

GUIDELINES

In Wisconsin, veterinarians are legally required under Wis. Stat. § 173.12 to report when there is reason to believe that an animal has been in a fight in violation of Wisconsin's criminal animal fighting statute, Wis. Stat. § 951.08.

The AVMA policy position regarding a veterinarian's duty to report animal abuse and neglect is as follows:

The AVMA recognizes that veterinarians may observe cases of animal abuse or neglect as defined by federal or state laws, or local ordinances. The AVMA considers it the responsibility of the veterinarian to report such cases to appropriate authorities, whether or not reporting is mandated by law. Disclosure of abuse is necessary to protect the health and welfare of animals and people. Veterinarians should be aware that accurate record keeping and documentation of these cases are essential. The AVMA considers it the responsibility of the veterinarian to educate clients regarding humane care and treatment of animals.

Reports can be made to your local law enforcement or humane officer.



MORE INFORMATION

For more information and additional resources — including relevant articles, local laws, and who to contact if you suspect domestic abuse or animal abuse — visit our website at:

saavprogram.org/vet

Sheltering Animals of Abuse Victims is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending the cycle of abuse within families. Since 2001, SAAV has been playing a unique role in this fight by recognizing the importance of animals as vital family members and arranging for their safe harbor at a time of critical need — when a domestic abuse victim seeks refuge from an abuser. For more information about our work, visit www.saavprogram.org.



CONNECTING

animal
abuse

domestic
violence

Resource Guide for VETERINARIANS

Understanding the connection between **animal abuse** and **domestic violence**, and what you need to know.

THE CONNECTION

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A veterinarian who suspects an animal has been abused needs to be aware that **animal abuse in a home is a strong indicator that physical abuse of an intimate partner and/or child is also happening** in that home. Abusers often use the threat of, or actual harm to, an animal to control a victim of domestic violence.

Many victims of domestic violence will not leave their abuser for fear of what might happen to their pets.



WARNING SIGNS

A common indicator that an animal abuser is also physically abusing an intimate partner or child is the client's fear that the abuser will find out treatment was sought for the animal. A client who is a victim of abuse may be fearful of seeking treatment for the animals.

Other RED FLAGS include:

- Clients who use the services of multiple veterinarians, or "vet shop"
- Discrepancies in names, addresses, or ownership of the animal
- Client reluctance to give a full history
- Delay in seeking medical attention



- Clients who repeatedly bring in "new" animals
- Owners who self-treat injuries to their animals
- Unexplained or "accidental" injuries that don't match the explanation given
- Behavioral cues: fearful, cowering, submissive, relief when separated from the owner

STATISTICS

- A 2012 study found that 59% of abused women delayed leaving out of fear of leaving pets behind.
- In a study of domestic violence shelters across the country, 85% of shelter directors encountered cases in which women disclosed animal abuse.
- A 2007 study found that women seeking refuge at a family violence shelter were nearly 11 times more likely to report that their partner had hurt/killed their pet.
- In a study of battered women in several northeastern states, 48% of respondents reported that animal abuse had occurred "often" during the past 12 months, and another 30% reported that the abuse occurred "almost always."

WHAT TO DO

- Become knowledgeable about domestic violence programs and resources for human and animal victims of abuse in your community;
- If domestic abuse is suspected, delicately open a dialogue with the victim/client. Provide information about local resources (or keep such information on hand in your clinic).
- As part of client information forms, ask if the client feels the pet is safe at home.
- If you have the facilities, offer to provide refuge to animals affected by domestic abuse.
- Consider providing pro bono veterinary services to animals affected by abuse.

This brochure is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. For more information about the connection between animal abuse and domestic violence and what you can do, visit www.saavprogram.org/vet