



Understanding The Link[®] Between Animal Abuse and Family 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. For example:

- There are now felony-level penalties for animal cruelty in nearly all states.

- Several states require veterinarians to report suspected animal abuse and offer veterinarians who report cruelty immunity from civil and criminal liability.
- Some states require animal control officers to report suspected child abuse or neglect and receive training in recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect.
- A few states permit child and adult protection workers to report suspected animal abuse or receive training on identifying and reporting animal cruelty, abuse and neglect.
- Nearly half the states call for psychological counseling for individuals convicted of animal cruelty.

Where Does American Humane Stand?

American Humane has been working to protect children and animals since 1877. For more than a decade, American Humane has been educating both the general public and professionals about The Link between violence to people and animals by:

- Facilitating workshops to educate the public and build collaboration among human service, animal protection, public safety and law enforcement professionals;
- Operating the National Resource Center on The Link, providing professional training at national conferences and publishing resources and training guides;
- Helping pass animal cruelty legislation, drafting cross-reporting legislation and testifying at both state and national levels; and
- Contributing to the understanding of The Link through research on animal cruelty, its treatment in the criminal justice system and detection by veterinarians.

American Humane asserts that The Link must be addressed and the following provisions must be implemented:

- Cross-training and cross-reporting among law enforcement officers, humane investigators, veterinarians, health professionals, domestic violence advocates and child protection workers;



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- Training and continuing education about The Link for judges and prosecutors;
- Model legislation for cross-reporting and cross-reporting standards;
- Systematic tracking of national animal abuse data;
- Expanded research about The Link, including evaluation of prevention and intervention approaches;
- Inclusion of animal-focused violence in standard assessments and intake forms for child protective services, mental health and domestic violence workers; and
- Community partnerships to respond to family violence and educate the public about taking all acts of violence seriously.

References

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Merz-Perez, L., Heide, K. M., & Silverman, I. J. (2001). Childhood cruelty to animals and subsequent violence against humans. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 45(5), 556-573.

Resources

American Humane's National Resource Center on the Link. www.americanhumane.org or (800) 227-4645.

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PSYETA AniCare and AniCare Child models of treatment of animal abuse. www.psyeta.org