

What Concerned Citizens Need to Know



*The First Strike®
campaign was
developed by
The Humane Society
of the United States
(HSUS) to increase
public awareness
of the connection
between animal
cruelty and
human violence.*



What is animal cruelty?

Animal cruelty encompasses a range of behaviors harmful to animals, from neglect to malicious killing. Most cruelty investigated by humane officers is unintentional neglect that can be resolved through education. Intentional cruelty, or abuse, is knowingly depriving an animal of food, water, shelter, socialization, or veterinary care or maliciously torturing, maiming, mutilating, or killing an animal.

Why is it a concern?

All animal cruelty is a concern because it is wrong to inflict suffering on any living creature. Intentional cruelty is a particular concern because it is a sign of psychological distress and often indicates that an individual either has already experienced violence or may be predisposed to committing acts of violence.

Is there any evidence of a connection between animal cruelty and human violence?

Absolutely. Many studies in psychology, sociology, and criminology during the last 25 years have demonstrated that violent offenders frequently have childhood and adolescent histories of serious and repeated animal cruelty. The FBI has recognized the connection since the 1970s, when its analysis of the lives of serial killers suggested most, as children, had killed or tortured animals. Other research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of more common forms of violence, including child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association considers animal cruelty one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder.

Why would anyone be cruel to animals?

There can be many reasons. Animal cruelty, like any other form of violence, is often committed by a person who feels powerless, unnoticed, and under the control of others. The motive may be to shock, threaten, intimidate, or offend others or to demonstrate rejection of society's rules. Some who are cruel to animals copy things they have seen or that have been done to them. Others see harming an animal as a safe way to get revenge on someone who cares about that animal.

As natural "explorers," don't all children sometimes harm animals?

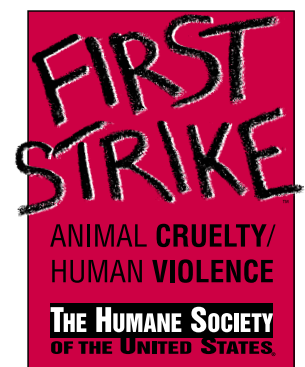
Absolutely not. While some children kill insects, few torture pets or other small creatures. If allowed to harm animals, children are more likely to be violent later in life. Animal cruelty, like any other violence, should never be attributed to a stage of development.

What kind of children are cruel to animals?

Serious or repeated animal cruelty is seen more often in boys than in girls. Children as young as four may harm animals, but such behavior is most common during adolescence. Cruelty is often associated with children who do poorly in school and have low self-esteem and few friends. Children who are cruel to animals are often characterized as bullies and may have a history of truancy, vandalism, and other antisocial behaviors.

What does animal cruelty indicate about family dynamics?

Researchers say that a child's violence against animals often represents displaced hostility and aggression stemming from neglect or abuse of the child or of another family member. Animal cruelty committed by any member of a family, whether parent or child, often means child abuse occurs in that family.



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What should I do if my child or a neighbor's child has harmed an animal?

If you suspect your child has deliberately harmed an animal, talk to your child. Try to discover what caused the cruelty. Communicate with your child, your child's teachers, and your child's friends. The more you know about your child's activities, the better able you will be to guide your child in making compassionate and humane choices. Something as serious as animal cruelty, however, should not be handled alone. Seek help from a family counselor, school counselor, pediatrician, or clergy member.

If you know another child who has harmed an animal, report what you know immediately to your local animal welfare organization or police department. Alert the child's school principal or guidance counselor.

Knowing that a friend has serious problems can be quite troubling for a child. Your child may need to sort out the feelings the incident raises.

What should I tell my child about the other child's behavior?

Explain that animal abuse is often a sign of other serious problems and should be addressed by the proper authorities. Knowing that a friend has serious problems can be quite troubling for a child, as can witnessing animal cruelty. Your child may need to sort out the feelings the incident raises.

What should I do if an otherwise "good" child harms an animal one time?

Though innocent exploration may be corrected simply by talking with the child, any time a child causes an animal pain or suffering you should be concerned.

Children as young as four may harm animals. Animal cruelty by any member of a family often means child abuse occurs in that family.

What is the difference between innocent exploration and calculated animal cruelty?

Innocent exploration may come of simple curiosity, but calculated animal cruelty is motivated by a desire to harm. While even innocent acts of cruelty should be addressed, it is particularly important to intervene when a child is insensitive to the obvious distress of an animal, repeats a harmful behavior, or derives pleasure from causing an animal pain.

What happens when authorities prosecute an animal cruelty case?

Appropriate sentencing can include individual or family counseling, community service, or diversion programs. It is rarely the goal of the authorities to imprison a child for cruelty to animals. Law enforcement officers and judges recognize that cruelty to animals is one part of a complex problem. Sometimes the official response to animal cruelty provides a family its first opportunity to get help.

Can reports be made anonymously?

While many jurisdictions will respond to an anonymous complaint, successful prosecutions often depend on an identifiable witness who can authenticate evidence.

Will I be required to testify?

If a case goes to trial and you have identified yourself as the complainant in either a written or an oral report, you may be called to testify.

How can I teach my child to respect animals?

Teach by example; use real-life situations to instill a sense of respect for all life. Invite your child to help you feed the birds or rescue a bug. With older children, discuss animal cruelty cases publicized in the news. Encourage children to speak up for animals.

How can my child's school incorporate humane education?

Humane education should be part of every school curriculum. The National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (NAHEE), The HSUS's youth education division, publishes materials that help teachers establish a classroom theme of kindness, respect, and tolerance. For subscription information, contact NAHEE, P.O. Box 362, East Haddam, CT 06423-0362; nahee@nahee.org; www.nahee.org.



To learn more about the First Strike campaign, call toll free 1-888-213-0956, e-mail firststrike@hsus.org, visit www.hsus.org/firststrike, or write to us at the address below. The HSUS was founded as a nonprofit organization in 1954 to protect animals through legal, educational, legislative, and investigative means. The HSUS has 10 regional offices throughout the country and operates outside The United States as Humane Society International.

Promoting the protection of all animals

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