



Promoting justice and safety for victims of intimate partner violence and their families.

BATTERED WOMEN'S JUSTICE PROJECT



Understanding Animal Abuse as Intimate Partner Violence

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When abusers use violence in the home as a means of controlling and threatening the partners and children, it can be—and often is—directed at the pets as well. Pet abuse is one of the forms of intimidation listed in the [Power and Control Wheel](#) used by advocates for victims of domestic violence, and in fact is one of four significant factors associated with battering. [Walton & Moss, B.J., Manganello, J., Frye, V., & Campbell, J.D. (2005) Risk factors for intimate partner violence and associated injury among urban women. *Journal of Community Health*, 30, 377-389.] In the past 20 years, many programs and policies have addressed this connection between domestic violence and animal abuse, and meaningful partnerships among domestic violence advocates animal rights activists have been developed. The articles in this newsletter address some of the ways these two communities have worked together to ensure safety for all victims of domestic violence.

The Human-Animal Bond in the Context of Domestic Violence

The human-animal bond begins at an early age. When asked to identify the 10 most important individuals in their lives, two of the ten listed by 7- and 10-year-old children were their pets. In another study, 42 percent of 5-year-olds spontaneously mentioned their pets when asked, "Whom do you turn to when you are feeling sad, angry, happy, or wanting to share a secret?" [Foer, J.S. (2006, November 27). My life as a dog [Op-Ed]. New York Times, p. A6.]

This bond can be especially strong in a home where domestic violence is occurring. Domestic violence victims live in great stress. A parent comforts and protects her child. Who can comfort parents who also are victims of domestic violence? Often it is their pets. The human-animal bond can facilitate healing, aid attachment, and provide a source of comfort, love, and support for survivors and their children. Relationships with pets help a person respond to grief and loss. Click [here](#) for more information about the human-animal bond.

Unfortunately, there is a dark side to this attachment - a clear and persistent link between pet abuse and domestic violence. For example, a recent study found a significant association between adult animal abuse and the perpetration of physical and severe psychological interpersonal violence. [Febres, J., Brasfield, H., Shorey, R.C., Elmquist, J., Ninnemann, A., Schonrum, Y.C., Stuart, G. (2014). Adulthood animal abuse among men arrested for interpersonal violence. *Violence against Women*, 20, 1959-1077.] For more information, click [here](#).

Much of the discussion about this link has focused on how pets in the family are often threatened, harmed, and sometimes killed as a way to control, intimidate, and harass the domestic partner. Not only do survivors worry about their own safety and that of their children, but they also worry about the safety of their pets. Because that bond is so strong, many survivors will risk further victimization by delaying seeking shelter, and/or by returning to an abusive partner, out of concern that their partners may harm their pets. [Continue reading...](#)

Including Pets on Protection Orders

The idea that pets should be (or even need to be) included on domestic violence protection orders was not considered until relatively recently. However, it is a natural outgrowth of the greater visibility and acceptance of the connection between animal cruelty and abuse and other forms of crime, particularly domestic violence. For example, research found that up to 71% of domestic violence victims with companion animals reported that their abusers had threatened, injured, or killed their pets. [Ascione, F. R., Weber, C. V., Thompson, T. M., Heath, J., Maruyama, M., & Hayashi, K. (2007). Battered pets and domestic violence: Animal abuse reported by women experiencing intimate violence and by non-abused women *Violence Against Women*, 13, 354-373.]

The strong bond that exists between survivors of domestic violence and their companion animals, coupled with the paucity of resources offering safekeeping for their pets, presents a challenge for victim advocates: 48% of respondents in another study refused to leave an abusive situation because they had nowhere to take their pets. [Carlisle-Frank, P., Frank, J. M., & Nielsen, L. (2004). Selective battering of the family pet, *Anthrozoos*, 17, 26-41.]

One way to help these survivors protect their pets is to ensure custody through the protection order process. However, a 2005 workshop in Maine on the link between animal cruelty and human violence revealed confusion on the parts of judges and participants about the legal ability to include companion animals in “protection from abuse” orders for battered spouses and families. This confusion has not been confined to Maine. Judges have been reluctant to take this action without clear statutory authority. [Continue reading...](#)

Creating Relationships between Domestic Violence Service Providers and Animal Control/Humane Law Enforcement

Animal control agencies are tasked with enforcing local animal ordinances and, in many areas, state animal protection laws. Animal control officers may encounter victims of domestic violence in many ways, and they can be important partners for domestic violence advocates.

It is common knowledge that domestic abuse often goes undetected. However, a dog in the yard who has visible injuries or is severely underweight may be more easily noticed and reported by neighbors. Also, victims may report abuse of their animals more readily than they seek help for themselves. For these reasons, animal control officers may come in contact with domestic violence victims before anyone else does. Their training as first responders gives them the ability to make a quick assessment of a situation and determine whether an animal is in danger. If domestic violence professionals can help these officers widen their lens to include potential human victims of abuse, they may be able to provide resources and referrals to victims at an earlier stage; for example, a domestic violence program might choose to provide animal control officers with wallet cards containing the crisis line number and information about local resources.

Domestic violence organizations should also strongly consider reaching out to animal control agencies to offer training. While many, if not most, animal control officers may be versed in the basic connections between animal cruelty and domestic violence, they would benefit greatly from a deeper understanding of the dynamics of battering. How domestic violence may affect victims’ behavior as well as batterer tactics may be relevant in situations officers encounter (e.g., claiming that the victim was the one who harmed the animal, or that the animal belongs to the batterer rather than the victim). In turn, animal control agencies may offer victim advocates insight into what they see “in the trenches” and educate them on ways to help victims protect their pets via the legal system: what to do if the animal becomes part of a cruelty case, or if the batterer attempts to gain custody of the victim’s pet via the courts. [Continue reading...](#)

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