

# Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence

*Saving Lives...  
Building Hope...  
Ending Violence...*

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To most of us, our pets are our friends and companions. However, to some they are a tool used to exert power and control over a partner. Batterers use pets by threatening to harm the family pets if their partner doesn't do what they want or if their partner tries to leave. In 3 surveys of women's shelters in Wisconsin and Utah, an average of 74% of pet owning women reported that a pet had been threatened, injured, or killed by their abuser (Ascione 1995, 1997 and Quinlisk 1995). A survey of women in shelter in Utah found 20% delayed leaving the abusive situation out of fear their pet would be harmed. In Canada, almost 50% delayed leaving (Ascione 1997). Looking for signs of animal cruelty can often lead to the discovery of abuse against other members of the family. Some of the signs to look for in cases of animal abuse include unexplained injuries and bruises, behavior changes, failure to thrive and grow, hostility, and a desperation to please.

If you suspect abuse, you can ask the children about their pet—who takes care of it, has it ever gotten hurt, & how is the pet taught to be good. You can also question adults about the batterer's behavior toward the animals—has your partner ever threatened the pets, have your children ever harmed your pets, do they worry about their pet's safety, and have they delayed leaving due to concern for their pet?

