advocacy Program](#) (FAP), for assistance in obtaining a MPO or connecting with military law enforcement. Article 128b of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) on domestic violence explicitly recognizes how pets are used by abusers as a means to intimidate and threaten victims, and Article 115 of the UCMJ on communicating threats qualifies threats to injure a victim's pet as a crime.¹³ For more information on domestic violence in the military, visit [WomensLaw.org](#)

Resources on Safe Havens

To assist survivors, advocates must be aware of the options for survivors and their pets to shelter safely.

- [Animal Welfare Institute Safe Havens Search](#) provides a national listing of organizations that will shelter the pets of domestic violence victims based on proximity to the victim's location.
- [Sheltering Animals and Families Together \(SAFT\)](#) provides a list of pet-friendly domestic violence shelters by state. For locations that are not on their list, SAFT refers to RedRover's Safe Place For Pets Program.



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¹² *Animal Cruelty and Human Violence FAQ*, The Humane Soc., <https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/animal-cruelty-and-human-violence-faq>.

¹³ 10 U.S. Code § 928b - Art. 128b. Domestic Violence, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/928b> and 10 U.S. Code § 915 - Art. 115. Communicating threats, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/915>