



Victims and witnesses can feel helpless to stop violence in the home, whether against a human or animal family member. But there are things we can do to prevent and cease the suffering.

## 1. Prevention

Through educational programming and public awareness about animal welfare and the violence link, we can make efforts to intervene before violence begins or escalates. In schools, humane education can be taught through bringing animals into the classroom, role modeling and discussion about the similarities and interconnectedness we have with animals.

A key aspect of humane education is empathy development, which is a component of prosocial behaviour. Learning empathy for animals helps children transfer empathy towards humans. By understanding that every living thing on earth has its purpose, and respecting the intrinsic value of all living things, children will in turn promote respect, kindness and peace in their communities and the world at large.

The importance of role modeling this behaviour cannot be overstated. Children may not have strong positive role models in their home environment, and therefore need others to show them the benefits of positive interactions with other people, animals and the environment.

## 2. Intervention

There are various organizations, programs and groups that exist to help victims and abusers acknowledge what is happening, and take steps to resolve the problem.

### Youth programs

For children who have had negative experiences with animals or have abused animals, having a controlled opportunity to interact with animals in a positive manner can have a significant and lasting impact. In the company of animals, youth can learn empathy skills and benefit

from the non-judgmental character of animals. Interaction with animals can help build self-esteem, respect and nurturing skills.

Learn more about the types of at-risk youth programs available:

- [www.haltdogs.org](http://www.haltdogs.org)
- [www.greenchimneys.org/about](http://www.greenchimneys.org/about)

### **Animal-assisted therapy**

Including animals during therapy sessions can help ease tension and initiate conversation. Animal-assisted therapy may help adults and children rebuild self-esteem and trust. The unconditional love of a companion animal can greatly assist battered women and their children in the healing process.

### **Prison programs**

Animal-facilitated therapy programs implemented in some prisons have had positive effects on both prisoners and staff. Prisoners have noticed an increased level of communication and have positively altered behaviour in order to remain in the program, which is available to only a limited number of prisoners. Having positive interactions on a daily basis in prison has changed the participants' attitudes towards themselves and others. Caring for animals gives inmates a chance to build psychological and emotional skills, a chance for the healing process to begin.

Learn more about animal-facilitated therapy programs in Canadian correctional institutions:

- [www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/fsw/pet/pft\\_e.rtf](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/fsw/pet/pft_e.rtf).

## **3. Cross-reporting**

**Professionals working with victims of abuse** should include animal-related questions when they conduct assessments of abused persons so that they may learn about and report suspected animal abuse:

1. Do you have pets or other animals at home?
2. Are you concerned about their health or welfare?
3. Can we help you contact someone to care for them?

4. Are you aware that (explain what provisions can be made for temporary care of the animal)?
5. Would you like us to work with you to find housing that allows pets when you leave the shelter?

**Animal care professionals** should take note of indicators that may lead them to suspect family violence so that they can report it:

- Injury does not match the story of what happened to the animal.
- Person will not disclose how the animal was injured or killed.
- Person reports that another adult in the family kicked or threw the animal across the room or against an object.
- The pet has been injured or killed with the reporting person present.
- There is a rapid succession of pets, decreased life expectancy, or increased injuries to this family's pets.
- A woman is having a healthy, non-aggressive animal put down.
- The pet's injuries or death indicate blows/beating/other abuse.

### **Facilitation of effective cross-reporting**

A report on a 2012 [study](#) looking at the the significance of animal cruelty in child protection investigations noted that "all child welfare workers considered animal cruelty to be a "red flag" for abuse." However, the study also showed that an alarming number of respondents witnessed animal cruelty in their investigations and did not report it, or had received a referral from an animal welfare organization to conduct an investigation and did not do so. In order to facilitate effective cross-reporting between agencies, there is a responsibility for community coalitions to bring together stakeholders to create an infrastructure of support, cross-training and cross-reporting. These coalitions are then positioned to serve the greater community. There is also a need for comprehensive workshops specifically dealing with animal and family protection issues to share information and to raise awareness of the issues affecting animal welfare and social service agencies.

In order for this to work, there must be a strong network between the various agencies. Each should be aware of the connection between their particular area of focus and that of other

professionals, effective identification and reporting of cases and what to do with the information they have gathered.

## 4. Action

You can help take action to end the abuse.

### **Report abuse**

When you report suspected animal abuse to the proper authorities, you are not only helping the animal in question; you may also be helping a person or persons in a violent situation. To report animal abuse in B.C., call the BC SPCA Animal Cruelty Reporting Hotline at 1.855.622.7722.

### **Tell others about the link**

The more people who understand the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence, the more animals and people who can be helped. Talk to friends, family and members of the community about the link so that they may in turn take action towards violence prevention and intervention.