

PETS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

WHY IT MATTERS

Pets are not immune to domestic violence. Batterers frequently threaten, injure, maim, or kill their partners' or children's pets in conjunction with domestic abuse. Because victims understand the extent of the harm that their abusers will likely inflict upon their pets, many hesitate to leave violent relationships out of concern for the safety of their pets. When batterers abused victims, victims see the animal cruelty as part of a long history of violence aimed at them and their families.¹ Recognizing this, an increasing number of shelters have added kennels or instituted "safe haven" animal foster care programs in an effort to protect victims, their children, and their pets.

DID YOU KNOW?

- 71% of pet owners entering domestic violence shelters report that their batterer had threatened, injured, or killed family pets.²
- One study found that 87% of batterer-perpetrated incidents of pet abuse are committed in the presence of their partners for the purpose of revenge or control.³
- Studies show that up to 76% of batterer-perpetrated pet abuse incidents occur in the presence of children.⁴
- 13% of intentional animal abuse cases involve domestic violence.⁵
- Women in domestic violence shelters are 11 times more likely to report animal abuse by their partner than women not experiencing violence.⁶
- 85% of domestic violence shelters report that they commonly encounter women who speak about pet abuse incidents.⁶
- 52% of victims in shelters left their pets with their batterers.⁶
- Criminals and troubled youth have high rates of animal cruelty during their childhood, perpetrators often were victims of child abuse themselves.⁷
- Investigation of animal abuse is often the first point of social services intervention for a family experiencing domestic violence.⁸

THE LINK BETWEEN PET ABUSE AND DV

- Similar to domestic abuse, abusers demonstrate power and control over the family by threatening, harming, or killing animals.⁸
- Domestic violence victims whose batterers abuse their pets report more than twice as many incidents of child abuse as compared to domestic violence victims whose batterers have not abused their pets.¹⁰
- Batterers threaten, harm, or kill their children's pets in order to coerce them into sexual abuse or to force them to remain silent about abuse.¹¹
- Abusers harm pets to punish the victim for leaving, or in attempts to coerce her/him to return.¹⁷
- Abusers may harm pets to retaliate for acts of self-determination or independence.⁹
- Animal abusers are more likely to be domestic violence abusers, to have been arrested for other violent crimes and drug-related offenses, and engage in other delinquent behavior.⁶
- Many abusers have a history of animal abuse that precedes domestic violence toward their partner.¹²
- Animals may sometimes be used as weapons against domestic violence victims.⁶

THE ROLE OF PETS

- Family pets are commonly viewed as family members and companions.
- 55% of domestic violence victims and their children report that their pets are very important sources of emotional support, thus violence toward pets may be especially devastating and viewed as another form of family violence.¹³
- A large majority of women residing in domestic violence shelters report being emotionally close to their pets and experience distress when their animals are abused.⁶
- Studies show that a vast majority of children who witness pet abuse become distressed and emotionally distraught.⁶
- Women without children are more likely to postpone seeking shelter out of concern for their pets' safety as compared to women with children, 33.3% versus 19.5%.⁶

BARRIERS TO SEEKING SERVICES

- 65% of women who report prior pet abuse continue to worry for their pets' welfare after entry into a shelter.⁶
- Up to 40% of domestic violence victims are unable to escape their abusers because they are concerned about what will happen to their pets when they leave.¹⁴
- Only 12% of domestic violence programs can provide shelter for pets and 24% provide referral services to local animal welfare organizations.¹⁵
- Victims of domestic violence have been known to live in their cars for as long as four months until an opening was available at a pet-friendly safe house or shelter.¹⁶

TIPS FOR VICTIMS WITH PETS⁹

- Some shelters allow pets and many others have established "safe haven" foster care programs for the animal victims of domestic violence.
- If it is not possible to take the animals when the victim leaves the home, try to arrange temporary shelter for the pets with a veterinarian, trusted friend or family member, or local animal shelter.
- When vaccinating pets against rabies and licensing them with the town or county, it is important that registrations are in the victim's name. This will serve as proof that the victim owns the pets.
- Prepare the pets for a quick departure: collect vaccination records, pet license, medical records, and other documents.
- Ask for help from animal care and control officers or law enforcement if pets need to be retrieved from the abuser. Never reclaim animals alone.

IF YOU NEED HELP

For more information or if you need help, please contact the
American Humane Association at 303-792-9900.
National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE.
National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.
National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE.

SOURCES

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- ¹³ Faver, C.A. & Strand, E.B. (2003). Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty: Untangling the Web of Abuse. *Journal of Social Work Education*. 39(2), 237-253.
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- ¹⁵ NCADV *National Directory of Domestic Violence Programs*, 2004
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NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The Public Policy Office of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a national leader in the effort to create and influence Federal legislation that positively affects the lives of domestic violence victims and children. We work closely with advocates at the local, state and national level to identify the issues facing domestic violence victims, their children and the people who serve them and to develop a legislative agenda to address these issues. NCADV welcomes you to join us in our effort to end domestic violence.