



Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter

The Open-Door Shelter Serving Our Community and Its Neediest Animals

Animal Cruelty/Domestic Violence Fact Sheet

Researchers have found that a batterer's first target is often an animal living in the home, the second-a spouse or child. Often, batterers are able to control their victims, such as a spouse, by threatening, torturing, and/or killing the victim's animals.

National surveys conducted by various universities and the Humane Society of the United States show that about 74% of women who are victims of domestic violence have an animal. Nearly three-quarters of those women report their pet was threatened, harmed or killed by their partners.

Why do batterers threaten, abuse, or kill animals?

- To demonstrate and confirm power and control over the family. • To isolate the victim and children.
- To eliminate competition for attention.
- To force the family to keep violence a secret.
- To teach submission.
- To retaliate for acts of independence and self-determination.
- To perpetuate the context of terror.
- To prevent the victim from leaving or coerce her/him to return.
- To punish the victim for leaving.
- To degrade the victim through involvement in the abuse.

Why should we recognize animal abuse as a form of battering?

- Animal abuse exposes the deliberateness of battering rather than loss of control.
- Animal abuse and child abuse are closely related.
- Animal abuse is often a tool used by batterers to emotionally control or coerce victims.
- Threatening, injuring, or killing animals can indicate the potential for increased violence or lethality.
- Victims may postpone leaving out of fear for their pets' safety.
- Identifying animal abusers can help identify other victims of violence within the family.

What can victims of domestic violence do to protect their pets?

- Develop an emergency plan for sheltering the pets, themselves, and their children (Review a copy of the First Strike® planning guide, *Making the Connection: Protecting Your Pet From Domestic Violence.*)
- Establish ownership of the pets (obtain an animal license, proof of vaccinations or veterinary receipts in victim's name to help prove they own the pets).
- Prepare the pets for departure (collect vaccination and medical records, collar and identification, medication, bowls, bedding, etc.).
- Ask for assistance from law enforcement or animal care and control officers to reclaim the pets if left behind.

What are suggested intake questions regarding pets that should be asked by a domestic violence shelter?

- Do you now have a pet? If yes, how many and what kinds?
- Have you had a pet in the past 12 months? If yes, what kinds?
- Has your partner ever hurt or killed a family pet? If yes, describe.
- Has your partner ever threatened to hurt or kill a family pet? If yes, describe.
- Have you ever hurt or killed a family pet? If yes, describe.
- Have any of your children ever hurt or killed a family pet? If yes, describe.
- Was the animal considered the child's, yours, your partner's or the family's pet?
- Did your concern for a pet's welfare keep you from coming to a shelter sooner than now? If yes, explain.

- Did you leave the abusive partner because of the abuse of a pet? If yes, describe.

What can advocates do to raise awareness about the connection between animal cruelty and domestic violence in their communities?

- Take animal abuse seriously.
- Contact their counterparts in other agencies.
- Develop cross-training and cross-reporting among animal welfare, domestic violence, child abuse and other related agencies.
- Support strong anticruelty laws.
- Develop community anti-violence coalitions.
- Develop community based programs to promote empathy and humane education.
- Encourage research on the connection.
- Work with local animal shelters, veterinarians, veterinary schools and boarding kennels to develop emergency housing programs for pets.
- Collect data in their own agencies.
- Add questions to intake forms about animal cruelty.