



# 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.