

fact sheet

pets & 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.

Week
without
Violence

The YWCA Week Without Violence™, the third week in October, is an international initiative that was created by YWCA USA in 1995 to mobilize the women, men and children to take action against violence in our homes, schools, work places and communities.

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

eliminating racism
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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 com-

pared 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:

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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⁴ Faver & Strand. (2003).

⁵ Humane Society of the U.S. (2001). *2000 Report of Animal Cruelty Cases*. Washington, DC.

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⁷ Flynn, C.P. (2000). Woman's Best Friend: Pet Abuse and the Role of Companion Animals in the Lives of Battered Women. *Violence Against Women*, 6(2), 162–177.

⁸ Arkow, P. (2003). *Breaking the cycles of violence: A guide to multi-disciplinary interventions*. A handbook for child protection, domestic violence and animal protection agencies. Alameda, CA: Latham Foundation.

⁹ *Animal Cruelty/Domestic Violence Fact Sheet* (2007). Humane Society of the United States. <http://www.hsus.org/hsusfield/>.

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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.

¹⁴ Arkow, P. (1994). Animal abuse and domestic violence: Intake statistics tell a sad story. *Latham Letter* 15(2), 17.

¹⁵ NCADV National Directory of Domestic Violence Programs, 2004

¹⁶ Kogan, L.R., McConnell, S., Schoenfeld-Tacher, R., & Jansen-Lock, P. (2004). Crosstrails: A unique foster program to provide safety for pets of women in safehouses. *Violence Against Women* 10, 418–434.