

Understanding  
**The Link**<sup>®</sup>  
Between Violence to  
People and Violence  
to Animals



AMERICAN HUMANE

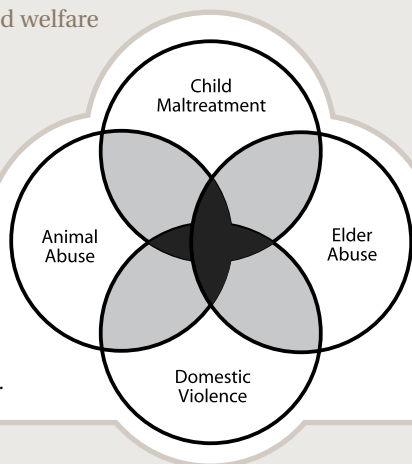
*Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877*

# The Link

## Addressing the Connection Between Violence to People and Violence to Animals

In recent years there has been renewed interest in an idea dating back centuries — that children who harm animals become desensitized to violence and go on to commit antisocial acts against other people. This concept partly formed the basis for American Humane's founding more than 130 years ago, and continues to influence our work in child welfare and animal protection. We call it The Link.

*Abusers often strike out in more ways than one, creating overlap among child maltreatment, animal abuse, elder abuse and domestic violence cases.*



Today, knowledge of The Link informs a larger model for family violence prevention that includes domestic violence as well as adult protective services. Research findings increasingly substantiate the interrelationships among different forms of abuse, and officials in child welfare, animal care and control, domestic violence and adult protective services are coordinating their efforts. The results are adding depth to their work through a more comprehensive approach to eradicating the cycle of violence and abuse, and in the process, protecting all vulnerable members of the families they serve.



## What Is The Link?

### The Evidence

Researchers in such fields as psychology, child development, sociology, criminology, social work, law and veterinary medicine are addressing the multi-disciplinary nature of animals and family violence. Key findings include:

- If a child is cruel to animals, this may be an indicator that serious neglect and abuse have been inflicted on the child.
- Where serious animal abuse has occurred, other forms of family violence are often occurring and other family members may be at increased risk of abuse.
- Acts or threats of animal abuse may be used to coerce, control and intimidate women, children and elders to be silent about their abusive situations. These threats to pets often prevent women and children from leaving situations of domestic violence and sexual abuse.
- Childhood cruelty to animals has been linked to an increased likelihood of violent behaviors against other people both in childhood and in adulthood.
- When an animal has been abused there is a greater risk that adults and children in the home have been bitten or attacked by the pet.

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

*– Mary Renck Jalongo, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, author of “The World’s Children and Their Companion Animals: Developmental and Educational Significance of the Child/Pet Bond”*

Many studies indicate that animal maltreatment is part of a complex constellation of family violence. While not all children who harm animals go on to become violent adults, and while not all adult animal abusers necessarily harm their partners or children, compelling evidence is causing researchers and practitioners to view animal abuse as a “red flag” for other antisocial behaviors. Investigation and assessment are keys to determining whether there are any links between these forms of violence and possible risks to the safety and welfare of children, adults and animals.

## Why is The Link Important?

Policy and practice based on knowledge of The Link may enable professionals to intervene earlier in order to detect or prevent abuse to children, animals and vulnerable adults. To achieve this it is essential that arrangements for communication and cooperation between relevant statutory and voluntary organizations are developed and enhanced. With the compartmentalization of social services, these agencies have traditionally focused on distinct victim groups. As we begin to recognize that the ecologies of families include both people and pets, it is apparent that victims may experience many forms of overlapping maltreatment, and that interagency collaboration would be beneficial.

*“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, describing her family's experience in “Life and Death Inside the Cycles of Violence”*



## What Are The Link's Implications?

When animals are abused, people are at risk; when people are abused, animals are at risk. With pet ownership at record levels — and with 98 percent of Americans considering pets to be close companions or family members — animal maltreatment must be viewed as a form of family violence.

Animal maltreatment, including neglect, physical abuse, animal fighting and hoarding:

1. Promotes desensitization and damages a child's capacity for empathy.
2. Fosters the idea that victims are expendable.
3. Damages children's sense of safety and confidence in the ability of adults to protect them from harm.
4. Leads to acceptance of physical harm in allegedly loving relationships.
5. Fosters a dynamic of empowerment through the infliction of pain, suffering and humiliation.
6. Leads to imitation of abusive behaviors.
7. Allows abusers to maintain control over victims, expanding the landscape of terror in which victims live.
8. Prevents victims from leaving abusive situations out of fear for what might happen to their pets.
9. Removes a source of solace and comfort for victims of family violence.



## How Can Knowledge of The Link Be Used in Daily Practice?

### For Professionals Working With Children and Families

- Recognize that the animal-human dynamic has changed in modern society and that pets are considered members of the family, with powerful influences on people's emotions.
- Incorporate questions about pets and their care, and the behavior of children toward animals, in intake forms, assessments and interviews. Such information may provide useful information about family functioning and identify patterns of violence as well as others who may be at risk. Without intervention, children who abuse animals may become involved in bullying and other antisocial behaviors that can escalate to serious violence.
- Consider the possibility that children who repeatedly harm animals may have been abused or may be living in a climate of violence.
- Establish relationships with animal care and control agencies so you are prepared to share information, make a referral or ask for assistance when a case uncovers suspected or actual animal maltreatment. Invite representatives from these agencies to provide in-service education for your staff — and reciprocate by providing continuing education for theirs.



- Consider the potential therapeutic aspects of pets for children who have experienced abuse or loss in their lives. Witnesses and victims are often more comfortable talking about animal abuse than their own situations, and may be more likely to discuss their situations in the comforting presence of a trained therapy pet.
- Display resource materials from animal protection, adult protection and domestic violence agencies in your facility to establish yourself as a community resource concerned about family violence.
- Address The Link at regional, state and national training conferences. American Humane has a speakers' bureau of authorities on this topic.
- Encourage inclusion of The Link in agency training materials, pre- and post-licensure continuing education, and in social work curricula for higher education.

*“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*



## For Animal Care and Control Agencies

- Establish relationships with child protection, domestic violence and adult protection agencies so you are prepared to share information, make a report or referral, or ask for assistance when a case uncovers suspected or actual maltreatment of women, children or elders. Invite representatives from these agencies to provide in-service education for your staff — and reciprocate by providing continuing education for theirs.
- Display resource materials from child protection, adult protection and domestic violence agencies in your shelter to establish yourself as a community resource concerned about family violence.
- Help women's shelters include animals in safety planning and establish "safe haven" foster care programs for the animal victims of domestic violence and/or house their residents' pets on-site through American Humane's Pets and Women's Shelters (PAWS)<sup>™</sup> Program.
- Address The Link at regional, state and national training conferences. American Humane has a speakers' bureau of authorities on this topic.
- Encourage inclusion of The Link in agency training materials.

*"My husband said if I left he would kill the dog or let the calves die and it would be my fault. When he threatened to kill me, I thought, who would know? The farm is so isolated."*

*— Woman in rural Saskatchewan, Canada*



## For Veterinarians

- Consider the possibility of animal abuse as a diagnosis. Several textbooks are now available that provide veterinary forensics training to identify animal cruelty and neglect.
- Attempt to educate clients when animal husbandry practices are less than optimal. When educational efforts fail or are likely to increase the risks to others in the household, report suspected animal or child maltreatment to the appropriate authorities according to state laws and codes of professional conduct.
- Display resource materials from animal, child, and adult protection and domestic violence agencies to establish your hospital or clinic as a community resource concerned about healthy families.
- Address The Link at regional, state and national training conferences. American Humane has a speakers' bureau of authorities on this topic.
- Encourage inclusion of The Link in staff training materials and in veterinary school curricula.
- Help women's shelters include animals in safety planning and establish "safe haven" foster care programs for the animal victims of domestic violence and/or house their residents' pets on-site through American Humane's Pets and Women's Shelters (PAWS)<sup>™</sup> Program.
- Provide low-cost or pro bono services for seniors.



## For Domestic Violence Agencies

- Recognize that the animal-human dynamic has changed in modern society and that pets are considered members of the family, with powerful influences on people's emotions.
- Modify safety planning procedures to include provisions for removal of animals from abusive households. Dozens of women's shelters have established "safe haven" programs with animal welfare organizations to provide foster care for the animal victims of domestic violence, and others are considering implementing American Humane's Pets and Women's Shelters (PAWS)<sup>™</sup> Program to house their residents' pets on-site.
- Help battered women prove ownership of their pets. All licenses, vaccinations, veterinary bills, adoption or pedigree papers and related documents should be issued in the client's name.
- Establish communications with animal care and control agencies so you are prepared to share information, make a referral or ask for assistance when a case uncovers suspected or actual animal maltreatment. Invite representatives from these agencies to provide in-service education for your staff — and reciprocate by providing continuing education for theirs.
- Support legislation that includes pets in domestic violence protection orders.
- Establish lists of pet-friendly transitional housing in the community.
- Display resource materials from animal, child and adult protection agencies to establish your agency as a community resource concerned about family violence.
- Address The Link at regional, state and national training conferences. American Humane has a speakers' bureau of authorities on this topic.



- Encourage inclusion of The Link in agency training materials and in social work curricula for higher education.

## For Adult Protective Services

- Recognize that the animal-human dynamic has changed in modern society and that pets are considered members of the family, with powerful influences on people's emotions. Elders may neglect themselves, refuse interventions or fail to seek medical treatment in order to care for their pets. Elders may become animal hoarders and overextend themselves to care for a surplus of pets.
- Include questions about pets in intakes and assessments to build trust with clients, open up channels of communication and identify others who may be at risk.
- Observe the condition of animals when making home visits and inquire about any pet health problems.
- Establish relationships with animal care and control agencies so you are prepared to share information, make a referral or ask for assistance when a case uncovers suspected or actual animal maltreatment. Invite representatives from these agencies to provide in-service education for your staff — and reciprocate by providing continuing education for theirs.
- Display resource materials from animal and child protection and domestic violence agencies in your facility to establish yourself as a community resource concerned about family violence.
- Address The Link at regional, state and national training conferences. American Humane has a speakers' bureau of authorities on this topic.
- Encourage inclusion of The Link in agency training materials and in social work curricula for higher education.

- Establish lists of pet-friendly subsidized or senior housing in the community.
- Suggest that clients who are capable acquire a pet for companionship, daily routine, exercise and social outreach.
- Find volunteer opportunities for seniors at animal shelters.



## For Law Enforcement, Prosecutors and Judges

- Recognize that the animal-human dynamic has changed in modern society and that pets are considered members of the family, with powerful influences on people's emotions.
- Recognize that early intervention in animal abuse cases can prevent violence from escalating.
- Establish relationships with animal care and control agencies so you are prepared to assist them when a case uncovers suspected or actual animal maltreatment. Invite representatives from these agencies to provide in-service education for your staff — and reciprocate by providing continuing education for theirs.
- Recognize the evidentiary importance of animal cruelty and dangerous animals at trial and in sentencing dispositions, pre-sentence investigation reports, orders for psychological evaluation, and decisions regarding child removals, custody and visitation.

- Address The Link at regional, state and national training conferences. American Humane has a speakers' bureau of authorities on this topic.
- Encourage inclusion of The Link in agency training materials and in law school curricula.



## For an Aware and Caring General Public

- If you have reason to believe that abuse has occurred, call the appropriate agency to discuss your observations. The staff who take the calls share your concern and will help identify the nature of the situation and the right response.
- Raise awareness of The Link within local networks, community coalitions and media.
- Volunteer to serve in local organizations and on interdisciplinary community coalitions that exchange ideas and news.
- Encourage local and state government leaders to support public policy initiatives that recognize the multi-faceted nature of family violence and that work for a more comprehensive approach to end violence of all kinds.
- Recognize that the animal-human dynamic has changed in modern society and that pets are considered members of the family, with powerful influences on people's emotions.



## The Question of Confidentiality

Professionals should ensure that they are familiar with their professions' and/or agencies' protocols or procedures governing the disclosure of personal information to another agency in cases where multiple forms of abuse are suspected. In some cases, state law explicitly or implicitly mandates or permits this information to be disclosed. In many states professionals are granted immunity from civil or criminal liability for making such a disclosure in good faith. Failure to make a mandated report may be grounds for criminal action.

While it can seem daunting to report concerns to the appropriate authority, personal information can often be disclosed lawfully if there is serious concern about the safety of a child, animal or others in the household. Professionals may have only one small piece of information, and are not expected to be authorities in all forms of family violence. However, when this information is added to others, a fuller picture emerges that may not be deemed worthy of further pursuit — or which may indicate that risks of abuse to others are high.

*“Family violence is a matter of power and control. Often, the choice of victim is opportunistic. Whenever one member of the family is abused, all others in the family are at risk.”*

– Phil Arkow, interim director, *Human-Animal Bond*,  
American Humane



## About American Humane

Founded in 1877, the American Humane Association is the only national organization dedicated to protecting both children and animals. Through a network of child and animal protection agencies and individuals, American Humane develops policies, legislation, curricula and training programs to protect children and animals from abuse, neglect and exploitation. The nonprofit membership organization, headquartered in Denver, raises awareness about The Link between animal abuse and other forms of violence, as well as the benefits derived from the human-animal bond. American Humane's regional office in Los Angeles is the authority behind the "No Animals Were Harmed"® end credit disclaimer on film and TV productions, and American Humane's office in Washington, D.C., is an advocate for child and animal protection at the federal and state levels. American Humane meets the strong, comprehensive standards of the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance, has been awarded the Independent Charities of America "Best in America" Seal of Approval and has received a 3-star rating from Charity Navigator, America's leading charity evaluator.

Visit [www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org) to learn more.



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The Link<sup>®</sup>

For More Information

Contact the American Humane Association's  
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