



NOT WITHOUT MY DOG  
Moving More Survivors to Safety



# WHO WE ARE

Ruthless Kindness is a veterinarian-founded 501c3 non-profit

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Started in 2019 in Sonoma County, California

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Mission: To address the epidemic of violence and preventable suffering for at-risk animals and people



**Dr. Sarah Reidenbach, Co-founder**  
Formerly with San Francisco SPCA,  
Berkeley Humane, Humane Society of  
Sonoma County



**Dr. Kate Kuzminski, Co-founder**  
Formerly with Humane Society of  
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## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ANIMALS



Across a dozen studies, between 18% and 48% of domestic violence victims delayed leaving abusive situations or returned to them because they feared for the safety of their pets. (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004)

Only 19% of domestic violence safe houses are pet-friendly.

71% of pet-owning women entering women's shelters reported that their batterer had injured, maimed, killed or threatened family pets for revenge or to psychologically control victims. (Ascione, 1998)

Perpetrators of domestic violence frequently exploit the human-animal bond by threatening or harming a victim's pet to manipulate and control them - a tactic used both to prevent victims from leaving and to punish them if they attempt to escape (Urban Resource Institute, 2024).

Survivors choose to live in their cars with their companion animals rather than leave them behind, and those who do leave report losing an important source of support as they recover from violence. ([Animal Welfare Institute](#))

Domestic violence is widely recognized as the leading cause of homelessness among women in the U.S.



## CHILD PROTECTION AND ANIMALS



Across studies looking at children in IPV-affected households, rates of children witnessing threats or harm to companion animals ranged from 25% to 57.1%. ([Tomlinson et al, 2022](#))

Among U.S. pet-owning families, 88% of homes with substantiated child abuse and neglect also include abuse toward animals. ([McDonald et al., 2015](#))

61.5% of women with children residing at a domestic violence shelter reported their children had heard or seen pet abuse, and 67% of children in shelters indicated they had seen or heard one of their pets being hurt. ([McDonald et al, 2015](#))

Across studies, between 51% and 78% of children in abusive situations risk their own safety in attempts to protect their animals. Researchers interpret this willingness to insert themselves as evidence that pets are important to children, particularly in violence-affected households where pets may serve as resiliency agents providing comfort and consistency for children exposed to high levels of fear and uncertainty. ([Rojas et al, 2022](#))

In a study of five-year-olds, 42% spontaneously mentioned their pet when asked who they would turn to if they felt sad, angry, happy, or needed to share a secret - a finding particularly relevant to children in households which feel unsafe. ([Callaghan et al, 2023](#))

More than three-quarters of American children have pets, and children are now more likely to grow up with pets than with both parents living in the home. (Melson, 2001)

## ADULT PROTECTION AND ANIMALS



75% of APS caseworkers reported that their clients' concerns for their pet affected their decision to accept interventions and services.

Memory loss, economic constraints, transportation and physical limitations can cause pet neglect, usually necessitating support, not confiscation or citation.

Elderly pet owners may have long-standing deep emotional ties to their animal companions. Animals may be their primary emotional support or motivation.

Elders with companion animals have been shown to have better physical and mental health.

# The PALS Survey

Included in the report are the insights from the largest nationwide survey in the United States of domestic violence survivors focused on the impact of pets on survivors' ability to leave a dangerous situation. URI partnered with the National Domestic Violence Hotline to gather the most extensive and comprehensive national data on how the consideration of pets affects domestic violence victims' options and decision-making. This was the first time The Hotline conducted a survey about pets, and findings are clear: fear for the welfare of pets and the lack of pet-friendly shelter is a barrier that prevents survivors from leaving abusive situations to find safety and healing. Additionally, once in a safe location, separation from a beloved pet creates an additional trauma.

[Urban Resource Institute \(URI\) & National Domestic Violence Hotline. \(2021\). PALS Report and Survey: Breaking Barriers to Safety and Healing.](#)

## Sample findings:

**97%**

of respondents said that keeping their pets with them is an important factor in deciding whether or not to seek shelter from domestic violence.

**50%**

of respondents would not consider shelter for themselves if they could not take their pets with them.

**91%**

of respondents indicated that their pets' emotional support and physical protection are significant in their ability to survive and heal



PEOPLE AND ANIMALS ARE LINKED IN THEIR VULNERABILITIES BUT ALSO LINKED IN THEIR ABILITY TO BENEFIT ONE ANOTHER



- "Joy"
- "Taught me the meaning of devotion"
- "My Best Friend"
- "Told me a thousand times over that I am his reason for being"
- "Comfort"

*Thousands of studies show the physical, mental and emotional health benefits of the human animal bond.*



IF WE KNOW THAT HALF OF VICTIMS OF DV WITH PETS CANNOT ACCESS SAFETY, HOW DO WE REMOVE THIS BARRIER?

## Support the human animal bond during a crisis.

- Ask about pets at intake
- Include animals in safety planning and protective orders
- Collaborate with animal welfare agencies
- Provide pet-inclusive shelter and housing options
- Offer temporary animal foster and boarding
- Provide pet support services (medical, nutrition, etc)
- Facilitate cross-training
- Create pathways for all family members to escape abuse – animals included



# WHAT RUTHLESS KINDNESS DOES

## Crisis Response Programs:

1. On-call free individual mobile veterinary appointments for the pets of people in an urgent crisis
2. Free pop-up veterinary clinics on-site at shelters and human service agency facilities
3. Receive client referrals from victim service and human service agencies
4. Pet food and supplies
5. Tele-support and Tele-medicine
6. Pet foster and boarding support
7. **Partner:** Sonoma DA Victim Services, Victim Service nonprofits, Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, On-site partner at Family Justice Center of Sonoma County

## Upstream Programs:

1. Human service agency training & consultation
2. Veterinary and animal welfare professional training
3. Cross-professional collaboration (HAWC)
4. Landlord Advocacy
5. **Empathy Education:** 8-week curriculum for youth who have been directly exposed to trauma

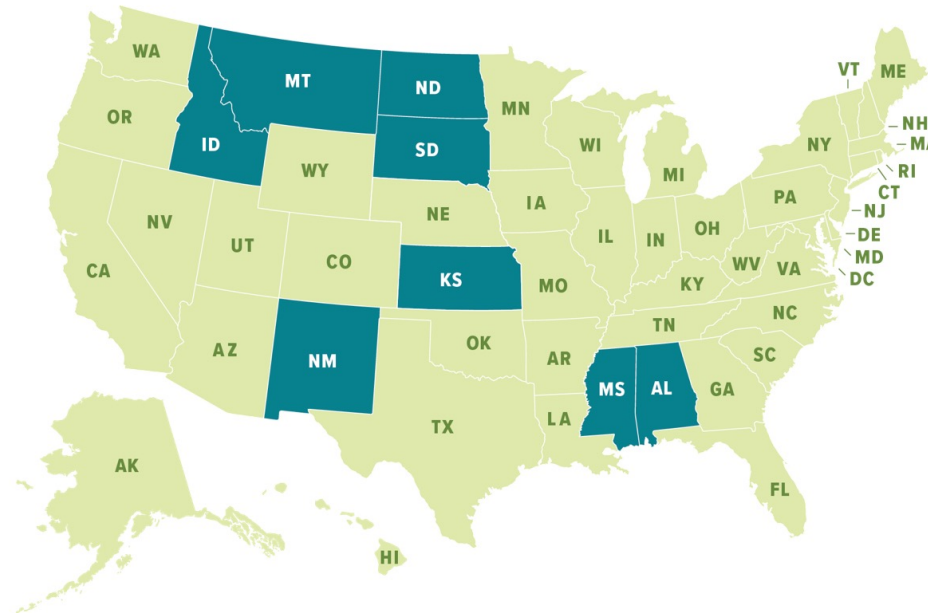


# PETS IN PROTECTION ORDERS

As of 2025, 42 out of 50 states, plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico specifically permit courts to include animals in domestic violence protective orders.

## STATES WITH PET PROTECTION PROVISIONS INCLUDED IN PROTECTION ORDER STATUTES

The map below shows which states have laws that specifically provide for the inclusion of companion animals in domestic violence protection orders.



Green states specifically provide for the inclusion of pets in temporary restraining orders.

Blue states do not specifically address the inclusion of pets in temporary restraining orders.

awionline.org

Even in states without specific statutes, pet abuse can often be included in the "other relief" section of a protection order,

List of States and their corresponding legislation about protective orders:

<https://www.animallaw.info/article/domestic-violence-and-pets-list-states-include-pets-protection-orders>

## PETS ARE A GATEWAY TO HELPING PEOPLE

It may be easier for a client to talk about their pet's needs before there own.

Asking about animals at intake can build trust and give insight into the case.

Piggybacking simultaneous services alongside pet services has proven successful to increase awareness about human services.

**Pets... the ultimate ice breaker!**



# WHY DO OUR CLIENTS NEED ANIMALS CONSIDERED IN HUMAN SERVICES?

“Bonds with animals save lives. When you deny people their animals, you are actively denying them help, aid, mental well-being, psychological hope, a way out of depression. How can you do that when your commitment is to help?” –Dr. Alina Luna

48% of victims won't leave violence if they cannot bring their pets with them

98% of U.S. pet owners say their pets are part of their family

93% of homeless pet owners reported that they would never accept housing if their pets were not allowed

Whether or not we recognize an animal's own value or victimization, to our clients they are family, and they will refuse help if pets are excluded. Including animals in case planning is an effective way to move more people to health and safety.

# HOW RUTHLESS KINDNESS CAN SUPPORT YOUR WORK

- Training about the link between human and animal violence, and the barriers that survivors face
- Consult about small but meaningful ways to start supporting survivors with pets
- Facilitate pet-inclusive programming for your jurisdiction / organization



## VOICEMAILS:

**I'm trying to get away from my ex, my abuser. Apparently, there's nowhere for me and my dog together? I've lost track of time, my head is spinning. I don't want to be desperate but I am. I'm exhausted.**

I found safe housing but not for him. So, I'm looking for safe housing that will allow my dog.

I'm coming from a domestic violence problem and because of that I'm being evicted and from there I'm going to a safe house but they said to call you because the animals can't come to the safe house.

**I'll leave my abuser when instead of telling my dog "Goodbye" I can tell her "Let's go."**

I am in a safe house.  
I have 2 small dogs.  
I need help with finding out how I can get help with them. I really need some help. Please.

**I had to run from my house with nothing and I need temporary housing for 2 dogs.**

I'm calling in regards to my puppy being at risk of homelessness. I was in a DV situation and I was able to find shelter for myself but my puppy is not with me and I just need to get her some help please.

**I'm holding onto this dog for dear life.**

I'm a domestic violence survivor and I'm going into a program and I need assistance temporarily for my dog while I go and get help. I just need a safe place for him to go while I get help.

**She's very important to me. I can't bring her so I need a foster so I don't lose her while I have to go into the safe house.**

### Contact:

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