



You Can Help Protect the Safety of People and Animals

When an animal is being abused, it is likely others in the home are being hurt too

What is the connection between the safety of people and animals?

Several recent studies in Canada and the USA have found a strong link between the abuse of animals and the abuse of people, especially in the family. Although much of the research linking family violence and animal abuse is about pets, studies have also linked the abuse of farm animals to family violence.

Is the problem widespread?

We know that family violence is a widespread problem. We also know that pet ownership in Canada is high. A Statistics Canada study found that 66% of rural homes and 44% of urban homes reported household expenses for pets. In many homes pets are considered a “family member”. We are just coming to realize how common it is for animals to become part of the dynamics of family violence.

Why would somebody hurt their pet?

A person who abuses the family pet may be trying to get or keep power and control over other family members. For many victims, a pet may be their only source of unconditional love. Abusing an animal may be used to frighten or punish others in the family. In violent homes anyone can be a target.



Why don't people who are being abused just leave and take their pets with them?

Her partner may refuse to let her take the animal – even though he is threatening to harm or kill it if she leaves. Here are a few other reasons a person leaving abuse can't take an animal to safety:

- There's no place to take the pet for a few weeks – no “safe haven”
- Transition houses can't take pets because of concerns for allergies, sanitation and safety
- Hotels may not allow pets
- Apartments may not accept pets
- No money to put the animal in a kennel
- Pet does not have inoculations and she cannot afford to go to a veterinarian
- No access to the pet's records
- Abuse is happening to a large animal or farm animals like a horse, goats or chickens
- Police won't help her remove the animal because he claims to own it and police don't want to become involved in property disputes
- Afraid of retaliation, personal harm or further harm to pet if she leaves



Did you know?

A recent study on the link between abuse of pets/farm animals and family violence in N.B. and P.E.I. found:

- 70% of households in the study had a pet or farm animal.
- 45% of the women in the study said their partner deliberately threatened to harm their pets or farm animals and of those, 41% said their partner deliberately harmed or killed the pet.
- 57% of the households with pets also had children and 24% of their children were aware of the animal abuse.
- 27% of the women who owned pets said they were more reluctant to get help for fear their partner would harm their animal.



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Is animal abuse always a sign that people are being abused?

Not always. Not everyone who abuses an animal is harming other family members. And not every child who witnesses animal abuse or hurts an animal grows up to be violent. However, research suggests that if you see somebody abusing an animal or pet, it may be a sign of trouble in the family. Many well-known risk assessment tools for predicting future harm to victims of family violence ask questions about the abuse of pets. In violent homes where pets are abused there appears to be a greater risk that others, possibly a spouse, children, an elderly person or a disabled person, are also being harmed. Even if they are not, remember that abusing an animal is a crime in and of itself. You can report animal abuse to the SPCA, animal welfare or the police. Check the Yellow Pages under Animal Protection or contact the NBSPCA at **506-458-8208** or by email spca@nbnet.nb.ca.



What can the public and service providers do to help protect the safety of animals and people?

The Public	Veterinarians/ Kennel Owners and Animal Welfare Agencies	Social Service/ Family Violence agencies	Child/Adult Protective Services	Police, Prosecutors and Judges
Recognize the signs of both animal abuse and the abuse of people in families	Know the signs of family violence and animal abuse – they often go hand in hand	Be proactive in educating people in your community	Learn about the link between the abuse of pets and people	Provide professional development opportunities to learn more about the link
Advocate for improved animal welfare legislation	Advocate for improved animal welfare legislation	Teach alternates to violence against people or animals	Establish relationships with animal welfare organizations	Support treatment programs for animal abusers
Help set up a safe haven program for your region – be a foster family	Collaborate with others to set up a safe haven program for your region	Collaborate with others to set up a safe haven program for your region	Collaborate with others to set up a safe haven program for your region	Collaborate with others to set up a safe haven program for your region
Model respectful, peaceful behaviour yourself	Offer services (vet, boarding, license, etc.) to the pets of abused women	Help victims develop a safety plan that includes the safety of their pets	When investigating abuse of a child or adult, ask if there are concerns about the safety of a pet	Recognize the pets are considered part of the family and victims may not leave if they are afraid their pet will be harmed
Talk with friends, family, and members of the community about the links between family violence and animal abuse	If you are working with an animal you suspect is abused, know that people who are being abused may be too afraid to tell you what is happening	If you are working with victims of abuse, know that concern for a pet may make it difficult to leave an abusive relationship	Include information about the link in your own educational materials	Let the abused woman take her pet along when she asks you to take her to safety
Speak out and offer help when people or animals are being abused. Call the police (911) in an emergency	If you think a child is exposed to pet abuse/family violence, you have a legal duty to report it to child protection or the police	If you are working with a family and you learn of pet abuse, tell them about programs to shelter pets or consider contacting the animal welfare officer	If you are working with a family and you learn of pet abuse, tell them about programs to shelter pets or consider contacting the animal welfare officer or SPCA	Ensure consistent law enforcement to deal with violent behaviour against victims of all types, including animals

Speak out when someone hurts an animal - they may be hurting others in their family too.



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