



Understanding the Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence

What Is The Link®?

A correlation between animal abuse, family violence and other forms of community violence has been established. Child and animal protection professionals have recognized this link, noting that abuse of both children and animals is connected in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. When animals in a home are abused or neglected, it is a warning sign that others in the household may not be safe. In addition, children who witness animal abuse are at a greater risk of becoming abusers themselves.

How serious is it?

A survey of pet-owning families with substantiated child abuse and neglect found that animals were abused in 88 percent of homes where child physical abuse was present (DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood, 1983). A study of women seeking shelter at a safe house showed that 71 percent of those having pets affirmed that their partner had threatened, hurt or killed their companion animals, and 32 percent of mothers reported that their children had hurt or killed their pets (Ascione, 1998). Still another study showed that violent offenders incarcerated in a maximum security prison were significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed childhood acts of cruelty toward pets (Merz-Perez, Heide, & Silverman, 2001).

What's being done?

In many communities, human services, animal services and law enforcement agencies are sharing resources and expertise to address violence. Professionals are beginning to engage in cross-training and cross-reporting through inter-agency partnerships. Humane societies are also teaming with domestic violence shelters to provide emergency shelter for pets of domestic violence victims. In addition, some states have strengthened their animal-cruelty legislation and taken other measures to address The Link. These state-level actions permit earlier intervention and send a clear message that all forms of violence are taken seriously.

(more)

What can you do?

Even if you aren't an animal lover, you should still report animal cruelty. By reporting animal abuse, you may be preventing future violence toward people. You are also promoting respect for all living things, and this improves the quality of life for everyone in your community.

If you suspect animal cruelty or abuse contact the Colorado Humane Society & SPCA at (800) 249-5121, or file an online report at www.coloradohumane.org. If you live outside our service area, we will be happy to put you in touch with the proper agency handling your county.

Information on The Link® courtesy of the American Humane Association.

###