

# What is The Link

## ... and why is it important to you and your clients?

Accumulating evidence is demonstrating strong links between animal cruelty and other crimes, including interpersonal, family and community violence. Researchers have learned:

- Children's witnessing or participation in animal cruelty is a significant marker for their developing aggressive and anti-social behavior and a predictor of future domestic violence.
- Batterers often kill and abuse pets to orchestrate fear, violence and retribution in homes marked by domestic violence.
- Severe animal neglect in the form of hoarding often indicates elders needing social services or mental health assistance.

We call the areas where animal cruelty, child maltreatment, domestic violence and elder abuse intersect "The Link."

With a majority of homes having pets and 98% of Americans calling pets companions and family members, animal abuse does not occur in isolation. It is one form of interrelated family violence and dysfunction and a "red flag" for other violent behaviors.

Not all children who hurt animals become violent adults, and not all adult animal abusers hurt their other family members. But officials in child welfare, domestic violence, adult protection, other social services, law enforcement, social work, and behavioral, physical and veterinary medicine who routinely include questions about animals and their welfare in investigations and assessments can quickly determine patterns of violence and risks to the safety of all family members.

Animal cruelty rarely occurs in isolation: it's usually "the tip of the iceberg" and frequently the first opportunity for social services or law enforcement intervention. 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 or neighborhood is next!"

The Link informs many aspects of violence prevention. By viewing violence through the Link lens, human and animal services agencies can transcend disciplinary boundaries with effective collaborations to break the cycles of violence and protect all vulnerable members of society.

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

— **Dr. Mary Renck Jalongo**

**The World's Children and their Companion Animals:  
Developmental and Educational Significance of the Child/Pet Bond**



NATIONAL LINK COALITION

Working together to stop violence  
against people and animals

The National Link Coalition is a 501c3 nonprofit organization and the only international educational and advocacy organization working to prevent animal abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse. As the Global Resource Center on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence we train professionals, showcase programs, promote legislation, and publicize research to foster multi-disciplinary partnerships. Since 2008 our work has helped to create safer families and communities by recognizing that when animals are abused, people are at risk, and when people are abused, animals are at risk.

*"When animals are abused,  
people are at risk.*

*When people are abused,  
animals are at risk."*

**For more information, or to receive  
our free monthly e-bulletin The LINK-Letter,  
contact:**

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



*"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**

**Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse:  
Linking the Circles of Compassion  
for Prevention and Intervention**



## The Link between animal abuse and child maltreatment

Children's acts of animal cruelty used to be excused as "kids will be kids." This is no longer acceptable. We now know that when animal abuse occurs, other forms of violence are often present, putting all family members and impressionable young minds at increased risk.

- Acts or threats of harm to a child's pets can force children to be silent about abuse.
- A child's cruelty to animals may indicate that he or she has suffered serious neglect or abuse.
- Youths who perpetrate or witness animal cruelty are more likely to commit other violent behaviors in childhood and adulthood.
- 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.
- Animal abuse in the home greatly increases the risk of children being bitten or attacked by pets.
- 31% of Chicago teenagers have been to a dogfight.

Acts of animal abuse damage a child's sense of empathy and safety, desensitize children to violence, and foster a dynamic of inflicting pain to achieve power and control.

*"The child-animal bond affects the course of children's development and shapes the kind of people that children will grow up to be."*

— **Dr. Gail F. Melson**  
**Why the Wild Things Are:  
Animals in the Lives of Children**



## The Link between animal abuse and domestic violence

- A history of pet abuse is one of the four most significant risk factors for becoming a batterer.
- In a dozen studies, 15% to 48% of battered women delay leaving abusive situations – or return to them – out of fear for the safety of their animals.
- 71% of battered women report that abusers hurt, killed or threatened their pets to control them and their children.
- Batterers who also abuse pets are more dangerous and use more forms of violence than those who do not.
- Adding screening questions about animal cruelty on a crisis line decreased domestic violence homicides 80%.

Domestic violence officials now see animal abuse as an early warning sign. Survivors cannot blame themselves: the fault really lies with the batterer who takes out aggression against an innocent animal.

Domestic violence agencies can include pets in safety planning, help women prove pet ownership through veterinary, licensing and pet food receipts in her name, and establish shelter housing or off-site foster care for the animal members of the families. Many states now allow courts to include pets in protection-from-abuse orders.

*"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. I felt trapped."*

— **"Linda"**



## The Link between animal abuse and elder abuse

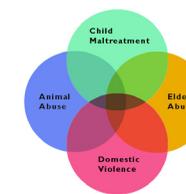
- 92% of Adult Protective Services caseworkers have found animal neglect co-occurring with clients who are unable to care for themselves.
- 45% of APS caseworkers have seen intentional animal abuse/neglect.
- Elders with limited resources, memory loss, frail physical condition or social isolation may neglect themselves to care for their pets, or may be unable to provide adequate food and veterinary care.

This issue is particularly problematic among animal hoarders, many of whom are older women. Hoarders' intense attachments to animals put them at risk of self-neglect, eviction, and physical and mental health problems. Social services agencies need to include the presence and welfare of animals in their interviews, assessments and treatment plans for seniors.

Animal shelters and veterinary associations may have pet transportation, pet food banks, temporary foster care and low-cost veterinary services to assist seniors on fixed or limited incomes.

*"Social welfare officials and animal officials sometimes are working on the same case and don't even know it."*

— **Dr. Randall Lockwood, ASPCA**



## The Link: How you can use it to inform your work

Incorporating The Link into policy and practice enables professionals to intervene earlier to detect and prevent abuse. But communication, cooperation, cross-training and cross-reporting between animal and human services agencies must be developed.

A collaborative, interagency approach is more effective than compartmentalization. The National Link Coalition recommends that agencies:

- Routinely include three questions about the presence and welfare of animals in their crisis lines, intake interviews, risk assessments, and lethality reviews:
  - Are there pets in the home?
  - How does each family member treat them?
  - Do you worry about something bad happening to them?
- Establish relationships with other local agencies.
- Set up lines of communication to address problems when they arise, cross-training programs so staff is familiar with these resources, and cross-reporting protocols to make appropriate referrals.
- Look for adverse conditions affecting all family members, and refer your concerns to these other agencies.
- Order psychological assessment and treatment programs for adult and juvenile animal cruelty offenders.
- Provide therapy animals to survivors of trauma or loss.

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

— **Susan Urban, MSW**