

Concerns regarding animal abuse in the family: What professionals need to consider



Cruelty to animals may be a first indicator there is something wrong in a child's life. Animal abuse is the intentional harm of an animal. It includes, but is not limited to, wilful neglect, inflicting injury, pain or distress, or malicious killing of animals.

Research suggests that animal abuse can be part of a continuum of abuse within the family, perpetrated by children who later demonstrate harm towards others or an indicator of the existence of child abuse.

When working with families in the home, professionals should consider:

- any risk factors
- be aware of the indicators an animal is being abused
- recording evidence
- understand the long term impact on the child



Risk Factors: have witnessed domestic abuse, treated violently by a family member, boys more likely to commit, being bullied is strong predictor



Assessments: If you suspect cruelty to animals, your assessment should include; who, what, when, where, why, how, frequency and severity of incidences



Detecting animal abuse: Evidence of family dysfunction, pets may retaliate and bite, may destroy own toys/things, may have a fear of animals or places



Long term impact: Offences against peers may be higher, a higher risk of aggressive or criminal behaviour



Statistics: 3-44% children reported to abuse animals at some point during their childhood, children who abuse animals are 2-3 times more likely to be directly abused themselves, animal abuse perpetrated by an older child (>10 years) are more likely to be associated with child abuse



Interventions: The RSPCA provide resources to support working with children who may have harmed an animal.

“He held my daughters’ pets out of the upstairs window, and threatened to drop them if we did not return home”

(Understanding the Links NSPCC)



The DDSCP Procedures provides information and guidance on concerns about the welfare of children <https://derbyshirescbs.proceduresonline.com/index.htm>

To register for training, please visit our online booking system at <https://ddscp.event-booking.org.uk> for available courses.

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