

TRAINING OUTLINE

Animal Abuse and Family Violence: Partners in Crime A Self-Guided Training Presentation for Law Enforcement Officers

Offered by
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PART I: INTRODUCTION TO THE ANIMAL ABUSE/FAMILY VIOLENCE LINKS

I. Introduction

1- In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in how acts of animal cruelty, abuse and neglect frequently serve as an indicator and as a predictor of other crimes, including crimes against the human members of society. Law enforcement officers who in the past might have dismissed reports of animal cruelty as “it was only a cat” or “boys will be boys” are gaining a new-found respect for the potential significance of these acts, recognizing that they are crimes to be investigated and prosecuted. Police personnel are collaborating with animal control agencies, humane societies, domestic violence shelters, and child and adult protective services officials in a coordinated effort to prevent all forms of family violence. These forms of family violence are frequently linked, and are often committed by the same perpetrators. It is our hope that your viewing this presentation will help you to establish close connections with the animal welfare agencies in your community and begin the process of addressing animal abuse as a human safety and welfare issue.

A. About The Latham Foundation

2- The Latham Foundation for the Promotion of Humane Education is a unique institution in the animal welfare world. Latham was founded in 1918 to promote a deeper understanding of and sympathy with animals and to promote children’s character development through kindness to animals and respect for one another. Latham believes that children raised to respect animals will grow up to be kinder to their fellow human beings. Since 1991, Latham has also been actively addressing the links between animal abuse and other forms of family and community violence.

B. Goals and Objectives

3 - Our goal is that by the end of this training session, you will have a greater understanding of:

- The significance of animal abuse as a predictor and indicator of domestic violence and other forms of family violence;
- Your state's statutes affecting animal cruelty and domestic violence;
- Techniques for investigating and gathering evidence in animal abuse/domestic violence cases;
- Relevant law enforcement and criminal justice system strategies in this area; and
- Resources for additional information and training.

II. Background on The Link

A. Why is this important? Don't cops have more important things to do?

4- Law enforcement, human services and criminal justice agencies now recognize what we call a "Link" when two or more types of family violence co-occur. Child abuse or neglect, domestic violence, elder abuse, and animal abuse often occur simultaneously, and any one can be an indicator or predictor of other crimes. With 98% of Americans considering pets to be companions or family members, and with nearly 60% of all households owning pets, the interconnection between animal abuse and human violence is now much more noticeable.

The first questions law enforcement officers usually ask are, "Why should we care about animals?" "Don't we have more important things to worry about?" "How can I worry about dogs and cats when I've got rapes and homicides to contend with?" What we hope you take away from this training is that animal cruelty cases are frequently human health and safety issues as well – and they ARE a crime. Researchers have found that animal cruelty offenders invariably have histories of multiple forms of aggression, and that the motivations behind animal cruelty are the same as in other forms of violence. Animal abuse rarely occurs in isolation – it's usually the "tip of the iceberg" and frequently the first opportunity for social services or law enforcement intervention. Animal cruelty investigators and law enforcement officers deal with the same perpetrators, but because these two systems have rarely interfaced with each other, agencies have not thought to share case information. Because animal abuse is such an early and reliable predictor of other crimes, particularly domestic violence, early intervention on the animal issue can often prevent other forms of violence from escalating.

1. The national law enforcement perspective

a. International Assn. of Chiefs of Police

5- National law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and in several foreign countries recognize how animal abuse affects crimes of interpersonal violence. The International Association of Chiefs of Police wrote, “Over the last decade, social scientists and law enforcement agencies have begun to examine cruelty to animals as a serious *human* problem closely linked to domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and other violent crimes.”

“[Preventing animal cruelty] cannot undo generations of abuse, but can be an effective means of breaking the cycle of family violence from one generation to the next.”

b. Federal Bureau of Investigation

6- The FBI’s Behavioral Sciences Unit has found that cruelty to animals shows up in the personality profiles of many serial rapists and murderers. Special Agent Alan Brantley has written, “A lot of what we do is threat assessment. Something we believe is prominently displayed in the histories of people who are habitually violent is animal abuse.” When asked how many serial killers had a history of abusing animals, Brantley’s response was, “The real question should be, How many have not?”

c. U.S. Department of Justice/Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention

7- Acts of animal cruelty perpetrated, or witnessed, by youth, are a particular problem, as these often desensitize youth to violence and may be precursors to a lifelong criminal trajectory. Anthropologist Margaret Mead noted many years ago that, “One of the most dangerous things that can happen to a child is to kill or torture an animal and get away with it.” The U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention has written that although attending to animal abuse will not solve all the challenges of youth violence, paying greater attention to animal abuse as a ‘red flag’ warning sign or sentinel behavior could help identify youth at risk for perpetrating interpersonal violence and who have themselves been victimized.

B. Reasons why it’s important

1. Animal abuse exposes other criminal behavior

8 - Researchers consistently find that acts of animal cruelty are closely linked with other crimes. The Chicago Crime Commission reported that 35% of search warrants executed for animal abuse or dog fighting investigations resulted in seizure of narcotics or guns. Of 22 offenders arrested for animal abuse violations, 18 had priors for battery, weapons or drugs, and 5 had subsequent felony arrests. Dog fighting is directly connected to the violent world of gangs, drugs and weapons.

9 - A survey of animal cruelty offenders by the Provincial Police in Sydney, Australia discovered that a history of animal abuse was a better predictor of sexual assault than were previous convictions for homicide, arson or firearms offenses. Almost two-thirds of animal cruelty offenders had also committed an assault; 17% had committed sexual abuse; and 8% had arson convictions. 99% of cruelty offenders had committed an average of four other crimes.

2. Animal abuse as a lethality assessment

10 - In Nashville, Tennessee, police were challenged by a tremendous increase in domestic violence homicides. They identified three factors that indicated a high risk of lethality: whether the batterer had threatened suicide, had access to weapons, or had threatened to mutilate or kill the victim's pets. Police added a screening system in the city's domestic violence hotline, and if the caller identified any of these three criteria, a special intervention unit responded. As a result, in one year even though the number of calls to the hotline increased 50%, the number of fatalities decreased 80%.

3. Animal abuse is often plain-sight evidence; Willingness to reveal information

11 - Other reasons why animal cruelty is a serious matter include that these incidents often occur in plain view, so neighbors (who are traditionally reluctant to get involved in domestic violence or child abuse cases) may be moved to file a report. Also, some evidence may be gathered outdoors without the need for a search warrant. Witnesses and victims who may be reluctant to discuss their own problems often "open up" and are eager to talk about their animals, which aid your investigation. And acts of cruelty inflict physical and emotional damage not only on the animals but on their humans as well.

4. Summary

12 - In short, animal cruelty needs to be taken as seriously as any human violence. The old attitude of, "It's just an animal!" is being replaced with a new awareness: "If he's hurting animals, someone else in the home is next." Animal cruelty cases often uncover domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, drugs, and weapons. Animals feel pain like we do and consequently are protected under the law. Finally, because so many people react emotionally to animal cases, *you will get negative press* if you fail to address the animal welfare component of family violence.

C. What is the role of pets in American families?

13 - Most of us have had pets, and our good or bad childhood experiences with them may help set lifelong patterns of how we relate to others, how well we trust the universe, and how emotionally secure we feel.

While it's easy to dismiss the impact of pets in people's lives, in reality there are a tremendous number of pets – and people whose emotional attachments to them make them vulnerable to the power and control battles of family violence. In the United States, with 300 million people, we also have 72 million dogs and 82 million cats, plus untold numbers of other household pets.

1. Statistics

14 - Pets are truly “all in the family,” and batterers use their human victims' emotional attachments toward their animals as a way to gain control over them. More American homes have pets than have children. There are more dogs in the U.S. than people in most countries in Europe – and more cats than dogs. We spend more money on pet food than on baby food. Even more significant is that a child in America is more likely to grow up with pets than with a live-at-home father.

2. Prevalence of pets in victims' homes

15 - Law enforcement officers, especially those involved in domestic violence cases and victim's services, should note this statistic: the overwhelming majority of pets are found in homes with children, and are cared for by the woman of the household. This makes it especially easy for batterers to threaten to torture or kill an animal to get a child victim of sexual abuse to remain silent, and to discourage a domestic violence victim from leaving.

D. History of “The Link”

1. The Intersections between Animal Abuse and Family Violence

16 – The concept of animal abuse being linked to other forms of family violence is summed up by this model. When police officers, SPCA or humane society investigators, animal control officers, or social services caseworkers conduct an investigation, referral or assessment, they may see several overlapping forms of family violence involving the same perpetrator and victims – but only if they are trained to ask questions to look for them. Finding these overlaps is not saying that animals are more important than people, but rather, that any crime must be investigated and responded to. When you are attuned to these overlaps you begin to see that *“When animals are abused, people are at risk; When people are abused, animals are at risk.”*

2. Types of Intersections

17 – Here are some of the more common ways that these intersections show up. In **domestic violence**, batterers torture or threaten the pets to intimidate or control their human victim, showing her what might

happen to her, or her animals, if she leaves. As a result, some 48% of battered women are afraid to leave home for fear of their animals' welfare. Of course, if she refuses to leave, or if she returns home, the violence invariably will continue. Similarly, **child sexual abuse victims** are forced to keep silent when the abuser threatens to kill their pet if they talk. Children who commit horrific acts of animal torture – and often videotape the incidents to amuse themselves when they are bored – have many reasons for taking out their aggression on animals. **Childhood cruelty to animals** is one of the diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder, and one of its earliest manifestations – often showing up in children as young as 6-1/2 years old. **Hoarding or collecting animals** is a serious mental health and public health problem with a 100% recidivism rate; the majority of animal hoarders are seniors in need of adult protective services or mental health interventions. And **dog- and cock-fighting** are huge subcultures and major crimes, particularly in inner cities. A survey in Chicago revealed that 31% of teenagers had been to a dog fight. Cock-fighting is considered a cultural norm in many Latino communities.

3. Case studies

a. Case study #1 – Animal Welfare As First Responders (The McBurrows case)

18 - Several case studies will help show how this works. This case shows how neighbors' concerns about animals' welfare makes the animal investigators the first responders. On a bitterly cold winter night, neighbors called police in Upper Dublin Township, Penna., to report a Great Dane freezing in an outdoor cage. Inside the house, police found the body of a 4-year-old boy who had been beaten to death for accidentally looking at someone going to the bathroom. The perpetrator, Rev. Javan McBurrows, and his wife fled the jurisdiction and were eventually apprehended in Atlanta. The investigation revealed that 6 of the 7 family and foster children in the household had been beaten at various times. Investigation also revealed that Rev. McBurrows had been convicted four years previously of domestic violence, and eight years previously of cruelty to animals. However, none of the agencies in Montgomery County, Penna. had interfaced with each other. After a lengthy court proceeding, Rev. McBurrows was sentenced to 22 years for felony child abuse and manslaughter.

b. Case study #2: There's More than One Way to Get Rid of a Lowlife

19 - A similar case from Cherokee County, Georgia, demonstrates how an initial animal abuse investigation led to other charges. A girl called the sheriff's office to report that her father had stomped her puppy to death. The investigation led to additional charges of child abuse and domestic violence being filed.

c. Case study #3: The Ruotolo case (Philadelphia, PA)

20- A case from Philadelphia vividly demonstrates how the threat of harm to pets keeps women trapped in abusive relationships. Sandra Ruotolo had been battered for 13 years. One night, her husband not only

whipped her with a vacuum cleaner cord but also punched one of her dogs. He threatened to slit the dogs' throats in front of her if she left. Finally, she had had enough. Later that night, as her husband slept, she loaded a .38 caliber pistol and pointed it at herself. A moment away from suicide, however, she looked at one of her dogs and realized that if she killed herself there would be no one to look after them. Instead, she walked into her husband's bedroom and shot him. She received a sentence of 10-to-20 years for third-degree murder.

d. Case study #4: The Davis case (East Toledo, OH)

21 - Another case in which a pet was killed to control a domestic violence victim occurred in East Toledo, Ohio, where a woman, who was seeking a divorce, came home from work. Her husband told her, "Your dinner's ready." She went into the kitchen to find he had baked her cat at 500 degrees. The husband was charged with animal cruelty and domestic violence offenses. The prosecutor commented, "Just when you think they've found every way possible to manipulate someone, somebody comes up with something new."

e. Case study #5: Stalking -- the Chevy case (St. Paul, MN)

22 - Sometimes these links show up in cases of stalking. This Minnesota teenager refused the advances of an older man who was pursuing her. On Valentine's Day, she awoke to find a gift box on her porch; inside, she found the severed head of her beloved dog.

4. History of the Connections – The 1970s Triad

23 - Although the concept that children who harm animals grow up to be antisocial has been part of conventional wisdom for centuries, the scientific study of these connections is relatively recent. The first research in the 1970s found that many criminals had early childhood histories that included a "triad" of marker behaviors: arson, bedwetting, and animal abuse.

5. History of the Connections – The 1980s Rogues Gallery

24 - In the 1980's, we began to find that many of the most notorious serious killers got their start by torturing animals. Ongoing research in the 1990s and 2000s confirmed the same pattern. The phenomenon is not a direct cause-and-effect where harming animals always leads to human violence, but rather a "tangled web" of violent activities in which victims at any time can be human or animal. All too often, families or law enforcement officers dismiss cases of juvenile cruelty to animals as "boys will be boys" or "it was only a squirrel." Psychologists working with abusive juveniles are quick to note that not every child who harms animals will become a psychopath; however, any child who does show an unusual fascination with hurting animals requires psychological intervention.

6. History of the Connections – The 1990s School Yard Shooters

25 - This was vividly demonstrated in the 1990s, when researchers discovered that half of the schoolyard shooters were also torturing and killing animals. Luke Woodham, of Pearl, Mississippi, who started what became a string of school shootings, wrote in gory graphic detail in his journal about how setting his dog, “Sparkle,” on fire was a “thing of beauty.”

Please continue on to Part 2: Defining and Identifying Animal Cruelty, Abuse and Neglect