

What Educators Need to Know

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 either that an individual 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 had, as children, killed or tortured animals. Other research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of more common violence, including child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) considers animal cruelty one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder.

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 without penalty, children are more likely to commit violent acts later in life. Children who abuse animals are generally involved in bullying, vandalism, and more serious crimes, including arson. Animal cruelty, like any other form of violence, should never be attributed to a stage of development. Rather, it should be considered a warning that a child may be experiencing some form of psychological—or physical—distress.

Not all animal cruelty is intentional, however, and a child’s acts of innocent exploration should be turned into opportunities for humane education. Telling stories, role playing, and creative writing can help you find out if a child is in distress and can help the child develop empathy. Additionally, teaching by example is one of a teacher’s most powerful tools—your efforts to rescue a bug or feed the birds will make a lasting impression.

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

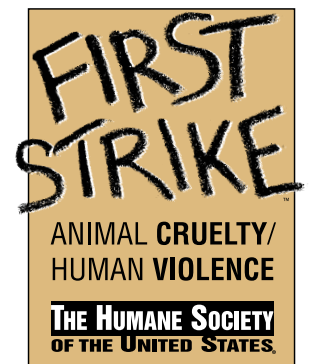
Innocent exploration may come of simple curiosity, but calculated animal cruelty is motivated by a desire to harm. While even innocent acts of cruelty should be addressed, it is particularly important to intervene when a child is insensitive to the obvious distress of an animal, repeats a harmful behavior,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

How can I find out if a child has witnessed, experienced, or perpetrated cruelty?

A child perpetrator may boast of harming an animal, either verbally or in a story; a child who has witnessed animal cruelty may recount an incident that took place at home or in the neighborhood.



*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.*



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These children may be cruel to or unnecessarily rough with classroom pets or other animals in school. Other children may report something that was said by a child perpetrator or victim of abuse.

What should I do if I suspect a child has abused an animal or reports that a family member has abused an animal?

Discuss your suspicions with the school principal, psychologist, resource officer, or other law enforcement officer assigned to the school. Review the child's behavior, including attendance, peer relations, and academic performance. A parent/teacher/principal consultation is recommended before further action is taken.

Like any other serious crime, animal cruelty should be reported to the proper authorities. In most jurisdictions a report should be filed with the humane investigator at the local animal welfare agency. If there is no such organization in your area, report the incident to the police or sheriff's department. The child's parents should be made aware of the necessity of such a report. Based on the history of the student and the school team's findings, it may be necessary to file an additional report with the local child welfare agency—often, children who abuse animals are abused themselves.

If a child reports that a family member is abusing an animal, a school team conference is necessary before filing reports with animal welfare and child welfare agencies.

Will I be required to testify?

If the case goes to court, you could be asked to testify at some point.

Can the cycle of abuse be broken?

Yes. According to the National Research Council, early prevention efforts are more likely to reduce adult crime than are criminal sanctions applied later in life. The APA's Commission on Violence and Youth encourages the adoption of broad and coordinated initiatives to prevent all youth violence or mitigate its effects.

How can I promote kindness, respect, and compassion through the curriculum?

Humane education, introduced by either classroom teachers, concerned parents, or local animal welfare agencies, should be an integral part of every elementary school curriculum.

You will be an effective agent for humane education if your lesson plans include peer mediation and conflict resolution and your long-term objectives are to encourage empathetic responses and ensure the safety of children and animals. The

National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (NAHEE), HSUS's youth education division publishes *Kids In Nature's Defense News™ (KIND News)*, a four-page monthly newspaper for elementary school students. KIND News helps 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.

How can I work with others to prevent the first abusive strike?

Introduce KIND News and other humane education materials into your curriculum. (The HSUS has written a special children's brochure that discusses animal cruelty.)

Learn about the violence prevention programs and coalitions in your area. If there are none that recognize the connection between human violence and animal cruelty, it may be time to start one.



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.

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**Promoting
the protection
of all animals**

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