

The Overlap of Animal Cruelty, Child Abuse/Neglect, and Domestic Violence

Research studies have shown that there is a link between animal cruelty and other violent acts. It has been found that people who abuse animals are highly likely to either have been abused themselves and/or are also abusing family members. Many go on to commit even more violent acts such as rape and murder. By reporting and stopping animal abuse, as well as getting psychological help for the abuser, there is the potential to prevent even more violent and pathologic behavior.

People abuse animals for the same reasons they abuse people. Some of them will stop with animals, but enough have been **proven** to continue on to commit violent crimes to people that it's worth paying attention to. FBI Supervisory Special Agent Allen Brantley was quoted as saying "Animal cruelty is not a harmless venting of emotion in a healthy individual; it is a **warning sign**."

Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty

In recent years it has become widely accepted that the mistreatment of animals can be an indicator of many other forms of family violence and ongoing abuse and neglect, including child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence and mistreatment of the disabled. Cruelty to animals can also be a significant indicator that a child or young adult is at high risk of becoming a perpetrator of violence in society, perpetuating the cruelties that he or she has experienced.

Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty

Researchers say that a child's violence against animals often represents displaced hostility and aggression stemming from neglect or abuse of the child or of another family member. Animal cruelty committed by any member of a family, whether parent or child, often means child abuse occurs in that family.

While animal abuse is an important sign of child abuse, the parent isn't always the one harming the animal.

Children who abuse animals may be repeating a lesson learned at home; like their parents, they are reacting to anger or frustration with violence. Their violence is directed at the only individual in the family more vulnerable than themselves: an animal. One expert says, "Children in violent homes are characterized by frequently participating in pecking-order battering," in which they may maim or kill an animal.

Elderly Abuse and Animal Cruelty/Neglect

When a family member abuses an elderly relative's pet, the motivations may be complex. The perpetrator may neglect or abuse an elder's pet as a form of control or retaliation, out of frustration over their caretaking responsibilities, or as a way to extract financial assets.

Cases of extreme animal neglect may also reflect an older adult's inability to provide adequate care for him or herself, and thus indicate the need for assistance.

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

- Animal cruelty exposes the deliberateness of battering rather than loss of control.
- Animal cruelty and child abuse are closely related.
- Animal cruelty 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.

Links to Animal Cruelty/Abuse Resources:

Humane Society of the United States:

http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/first_strike_the_connection_between_animal_cruelty_and_human_violence

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA): <http://www.helpinganimals.com/a-abusefam.html>

Pet-Abuse.com: http://www.animal-abuse.org/pages/cruelty_database/database_notes.php