



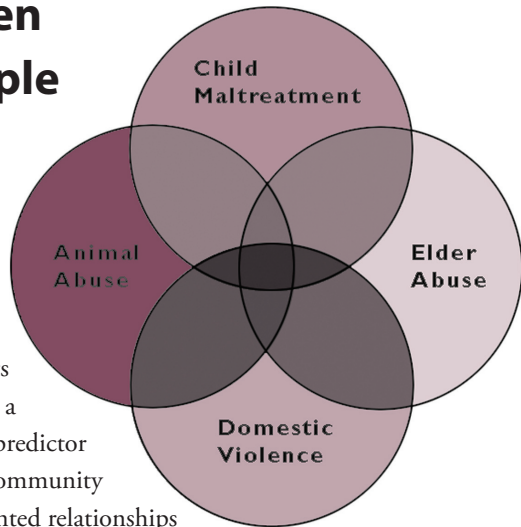
NATIONAL LINK COALITION

*Working together to stop violence  
against people and animals*

## The Link Between Violence to People and Violence to Animals

In recent years there has been renewed interest in an idea dating back centuries — that acts of cruelty against animals can be a sentinel indicator – and often a predictor – of other forms of family and community violence. Research has documented relationships

between childhood histories of animal cruelty and patterns of chronic interpersonal aggression. Animals often become victims in the battles of power and control that typically mark domestic violence. Animal abuse and neglect often indicate situations of elders needing assistance. We call the areas where child maltreatment, domestic violence, elder abuse and animal cruelty intersect “The Link.”



Today, knowledge of The Link informs many aspects of family and community violence prevention. Research increasingly substantiates the interrelationships of different forms of abuse, which are often committed by the same offenders. Officials in child welfare, animal care and control, domestic violence and adult protective services are coordinating their efforts. By transcending disciplinary and institutional boundaries, collaborations ensure a more effective approach to breaking the cycles of violence and protecting all vulnerable members of society.

# What Is The Link?

With a majority of homes having pets and with 98% of Americans considering pets to be companions and family members, animal maltreatment does not occur in isolation. Rather, animal abuse and neglect are often part of a complex constellation of family dysfunction and a “red flag” for other violent behaviors.

Researchers in psychology, child development, sociology, social work, criminology, veterinary medicine, and law are addressing the nature of violence against two- and four-legged members of the family. Key findings include:

- Where animal abuse or neglect has occurred, other forms of violence are often present, putting other family members at increased risk.
- Acts or threats of animal cruelty often coerce, control and intimidate women, children and elders to be silent about their abuse, to prevent them from leaving, and to force them to return.
- A child's cruelty to animals may be an indicator that the child has suffered serious neglect or abuse, and may lead to an increased likelihood of other violent behaviors in childhood and adulthood.
- The presence of animal abuse in the home greatly increases the risk of adults and children being bitten or attacked by pets.

Not all children who hurt animals become violent adults, and not all adult animal abusers hurt their partners or children. However, including routine questions about animals and their welfare in investigations and assessments can help social services, law enforcement and court officials determine patterns of violence and risks to the safety and well-being of all family members.

*“A growing body of evidence suggests that bonds formed or broken with companion animals reverberate and resonate across the lifespan.”*

**— Mary Renck Jalongo,**

***“The World's Children and Their Companion Animals: Developmental and Educational Significance of the Child/Pet Bond.”***

# Why is The Link Important?

Incorporating The Link into policy and practice may enable professionals to intervene earlier to detect and prevent abuse to children, animals and vulnerable adults. To achieve this, it is essential that communication and cooperation between humane and human services agencies be developed and enhanced.

Rather than compartmentalizing these services, a collaborative, interagency approach is more effective when addressing victims experiencing overlapping forms of maltreatment.

*"He opened the car door and ordered my daughter Christine to kick our dog Dusty out. When she refused, he told her...she could watch while he tortured and killed Dusty and dumped her off the side of the road, too. Then he said he would come home and kill me and Christine would be left alone with him. He raped Christine her first night alone in our new home while I was at work. She had just turned eight."*

**— Marsha Millikin**

***"Life and Death Inside the Cycles of Violence"***



# What Are the Implications of The Link?

*Social scientists and law enforcement agencies have begun to examine cruelty to animals as a serious human problem closely linked to domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and other violent crimes. [These efforts] cannot undo generations of abuse, but they can be an effective means of breaking the cycle of family violence from one generation to the next."*

**— International Association of  
Chiefs of Police**

When animals are abused, people are at risk; when people are abused, animals are at risk. Animal maltreatment must be viewed as a form of family violence. Animal neglect, abuse, cruelty, fighting, and hoarding:

1. Promote desensitization to violence.
2. Damage a child's development of empathy.
3. Foster the idea that victims are expendable.
4. Harm the sense of safety of children, pets, and vulnerable adults.
5. Damage children's sense of safety and confidence in the ability of adults to protect them from harm.
6. Lead to acceptance of physical harm in supposedly loving relationships.
7. Foster a dynamic of inflicting pain, suffering and humiliation to achieve power and control.
8. Lead to imitation of abusive behaviors.
9. Prevent survivors from leaving abusive situations fearing what may happen to their pets.



# Research Summary

*Criminal penalties and prosecutions for animal cruelty, and interagency partnerships addressing The Link, have dramatically increased. These changes have been motivated by an emerging body of research in social science. Among the more significant findings:*

## **The Link and Violent Crimes...**

- Children's acts of animal abuse are some of the strongest and earliest diagnostic indicators of conduct disorder, often beginning as young as 6-1/2 years of age (Ascione, 2001).
- 70% of animal abusers had criminal records including crimes of violence, property, drugs, or disorderly behavior (Arluke & Luke, 1997).
- 50% of schoolyard shooters have histories of animal cruelty (Verlinden, Herson, & Thomas, 2000).
- 35% of search warrants executed for animal abuse or dog fighting investigations resulted in seizures of narcotics or guns. 82% of offenders arrested for animal abuse violations had prior arrests for battery, weapons or drug charges: 23% had subsequent arrests for felony offenses (Chicago Crime Commission, 2004).
- 31% of inner-city teens have attended a dog fight (Cleveland, 2006).
- Adults who keep vicious dogs are more likely to have been arrested for violent crimes and drug- and property-related offenses (Barnes et al., 2006).
- 70% of people charged with cruelty to animals were known by police for other violent behavior – including homicide (Boat & Knight, 2000).
- 61.5% of animal abuse offenders had also committed an assault; 17% had committed sexual abuse; 8% had arson convictions. Animal abuse was a better predictor of sexual assault than were previous convictions for homicide, arson or firearms offenses. Animal cruelty offenders committed an average of four different types of criminal offenses. All sexual homicide offenders reported having been cruel to animals. Sexual assault, domestic violence and firearms offenses featured prominently in cruelty offenders' criminal histories (Clarke, 2002).
- 63% of aggressive criminals had deliberately inflicted harm on animals in childhood (Schiff, Louw, & Ascione, 1999).
- Including a screening question about animal cruelty on a domestic violence crisis line resulted in an 80% decrease in domestic violence homicides (Boat & Knight, 2000).
- 48% of rapists and 30% of child molesters committed animal abuse in childhood or adolescence (Tingle, Barnard et al., 1986).

# Research Summary

## The Link and Domestic Violence...

- A history of pet abuse is one of the four most significant indicators of who is at greatest risk of becoming a batterer (Walton-Moss et al., 2005).
- Twelve studies have reported that 18% to 48% of battered women delay leaving abusive situations out of fear for the safety of their animals (Ascione, 2007).
- 71% of battered women said their partners harmed, killed or threatened pets. 75% of these incidents occurred in the presence of the women to control them. 13% said their children had hurt pets. (Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997).
- 32% of battered women reported that their children had hurt or killed animals (Ascione, 1998).
- 68% of battered women reported violence to their animals. 87% of these incidents occurred in the presence of women to control them; 75% occurred in presence of children (Quinlisk, 1999).
- Batterers who also abuse pets are more dangerous, more controlling, and use more forms of violence than batterers who do not (Simmons & Lehmann, 2007).
- Children exposed to domestic violence were three times more likely to be cruel to animals (Currie, 2006).
- 48% of battered women reported that animal abuse had occurred “often” during the past year. (Carlisle-Frank & Flanagan, 2006).

## The Link and Elder Abuse...

- 92% of Adult Protective Services caseworkers found animal neglect co-existing with clients who were unable to care for themselves. 75% noted their clients’ concern for their pets’ welfare affected decisions about accepting interventions or other services. (HSUS & National Center on Elder Abuse, 2003).
- The inability of animal hoarders, a significant number of whom are older women, to adequately care for large numbers of animals puts them at risk of self-neglect, eviction, and health issues, and often indicates a need for mental health and social services interventions (Patronek, Loar, & Nathanson, 2006).
- In the absence of children or other loved ones, pets may be particularly significant others for isolated seniors: the loss of these animals when a senior moves to subsidized housing or assisted living facilities can be traumatic. Abusive children may intimidate elders, retaliate against them, or control their assets by threatening or removing their pets (Arkow, 2007).
- 35% of Adult Protective Services caseworkers reported their clients talk about pets being threatened, injured, killed, or denied care (Boat & Knight, 2000).

## **The Link and Child Abuse and Neglect...**

- Animal abuse was reported in 60% of child-abusing families and in 88% of families investigated for physical child abuse. In one-third of the families, the children had abused animals, using them as scapegoats for their anger. There were 11 times more dog bites and attacks in these homes (DeViney, Dickert & Lockwood, 1983).
- Children who were sexually abused were five times more likely to abuse animals (Ascione, Friedrich, Heath, & Hayashi, 2003).
- 20% of children who sexually abused other children also had histories of sexually abusing animals. In most cases the acts were carefully planned with pets targeted, isolated, groomed and abused -- much like their child victim counterparts (Duffield, Hassiotis, & Vizard, 1998).
- 91% of abused children institutionalized for delinquency and emotional disturbances said they had had special pets, and 99% showed very positive feelings toward these pets. However, abusive adults had frequently punished or intimidated them by killing, harming, or removing their pets (Robin, ten Bensel, Quigley & Anderson, 1984).
- 82% of families investigated for animal abuse were also known to social services departments, and 61% to probation departments. These families were largely described as having children at risk (Hutton, 1983).
- Children's witnessing animal cruelty was the largest predictor of future violence, with the witness eight times more likely to become a perpetrator. Animal abuse perpetration was associated with higher rates of child neglect (DeGue & DiLillo, 2009).
- 62% to 76% of animal cruelty in the home occurs in front of children (Faver & Strand, 2003).
- Significant research has documented relationships between childhood histories of animal cruelty and patterns of chronic interpersonal aggression (Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Hensley & Tallichet, 2005; Merz-Perez, Heide & Silverman, 2001; Becker & French, 2004).

***References for these and hundreds of writings on The Link can be found at [www.animaltherapy.net/Bibliography-Link.html](http://www.animaltherapy.net/Bibliography-Link.html)***



# Using The Link to Overcome Disconnects in the Systems

Historically, cruelty to animals has been viewed as an issue separate from other forms of violence and ignored by the human services and criminal justice fields. There are many reasons for these disconnects:

- Separate systems are involved. Child maltreatment is handled by county child protective services, and may be prosecuted in civil, criminal or family courts. Police and sheriffs investigate domestic violence reports. Animal abuse is investigated by humane societies and SPCAs with quasi-legal authorities; by municipal animal control agencies (who may be within police, health, code enforcement, public works or other departments); and by law enforcement officers for whom animal cases are rarely a priority.
- A patchwork of statutes leads to a lack of uniformity in enforcement.
- Confidentiality constraints preclude sharing information among agencies.
- Animal cruelty cases are notoriously difficult, costly and time-consuming. Animal law has only recently become a specialized discipline and attorneys have had little training in it. Archaic statutes, the inability of victims to testify, and evidence that is lacking in forensic detail further complicate matters.

The Link is changing this. Officials who once dismissed animal cruelty as “it was only a cat” or “boys will be boys” are gaining new respect for the significance of these acts, recognizing that they are human health and safety issues. Animal abusers invariably have histories of multiple forms of aggression. Animal abuse rarely occurs in isolation – it’s usually the “tip of the iceberg” and frequently the first opportunity for social services or law enforcement intervention.



Neighbors who are traditionally reluctant to get involved in domestic violence or child abuse cases may be moved to file an animal cruelty report. Thus, animal abuse is an early sentinel for interpersonal aggression and family dysfunction.

In short, animal cruelty needs to be taken as seriously as any human violence. The old attitude of, “It’s just an animal!” is being replaced with a new awareness: “If he’s hurting animals, someone else in the home is next!”



# How Can Professionals Use The Link?

## For Domestic Violence Agencies

- ❑ Recognize that survivors' strong emotional attachments to pets can be used as a weapon by batterers.
- ❑ Add three questions about pets to your crisis line, intake interviews, and risk assessments:

- **Are there pets in the home?**
- **How does each family member treat the pet?**
- **Do you worry about something bad happening to the pet?**

These questions are effective ways to assess risk and lethality and to get survivors to speak freely. Survivors who may blame themselves can be shown that the fault really lies with the batterer who is taking out aggression against an innocent animal.

- ❑ Help battered women prove ownership of their pets in custody disputes: licenses, vaccinations, veterinary and food bills, adoption and pedigree papers and related documents should be issued in her name.
- ❑ Include provisions for the care of animals removed from abusive households in safety plans.
- ❑ Develop relationships with animal care and control agencies to make referrals, display each other's materials, remove dangerous animals that threaten the safety of families, and provide resources to families needing support services.
- ❑ Invite representatives from these agencies to conduct in-service training for your staff and volunteers. Reciprocate by training them about your work in the community.
- ❑ Establish foster care programs, or on-site kennels at the women's shelter to keep families together with their pets.
- ❑ Support legislation that includes pets in domestic violence protection-from-abuse orders.
- ❑ Work with animal shelters to identify pet-friendly transitional housing in your community.
- ❑ Include Link training in state, regional and national conferences.

*"I wouldn't go to a shelter because they wouldn't take my dog. I've had this dog for 13 years and I wasn't going to leave her, so I felt that I had nowhere to go. I felt trapped."*

— Linda



# How Can Professionals Use The Link?

## For Animal Care and Control Agencies

- ❑ Establish relationships with child protection, domestic violence and adult protection services so you are prepared to share information, make a report or referral, or ask for assistance when a case uncovers suspected human abuse or neglect. This may be particularly necessary in hoarding situations.
- ❑ Invite these agencies to provide in-service education for your staff and volunteers. Reciprocate by training them about your role and responsibilities.
- ❑ Routinely observe the condition of vulnerable children and adults when making inspections and inquire about any health or welfare problems.
- ❑ Have materials from human services agencies available in your shelter and vehicles and on your website. These referrals position your agency as a community resource addressing family issues.
- ❑ Help women's shelters to include animals in safety plans and pet safekeeping programs.
- ❑ Advocate for legislation that allows judges to include animals in domestic violence protection-from-abuse orders, and for mandated cross-reporting of different types of abuse.
- ❑ Include Link training in state, regional and national conferences and animal control academies.

*“Social welfare officials and animal officials sometimes are working on the same case and don’t even know it.”*



**— Randall Lockwood  
American Society for the Prevention  
of Cruelty to Animals**

# How Can Professionals Use The Link?

## For Professionals Working With Children

- ❑ Recognize that children's powerful emotional attachments to pets can be used as a weapon against them in sexual abuse.
- ❑ Incorporate questions about pets and their care, and the behavior of family members toward animals, in intake forms, referrals, assessments and interviews. Such inquiries provide useful information about family functioning and identify patterns of violence and others who may be at risk.
- ❑ Routinely observe the condition of animals, and the presence of dangerous pets that might hurt a child, when making home visits. Inquire about any pet health or welfare problems; if problems are found advise them of animal services and humane resources.
- ❑ Consider the possibility that children who repeatedly harm animals may have been abused or are living in a climate of violence.
- ❑ Establish relationships with animal care and control agencies to make referrals and reports, ask for assistance, display each other's materials, remove dangerous animals that threaten the safety of children and case workers, and provide resources and support services.
- ❑ Invite animal care and control agencies to provide in-service training for your staff. Reciprocate by training them about your community services.
- ❑ Consider using therapy animals with children who have experienced abuse or loss. Witnesses and victims of violence are often more comfortable talking in the comforting presence of a therapy pet.
- ❑ Include Link training in state, regional and national conferences, pre- and post-licensure continuing education, and schools of social work.



*"If you're a committed social worker, you need to find out about the animals in the home because it will help you in your work. It's not extraneous: it's central."*

**— Susan Urban, MSW,  
New York City**

# How Can Professionals Use The Link?

## For Veterinarians

❑ Consider the possibility of animal abuse as a differential diagnosis when clinical conditions, patient histories, and client disclosures, profiles and behaviors lead to a raised index of suspicion.

*"The veterinarian is not only a public health authority, but also a type of family practitioner with the potential for ultimately preventing family violence."*

— Phil Arkow

**Coordinator, National Link Coalition**

❑ Undertake training in veterinary forensics to become proficient with

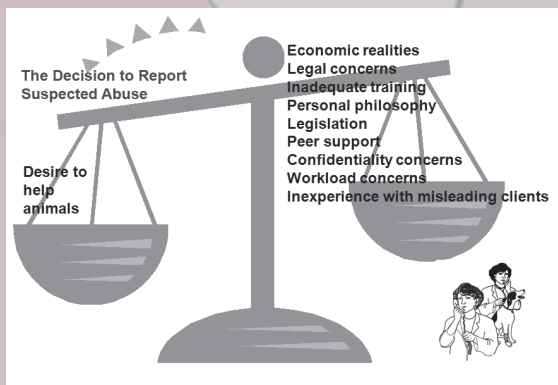
investigation, record keeping, evidence preservation, and courtroom testimony techniques in cases of suspected animal cruelty.

❑ Attempt to educate clients when animal husbandry practices are sub-optimal. When these efforts fail or increase the risk to others, report your suspicions to outside agencies according to state laws, codes of professional conduct and with protection from civil and criminal liability, to have them investigate. Establish risk assessment and decision-making procedures for your staff in these situations.

❑ Be sensitive to situations which suggest that clients may be victims of child abuse and neglect, domestic violence or elder abuse. Be prepared to refer clients to community agencies that might help them. Report suspected abuse to appropriate authorities as required by state laws and codes of professional conduct with immunity from civil and criminal liability.

❑ Include Link training in state, regional and national conferences, continuing education, and schools of veterinary medicine.

❑ Help women's shelters by providing veterinary services and foster care for animals displaced by family violence.



# How Can Professionals Use The Link?

## For Adult Protective Services

- ❑ Recognize that seniors may have powerful emotional attachments to their pets.
- ❑ Elders may neglect themselves to care for their pets. They may be financially or physically unable to provide proper care for animal companions. They may become overwhelmed with the responsibilities of too many animals and hoarding situations may develop.
- ❑ Include questions about pets and their care in intakes and assessments to open channels of communication, build trust with clients, and identify others who may be at risk.
- ❑ Routinely observe the condition of animals when making home visits and inquire about any pet health or welfare problems.
- ❑ Establish relationships with animal care and control agencies to make referrals, ask for help, remove dangerous animals that threaten the safety of family members and case workers, and provide resources to seniors needing support services.
- ❑ Invite representatives from these agencies to conduct in-service training for your staff. Reciprocate by training them about your community services.
- ❑ Include Link training in state, regional and national training conferences.

*"The shared environment between a pet and a pet owner is important to consider when providing adult protective services. The welfare of the pet often is closely related to the welfare of the pet owner."*

**— Barbara W. Boat & Juliette C. Knight**



- ❑ Work with animal shelters to identify pet-friendly subsidized or senior housing in the community.
- ❑ Suggest that capable clients acquire a pet for social outreach, companionship, daily routines, and exercise.
- ❑ Find volunteer opportunities for seniors at animal shelter and rescue organizations.



# How Can Professionals Use The Link?

## For Law Enforcement, Prosecutors and Judges

- ❑ Recognize that people may have strong emotional attachments to pets that they consider members of their family.
- ❑ It is no longer acceptable to trivialize animal cruelty cases. Become familiar with animal law and prosecute aggressively as early intervention can prevent violence from escalating.
- ❑ Animal cruelty investigations and prosecutions can be highly complex, costly and time-consuming. Utilize national resources, including veterinary forensics, training programs, and psychological assessment and treatment of offenders, to help overcome challenging situations.
- ❑ Recognize the evidentiary importance of animal cruelty and the presence of dangerous animals in pre-sentence investigation reports, trial testimony, custody and visitation agreements, child removal orders, and psychological evaluations.
- ❑ Order appropriate psychological assessment and treatment programs for convicted juvenile and adult animal abuse offenders.
- ❑ Include pets in domestic violence protection-from-abuse orders.
- ❑ Include Link training in state, regional and national training conferences, judicial institutes, and law schools.



*“Animal cruelty prosecutors understand the importance of pursuing animal cruelty cases with the same drive and passion as human violence cases. Prosecutors must take seriously all cases that involve charges or allegations of animal abuse because abusing an animal may be contemporary with, or a precursor to, more serious future abusive conduct.”*

**— Allie Phillips, J.D., Director, National Center for  
Prosecution of Animal Abuse,  
National District Attorneys Association**



# How Can Professionals Use The Link?

## The Question of Confidentiality

For many human service professionals, reporting suspected abuse is perceived as an ethical dilemma. This dilemma can be removed by statutorily mandating such reports, as has been widely done with suspected child abuse and, more recently, domestic violence, elder abuse and animal cruelty.



Professionals in one field need not be experts in other forms of abuse: they should, however, be sensitive to the possibility that such abuse may be occurring and willing to report such cases in good faith to authorities who can investigate further to determine what action, if any, may be warranted.

Staff should be familiar with their professional and organizational protocols governing the disclosure of personal information to another agency when multiple forms of abuse are suspected. In some cases, state law explicitly mandates or permits this information to be disclosed. In many states, professionals are granted immunity from civil and criminal liability for making such disclosures in good faith. Failure to make a mandated report may be grounds for criminal sanctions.

While reporting such concerns can seem daunting, disclosures can often be made lawfully if there is serious concern about the safety of a child, animal or others in the household.

An agency may have only one small piece of information. However, when this is added to other data, a fuller picture emerges that allows professionals to better aid families and animals at risk.

*"Confidentiality holds for personal privacy of clients unless the veterinarian is required to reveal the confidences of a medical record because of the health or welfare of either the person or the animal. We feel an obligation to safeguard the health and well-being of not only the animals we care for, but of the need to care for society, as well."*

**-- Mary Beth Leininger, DVM, American Veterinary Medical Association**



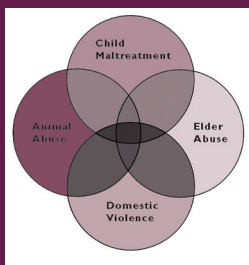


## NATIONAL LINK COALITION

*Working together to stop violence  
against people and animals*

The National Link Coalition is an informal, multidisciplinary, collaborative network of individuals and organizations in human services and animal welfare who address the intersections between animal abuse, domestic violence, child maltreatment and elder abuse through research, public policy, programming, and community awareness. We believe that human and animal well-being are inextricably intertwined and that the prevention of family and community violence can best be achieved through partnerships representing multi-species perspectives. The National Link Coalition's vision is:

*The Link between violence against humans and violence against animals is widely known and understood. We believe that through the recognition and integration of this understanding into policies and practices nationwide, humans and animals will be measurably safer.*



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