

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Domestic elder abuse and animal cruelty can be addressed and stopped—if they come to the attention of authorities such as adult protective services, animal control, the local humane society, veterinary professionals, or law enforcement. It is essential that all those who seek to identify and reduce such violence be alert to the connection.

There are several important ways human service and animal welfare professionals can collaborate to stop this abuse.

- Know your animal welfare or social services counterpart. Cross-train and cross-report between animal welfare and human service agencies.
- Show concern for the pets who are important to the older adults with whom you interact.
- Include questions and collect data about animal cruelty in intake interviews with elderly victims.
- Develop or participate in an antiviolence coalition that includes representatives from animal and human service agencies.
- Support legislation to improve animal cruelty and elder abuse laws.



THIS BROCHURE WAS DEVELOPED

as a joint educational initiative by The Humane Society of the United States's First Strike® campaign and the National Center on Elder Abuse. First Strike is a national campaign designed to increase public and professional awareness of the connection between animal cruelty and human violence.

For more information, contact First Strike
The Humane Society of the United States
2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037
202-452-1100 Toll Free: 1-888-213-0956
firststrike@hsus.org
www.hsus.org/firststrike

The National Center on Elder Abuse
1201 15th St., NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005
202-898-2586
www.elderabusecenter.org

This brochure was made possible by a grant from The Dr. Scholl Foundation, Chicago, Illinois.

Models are used for illustrative purposes only.

*Promoting
the protection
of all animals*

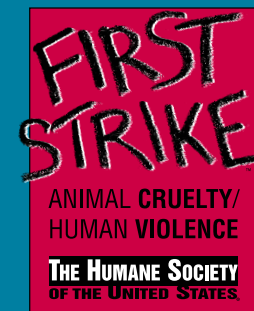
**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**
2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037
202-452-1100 • www.hsus.org/firststrike

©2004 The HSUS. All rights reserved.
Printed on recycled paper.



MAKING THE CONNECTION

Helping Vulnerable Adults and Their Pets



HELPING VULNERABLE ADULTS AND THEIR PETS

On January 20, 2001, an anonymous caller to the Washington, D.C., Humane Society reported that her neighbor's daughter had thrown a dead dog into the trash dumpster. Animal control officers arrived at the neighbor's house and discovered a 90-year-old emaciated and disoriented woman. The floor of the house was covered with trash and dog feces, parts of the ceiling had caved in, and mildew covered the walls.

Reports indicate that the daughter often left her elderly mother alone for several weeks at a time. In addition, it was alleged that the daughter would cash her mother's Social Security checks to buy illegal drugs. The animal control officers rescued the remaining dogs and contacted adult protective services, which arranged to have the woman transported to a hospital. The two agencies coordinated their action to meet the needs of victims of two different types of abuse, all in need of emergency care.



Elder abuse in domestic settings is a serious problem, affecting at least 500,000 elderly persons each year. However, because they are often physically and socially isolated from the community, older adults rarely alert authorities to domestic abuse. In fact, the 1998 National Elder Abuse Incidence Study estimated that for every reported incident of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation, or self-neglect, approximately five go unreported.

Neglect or abuse of a pet may be the first, and often the most visible, indication that an older

adult is being abused. By reporting animal abuse, you may be able to break the cycle of violence.

What Are the Signs of Elder Abuse?

- **Physical Abuse**—may produce injuries such as bruises, bone fractures, skull fractures, open wounds, cuts, or signs of having been restrained, such as ligature marks (rope burns, chafed skin) on wrists and ankles
- **Sexual Abuse**—can result in bruises around breasts or genital area; unexplained venereal or genital infections; and torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- **Emotional Abuse**—may cause the victim to be emotionally upset or noncommunicative; also may produce unusual behavior typically attributed to dementia, fear, or depression
- **Neglect**—can result in dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bedsores, poor personal hygiene, and unsanitary or hazardous living conditions
- **Abandonment**—might take the form of desertion of an elderly person at a hospital, shopping area, or other public location
- **Financial or Material Exploitation**—may be revealed by sudden changes in a bank account or banking practices, abrupt changes in a will, etc.



Elder Abuse and Animal Cruelty

Animals are often significant companions to elderly persons, especially if they are isolated from the community. Older adults are often particularly attached to pets, who may represent important links to the past, as well as being ongoing sources of comfort, humor, attention, protection, and contact with others. Unfortunately, in many cases of elder abuse, perpetrators may manipulate this bond to intimidate, threaten, or coerce victims.

In more than two-thirds of domestic elder abuse cases, the perpetrators are family members—often the children or grandchildren of the elderly victim—who may neglect or abuse the elder's pet as a form of control or retaliation, out of frustration over their caretaking responsibilities, or as a way to extract financial assets from the victim.

Cases of extreme animal neglect also may reflect an elder person's inability to provide adequate care for himself or herself and thus indicate the need for assistance.

Identifying Animal Cruelty in Elder Abuse Cases

- **Check the physical condition of pets.** Ask about any recent health problems or injuries. Pets are often malnourished in abusive homes; their ribs may be visible, and their food bowls may be empty.
- **Examine animals' behavior.** Pets in abusive homes are often frightened, withdrawn, aggressive, or overly protective.
- **Ask questions.** If a pet is suddenly missing or has been moved outside, ask why. Responses to these questions may lead you to discover animal cruelty and give the older person a chance to share concerns or report abuse.

