



The Links between Animal and Child/Vulnerable Adult Abuse

Introduction

Where serious animal abuse has occurred in a household, there may be an increased likelihood that some other form of family violence, abuse or neglect is also occurring and that any children or vulnerable adults present may also be at risk of abuse and neglect.

Practice based on knowledge of the links may enable professionals to intervene earlier in order to detect or prevent abuse to children, vulnerable adults and/or animals.

More information

- [RSPCA – Understanding the links between child abuse, animal abuse and domestic violence](#)
- [Video - Understanding Animal Welfare in Violent Homes](#)
- [Pet Fostering Services for Families Fleeing Domestic Abuse](#)

What can I do?

- Incorporate questions and be observant about the care and treatment of family pets in assessments.
- If you are concerned that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of abuse or neglect, contact report your concerns to [Children & Families Integrated Front Door or Social Care and Support](#).
- If you are concerned that an animal has been abused or neglected, report your concerns to the [RSPCA](#).

How can animal abuse impact on health?

Where pet owner does not provide appropriate places and opportunities for pets to go to the toilet and if animal faeces are not adequately disposed of, those living within the household could come into contact with it, which can cause an infection called [Toxocariasis](#), especially if the pet has not been wormed regularly. Furthermore, pets that are not regularly de-fleaed can bring fleas into the home. Pet fleas do not live on humans, but their bites can cause skin irritation that can lead to infection.

7 Minute briefing

What is animal abuse?

There are 3 categories summarising animal abuse:

Physical abuse: inc. kicking, punching, throwing, burning, microwaving, drowning, asphyxiation, and the administration of drugs or poisons.

Sexual: any use of an animal for sexual gratification.

Neglect: a failure to provide adequate food, hygiene, home conditions, water, shelter, companionship or veterinary care.

What are the indicators?

Signs of physical and sexual abuse of pets include: where pets appear frightened and flinch at human contact, display unprovoked aggression or overly submissive behaviour and have unexplained or untreated injuries/wounds. Signs of neglect the presence of faeces, unsuitable places for pets to go to the toilet and pet's toileting in the home, fur loss, matted fur, flea or parasite infestation and sickly and underweight appearance.

How does animal abuse impact on a family?

Abuse and neglect of animals can have damaging and devastating effects for both the physical and emotional wellbeing of animals and their owners who view their pets as much-loved family members.

The threat of harming a pet can be used as a powerful tool to coerce and control family members to prevent them from reporting abuse or leaving.