



American Humane Association

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877

Contact:

Kelley Baca Weir
American Humane Association
303-925-9418
kellyw@americanhumane.org

Matt Wagner
Carmichael Lynch Spong
720-946-6116
matthew.wagner@carmichaellynch.com

American Humane Association: Understanding the Link[®] Between Animal Abuse and Family Violence

What is the Link?

Many correlations between animal abuse, family violence, and other forms of community violence have been established. Professionals in child and animal protection, elder abuse and domestic violence prevention have recognized this Link, noting that abuse of vulnerable family members is connected in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. When animals in a home are abused or neglected, it is a warning sign that others in the household may not be safe. In addition, children who witness or perpetrate animal cruelty are at a greater risk of becoming abusers themselves.

How serious is it?

A survey of pet-owning families with substantiated child abuse and neglect found that animals were abused in 88 percent of homes where child physical abuse was present (DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood, 1983). A study of women seeking shelter at a safe house showed that 71 percent of those having pets affirmed that their partner had threatened, hurt, or killed their companion animals, and 32 percent of mothers reported that their children had hurt or killed their pets (Ascione, 1998). Still another study showed that violent offenders incarcerated in a maximum-security prison were significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed childhood acts of cruelty toward pets (Merz-Perez, Heide, & Silverman, 2001). Over a dozen studies have reported that the threat of animals being killed or harmed is a significant barrier that keeps battered women from escaping from abusive situations (Ascione, 2007).

What are some high-profile case studies illustrating the link between animal cruelty and other forms of violence?

Jeffrey Dahmer: American serial killer, as a child impaled animal skulls on stakes in his backyard. He practiced taxidermy skills on animals that he found dead alongside the road, skills that he later used when he murdered and cannibalized 17 men and boys between 1978 and 1991.

Albert DeSalvo: "The Boston Strangler," American serial killer, murdered 13 women between 1962 and 1964 in the Boston area. In his youth he trapped dogs and cats in orange crates and shot arrows through the boxes.

Luke Woodham: The first of the "schoolyard shooters," Woodham, 16, was convicted of killing his mother and two students and wounding seven others in Pearl, Miss. in 1997. He described in his diary, in sickening detail, how he tortured and killed his own dog, Sparkle, calling the act "true beauty."

What are some major examples of the Link?

Five major areas of the Link have been identified:

- 1) In **domestic violence**, animals are harmed, killed or threatened to control battered women, who frequently are unable to escape a violent home for fear of what will happen to their animals if they flee.
- 2) In **child abuse**, pets are harmed, killed or threatened to coerce children into sexual abuse or maintaining silence. When children are cruel to animals, it may indicate that abuse and neglect have been inflicted on the child.
- 3) In **child development**, serious acts of childhood cruelty to animals have been linked to an increased likelihood of future violent behavior against humans. Cruelty to animals is one of the earliest symptoms of Conduct Disorder in children.
- 4) In **elder abuse**, caseworkers report animal neglect frequently co-occurs with elderly persons' inability to care for themselves. Elderly persons are also more likely to be "hoarders" who collect unsustainable numbers of animals.
- 5) In **law enforcement**, dogfighting is rampant in many areas and is often accompanied by other crimes and violent behaviors.

What's being done?

In many communities, human services, animal services, and law enforcement agencies are sharing resources and expertise to address violence. Professionals are beginning to engage in cross-training and cross-reporting through interagency partnerships, and humane societies are teaming with domestic violence shelters to provide emergency shelter for pets of domestic violence victims.

In addition, some states have strengthened their animal cruelty legislation and taken other measures to address the Link. These state-level actions permit earlier intervention and send a clear message that all forms of violence are taken seriously. For example:

- There are now felony-level penalties for animal cruelty in nearly all states.
- Several states now include pets in protective orders issued for domestic violence victims.
- Several states require veterinarians to report suspected child abuse and offer veterinarians who report animal cruelty immunity from civil and criminal liability.
- Some states require animal control officers to report suspected child abuse or neglect and receive training in recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect.
- A few states permit child and adult protection workers to report suspected animal abuse or receive training on identifying and reporting animal cruelty, abuse, and neglect.
- Nearly half the states call for psychological counseling for individuals convicted of animal cruelty.

Where does the American Humane Association stand?

American Humane has been working to protect children and animals since 1877. For more than a decade, American Humane has been educating both the general public and professionals about the Link between violence to people and animals by:

- Facilitating workshops to educate the public and build collaboration among human service, animal protection, public safety, and law enforcement professionals;

- Administering the National Resource Center on the Link[®], providing professional training at national conferences, and publishing resources and training guides;
- Helping pass animal cruelty legislation, drafting cross-reporting legislation, and testifying at both state and national levels;
- Contributing to the understanding of the Link through research on animal cruelty, its treatment in the criminal justice system, and detection by veterinarians.

American Humane asserts that the Link must be addressed and the following provisions must be implemented:

- Cross-training and cross-reporting among law enforcement officers, humane investigators, veterinarians, health professionals, domestic violence advocates, and child protection workers;
- Training and continuing education about the Link for judges and prosecutors;
- Model legislation for cross-reporting and cross-reporting standards;
- Systematic tracking of national animal abuse data;
- Expanded research about the Link, including evaluation of prevention and intervention approaches;
- Inclusion of animal-focused violence in standard assessments and intake forms for child protective services, mental health, and domestic violence workers; and
- Community partnerships to respond to family violence and educate the public about taking all acts of violence seriously.

About the American Humane Association

Founded in 1877, the American Humane Association is the oldest national organization dedicated to protecting both children and animals. Through a network of child and animal protection agencies and individuals, American Humane develops policies, legislation, curricula and training programs to protect children and animals from abuse, neglect and exploitation. The nonprofit membership organization, headquartered in Denver, raises awareness about The Link[®] between animal abuse and other forms of violence, as well as the benefits derived from the human-animal bond. American Humane's regional office in Los Angeles is the authority behind the "No Animals Were Harmed"[®] End Credit Disclaimer on film and TV productions, and American Humane's office in Washington is an advocate for child and animal protection at the federal and state levels. American Humane meets the strong, comprehensive standards of the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance and has been awarded the Independent Charities "Best In America" Seal of Approval. Visit www.americanhumane.org to learn more.

###