

**FIRST
STRIKE**

**ANIMAL CRUELTY/
HUMAN VIOLENCE**

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES.**

*The role of
the community
in reducing
violence*

■ Recognizing the CONNECTION ■

Violence has become one of the defining characteristics of our age. Even if it hasn't touched our lives directly, we are confronted with the images and effects of it daily in the news. Because it affects all of us, it is a problem we all must address together.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has developed the First Strike® campaign with two goals: to increase awareness of the well-documented connection between violence against animals and violence against people and to encourage all those involved in antiviolence efforts to work together. This is our answer to the widespread practice of categorizing violence. One hears of animal abuse, child abuse, spouse abuse, abuse of the elderly, sexual harassment, violence in the work place, and so on. But when crime is categorized in this way, it is easy to lose sight of the big picture.

The truth is, violence cuts across categories. Animal cruelty, in particular, is often an early warning sign of violent tendencies that will be acted out eventually against people. The youth who tortures cats may grow up to harm or kill humans. The parent who abuses the family pet may also be abusing the children. The child who hurts an animal may already be a victim of, or a witness to, family violence.

Many studies have documented the connection between violence against animals and violence against humans, and studies have shown that animal cruelty in a family is an indicator of serious problems in that family. Animal welfare organizations routinely investigate complaints of cruelty to animals and find other forms of family violence as well.

You can make a difference by forming a community antiviolence coalition with representatives from the different agencies involved in violence intervention or by working within coalitions that already exist.

Interagency coalitions that recognize the connection between animal cruelty and human violence can *coordinate* antiviolence efforts that better protect the victims of violence, *prosecute and punish* those who commit violent acts, and *prevent* future violence through early identification of people with violent tendencies. Through community action programs, antiviolence coalitions also can raise the level of professional and community awareness and involvement so that all acts of violence are recognized and dealt with promptly and appropriately. Antiviolence coalitions can create an interagency network that will encourage cross-reporting and manage cases of violence cooperatively rather than in isolation, and they can examine community antiviolence laws and work to improve them.



■ Working with Coalitions ■

Your community may already have a family violence prevention coalition or an antiviolenace youth council. To find out if it does, look in the government pages of your telephone book under headings like “domestic violence,” “child abuse,” or “violence.” Social service agencies also may be able to help you. The mayor’s office, chief of police, board of county commissioners, or other government agencies in your area should have information on active coalitions or councils. If you discover that an antiviolenace coalition already exists, find out if representatives from animal welfare agencies are working members of it. If not, call and ask that animal welfare representatives be included. If coalition members do not understand why their group should include such representatives, provide them with materials from The HSUS First Strike campaign. Animal welfare representatives already working in coalitions will probably be your best contacts when you share information about the animal cruelty/human violence connection, but others may also be receptive.

Don’t give up if you meet resistance. In 1994 the District of Columbia’s Domestic Violence Coordinating Council was in the process of developing a comprehensive approach to handling cases when representatives from the Washington Humane Society (WHS) asked to be included. One of the missions of the council was to bring together the many groups in the city that had worked independently against domestic violence. While some members, representing both

private and public agencies, questioned an animal welfare organization's role on the council, it didn't take much to convince D.C. superior court judge Susan H. Winfield, chair of the D.C. justice system's coordination committee. She remarked, "[WHS] taught us that people sometimes batter other people after they injure animals."

If you are building a coalition from the ground up, first identify all of the key players in your community who deal with violence issues. Ideally, your antiviolence coalition would include representatives from animal welfare organizations, state and local law enforcement agencies, the medical community, social service agencies, family crisis centers, community programs and intervention groups, schools (teachers, administrators, school psychologists, and students), legislative bodies, veterinary clinics, churches, and the media. While government agencies are most often the investigators of violent crimes, private agencies may be involved in treatment, housing, and legal and advocacy services. All should be included.

Having identified your potential coalition members, the next step is to set up a meeting. Contact all parties by letter and invite them to an informational meeting to plan the coalition. Stress the importance of identifying animal cruelty as a form of violence in families and the community. Include with your letter materials from The HSUS First Strike campaign and information on local cases. Follow up with a phone call to reiterate the importance of the meeting and of each group's participation. Ask for additional names of individuals and agencies that should be invited to the meeting.

■ Your First Meeting ■

At the first meeting, provide an overview of the problem, the reasons for coordinating an interagency coalition, and a basic framework for short- and long-term goals. The meeting's agenda may include brief introductions and then a structured question-and-answer session designed to determine your coalition's priorities.

Initial fact-finding questions may include the following.

- What are the state and local laws governing the reporting of child abuse and family violence?
- Who are the mandated reporters, or professionals required to report abuse or violence? (Many communities have laws that require social workers, law enforcement officers, fire fighters, teachers, and others to report known or suspected cases of family violence.)
- What are the state and local animal-cruelty laws?
- Do existing state and local laws enable agencies to share information easily?
- Do agency intake forms include questions that could identify other victims in a household, including animals?



- What type of violence-reporting and violence-prevention training currently exists for humane officers, caseworkers, teachers, police officers, prosecutors, and judges?
- Is ongoing training available for these professionals?
- Is training available for those who don't normally report violence, such as animal control officers, animal shelter staff, and veterinarians?
- Can cross-reporting and cross-training protocols be established and offered through existing programs for mandated reporters and other professionals who might be in a position to report violence?
- Can such protocols be offered as separate training programs if they can't be incorporated into existing ones?
- Are there intervention, prevention, or treatment programs that use animal-assisted therapy?

■ Setting Goals ■

The goals you set will be based on the priorities your coalition establishes. For example, if agency representatives decide that setting up a review board to share case histories is a priority, your community must have laws or policies that allow agencies to share information. If existing confidentiality laws prohibit the exchange of information on abuse cases, for instance, your first goal would be to work toward changing those laws. Begin by researching such laws and meeting with local legislators to gain support for your proposed changes.

Following is a list of goals that may be appropriate for your community.

- Identify other agencies that should be included in the coalition.
- Identify possible sources of funding.
- Establish key questions, for investigative reports of all agencies, that would identify any possible connection between family violence and animal cruelty.
- Establish cross-training among agencies.
- Mandate cross-reporting among agencies.
- Establish a case review board that would include representatives of child- and animal welfare agencies.
- Improve standards for rapid response to all reported acts of violence.

- Initiate legislation that would require that mandated reporters share information with other investigative agencies and schools.
- Propose legislation to strengthen animal-abuse laws.
- Establish a *Safe Haven for Animals*[™] program, or emergency sheltering program, for the companion animals of any victims of family violence, including children and the elderly.
- Encourage representatives from social service agency boards to serve on humane society boards, and vice versa.
- Create a centralized reporting system to track abuse and violence cases.
- Develop a public-awareness campaign using The HSUS First Strike campaign materials.
- Develop relationships with the media and publicize, in discussing relevant cases, the connection between animal cruelty and family violence.
- Incorporate humane education values into antiviolence programs in schools and elsewhere or develop programs that foster such values.

Before you adjourn the first meeting, be sure every coalition member has an assignment. Then schedule the next meeting.

■ Getting the Word Out ■

It's important for your coalition to publicize and promote its antiviolence message throughout the community. Get to know the media. Invite the reporters who cover the local crime beat to a coalition meeting; invite the editorial board of the local paper as well. Identify writers with an interest in animals, family violence issues, or children and invite them to participate. Write letters to the editor and make calls to talk radio shows to discuss reported cases of violence. Always emphasize the importance of pursuing *all* violent offenders. Pitch the coalition's agenda to local television and radio show producers, and give them a list of experts from your coalition who are available to discuss the issue. If you've built a new community coalition, hold a press conference to announce its formation. If you've just gotten animal welfare agencies involved in an existing coalition, announce that. Assemble a press packet including The HSUS First Strike campaign materials, case histories (especially local cases), the coalition's mission and action plan, research, and testimonials.

Involve politicians. Ask the appropriate city or county office to pass a resolution or executive order that recognizes the connection



between animal cruelty and other forms of violence, expresses commitment to the prevention of all forms of abuse, and supports the coalition's mission. Such a resolution might be the hook for a media event.

Solicit funding or pro bono services to launch a community-awareness campaign. Supplement The HSUS First Strike campaign materials with materials specific to your community and distribute them in schools, libraries, social service agency waiting rooms, hospitals, and doctors' and veterinarians' offices. Coordinate campaign bus ads, billboards, public service announcements, television and radio ads, and giveaway promotions—distribute emergency number refrigerator magnets or wallet cards with emergency numbers. Organize an awareness day—End the Violence Day or Family Peace Day—or an event—a walkathon, a benefit, or a commemorative ceremony.

Establish a coalition-sponsored speakers' bureau for service clubs, parent-teacher associations, neighborhood associations, and religious groups. Offer seminars, led by a team of professionals from the coalition agencies, at schools of education, medicine, and social work, to explain the connection between animal cruelty and other forms of community and family violence. Host a communitywide forum, town meeting, or conference.

Whatever the tactic, get the information to the community: Animal cruelty hurts everybody.

■ Measuring Your Success ■

How will you know when your coalition's efforts are paying off? One indicator of increased awareness of the connection between animal cruelty and violence against humans, and the importance of reporting all forms of violence, is an increase in the number of reports of animal cruelty and family violence. Increased reporting increases the likelihood that offenders will be identified before their acts of violence escalate. It leads to better protection for pets and families at risk.

In 1987 the WHS contacted the school system in Washington, D.C., regarding a boy who had admitted killing several cats by slicing their necks with broken bottles. School psychologists were already seeking treatment for the youth for other behavioral problems when the WHS shared the animal abuse information. The WHS and the school collaborated with police and the Department of Human Services to ask the court to mandate institutional treatment. The information provided by all investigating agencies ensured that the child, who was himself a victim of sexual and physical abuse, was sent to a residential treatment hospital. As a result of this case, the WHS and Pupil Personnel Services (the agency designated to address mental health issues of D.C. public school students) formed a partnership to identify, using humane officers' reports, violent juveniles and children at risk of violence in their families and to seek the appropriate intervention of psychologists and social workers.

Your coalition's success can also be measured by how well it meets its own specific goals. While formal agreements between agencies may be difficult to obtain, informal networking among representatives of all investigating agencies—through agency newsletters, brown-bag lunch speakers, and frequent meetings—will generate awareness and inspire cross-reporting.



■ Working Together Against Violence ■

One of the greatest contributions you can make to your community is to get people working together to stop all forms of violence. Together, we can help both animals and people. For more information, and for help with your community coalition, contact First Strike, The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037; 1-888-213-0956; firststrike@hsus.org; www.hsus.org/firststrike

*Promoting
the protection
of all animals*

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
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