

# NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## PETS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACTS

### WHY IT MATTERS

Pets are not immune from domestic violence. Batterers frequently threaten, injure, maim, or kill their partners' or children's pets for the purpose of revenge or control. 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. 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.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- 13% of intentional animal abuse cases involve domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>
- Investigation of animal abuse is often the first point of social services intervention for a family experiencing domestic violence.<sup>2</sup>
- 55% of domestic violence victims report that their pets are very important sources of emotional support.<sup>3</sup>

### THE LINK BETWEEN PET ABUSE AND DV

- Domestic violence victims whose batterers abused their pets reported more than twice as many incidents of child abuse than domestic violence victims whose batterers had not abused their pets.<sup>4</sup>
- 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.<sup>5</sup>

### PET ABUSE AS PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

- 71% of pet owners entering domestic violence shelters report that their batterer had threatened, injured, or killed family pets.<sup>6</sup>
- 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.<sup>7</sup>
- Studies show that 62% to 76% of batterer-perpetrated pet abuse incidents occur in the presence of children.<sup>8</sup>
- Domestic violence victims whose batterers abused their animals see the animal cruelty as one or more violent episode in a long history of violence aimed at them and their families.<sup>9</sup>

### BARRIERS TO SEEKING SERVICES

- 25% to 40% of domestic violence victims are unable to escape their abusers because they worry about what will happen to their pets or livestock should they leave.<sup>10</sup>
- 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.<sup>11</sup>
- One study found that 49% of pet-owning victims who fled their abusers and sought shelter continued to worry about their animals after entering shelter.<sup>12</sup>

### TIPS FOR VICTIMS WITH PETS<sup>13</sup>

- If possible consider and plan for the safety and welfare of animals.
- When possible be prepared to leave the home with your animals: 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, 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.



## IF YOU NEED HELP

If you or someone you know is being abused and wants help, please contact the

**National Domestic Violence Hotline** at 1-800-799-SAFE.

**American Humane Association** at 303-792-9900.

**National Child Abuse Hotline** at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.

**National Sexual Assault Hotline** at 1-800-656-HOPE.

## TIPS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCATES

- Establish community coalitions against family violence that include humane societies, SPCAs, animal control agencies, and veterinarians. Invite representatives from these agencies to train your staff on how animal abuse cases are investigated and prosecuted and offer to train their staffs and volunteers about domestic violence issues.
- Add questions about pets in the home during intake questionnaires and risk assessments.
- Work with animal shelters, veterinarians, and rescue groups to establish “safe haven” foster care programs for the animals of victims of domestic violence.
- Include provisions for pets in safety planning strategies.
- Help your clients prove ownership of their animals.
- Include animals in protective orders.
- Help victims find pet-friendly transitional and permanent housing.
- When victims can no longer take care of their pets, make referrals to animal adoption agencies or rescue societies.

## SOURCES, as of 8-8-06

<sup>1</sup> Humane Society of the U.S. (2001). 2000 Report of Animal Cruelty Cases. Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Ascione, F.R. (2001). Animal Abuse and Youth Violence. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin.* U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> Loar, L. (1999). “I’ll only help you if you have two legs,” or, Why human services professionals should pay attention to cases involving cruelty to animals. In, Ascione, F.R. & Arkow, P., eds.: *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention.* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999, pp. 120-136.

<sup>6</sup> Ascione, F.R., Weber, C. V. & Wood, D. S. (1997). The abuse of animals and domestic violence: A national survey of shelters for women who are battered. *Society & Animals* 5(3), 205-218.

<sup>7</sup> Quintlisk, J.A. (1999). Animal Abuse and Family Violence. In, Ascione, F.R. & Arkow, P., eds.: *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention.* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, pp. 168-175.

<sup>8</sup> Faver & Strand. (2003).

<sup>9</sup> Luke, C., Arluke, A., & Levin, J. (1998). *Cruelty to Animals and Other Crimes: A Study by the MSPCA and Northeastern University.* Boston: MSPCA.

<sup>10</sup> Arkow, P. (1994). Animal abuse and domestic violence: Intake statistics tell a sad story. *Latham Letter* 15(2), 17.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Faver & Strand. (2003).

<sup>13</sup> American Humane Association and National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (2006).