



How are animal abuse and domestic violence linked?

Animal abuse and family violence are usually perceived and treated as separate issues. However, research has shown that the two are often linked. Intentional abuse in any form should be taken seriously, and understanding the link can help the agencies involved in their roles of reporting violence in any form. Awareness of the link may also encourage more individuals to report suspected animal abuse, as they will understand that their actions will not only help animals, but may also help prevent other forms of violence.

Violence towards humans or animals can take the form of neglect or physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. While many animal cruelty investigations are resolved through education because cases involve unintentional neglect, it is the cases of intentional neglect and abuse that are more cause for concern and are more likely to be connected to other forms of violence in the home.

Abusers may use animal abuse to silence victims about interpersonal abuse, prevent them from leaving a violent relationship, exert dominance and power over the victim and/or show the victim what could happen to them by "making an example" of an animal or animals. An abuser may kill a family pet as a way of eliminating a source of comfort and support for the victim. Victims themselves may also abuse animals, either by force or as a way of displacing their hostility towards their abuser.

It is important to report incidents of animal abuse for more than just the obvious safety of the animal. By reporting animal abuse or signs of animal cruelty, these investigations may spark interventions by other law enforcement or child protection workers that could save someone's life. To report animal cruelty in B.C., call the BC SPCA Animal Cruelty Reporting Hotline at 1.855.622.7722.