

ACCES for Pet Health

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Animal Cruelty: I know it when I see it

By Dr. Jean Maixner and Christina Ryan

Animal cruelty is an act against society and animal health which results in animal suffering. Frequently, it is also a harbinger for heinous societal offenses: It is common for serial killer initiate their acts by first torturing and killing animals. Animal abuse that occurs in the home is often a sign that there is also spousal and child abuse (2) .

How do you know it's animal cruelty?

Blatant cruelty is easy to spot. An angry boyfriend throwing his girlfriend's cat in a hot over or an angry spouse feeding the family dog rat bait are easily recognized acts of animal cruelty and should be reported. We should never ignore obvious cruel acts. The acts that are gray or uncertain should be discussed with local animal agencies to determine if they need further investigation.

However, here are some tips to help you determine if an animal is being abused (1):

- Does the animal have regular access to food, water and shelter?
- Is the area clear of feces, broken glass or other objects that may do harm or cause illness?
- Does the animal have open wounds or other injuries that have not been treated?
- Does the animal have signs of an illness that has not been treated? (Examples include heavy discharge from eyes or nose, rash or bumpy skin, and missing hair.)
- Have you witnessed someone kicking, beating or otherwise harming the animal?
- Is the animal's coat extremely matted or his nails severely overgrown?
- Does the animal appear overly aggressive or timid?

Reporting Animal Abuse

We all know animal cruelty is wrong and that we should report it. But many people hesitate when it comes to contacting the authorities. Why?

- 1)We're not sure if the case is a cruelty situation (see above).
- 2)We recognize cruelty but don't want to get involved because it may inconvenience us, or we may have to take time to testify in court. However, the rare time one would have to testify would be greatly offset by the positive effect testifying would have on families, pets and society.
- 3)We're worried about liability and repercussions. Many people are frightened the person they report will come back to threaten or injure them in some way. But you can report crimes anonymously and turn the case over to authorities who can gather evidence and prosecute the offender
- 4)We don't have an efficient and clear method by which we can report. It is true that many areas do not have clear guidelines for reporting cruelty cases. However, many local rescue groups can be a bridge between the case and the authorities.
- 5)We feel it won't make a difference. Edmund Burke wrote: "All it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." Although Washington state lags behind other states in having statues that address the reporting of cruelty acts (3), this should not prevent any of us from reporting blatantly cruel acts. By reporting the offender, he or she will be identified and society can address him/her and make our pets, families and society a safer place.

By committing ourselves to be on the lookout for animal cruelty, we may be saving more than one life and doing society a favor by putting those who harm animals-and possibly other people-in jail.

What do you do?

The Progressive Animal Welfare Society PAWS(<http://www.paws.org/>) of Washington has this advice for people who suspect animal abuse is taking place: "If you witness or suspect animal cruelty, abuse or neglect, you should contact animal control immediately. Call 911 if you are witnessing cruelty at the moment." Click here for a list of animal control phone numbers for Western Washington. <http://www.paws.org/other-shelters.html#AnimalControlPhoneNumbers>. You can also educate yourself about how to keep your own pets

safe and healthy to prevent any inadvertent cruelty. There are also many rescue and action groups that are working to have better laws and clearer statutes to define animal cruelty. They would love your help. Finally, you can work to educate your children and teach them to respect animals and other people so they grow up knowing that animal cruelty is wrong (4).

By taking a stand against cruelty, each of us will be respected and honored for the strength and compassion we show toward pets and people. It's the honorable thing to do.

Sources

- 1)How to Report Animal Cruelty by PAWS. <http://www.paws.org/report-cruelty.html>
- 2)American Humane <http://www.americanhumane.org/about-us/newsroom/fact-sheets/animal-abuse-domestic-violence.html>
- 3)Definitions of Animal Cruelty in Washington State. <http://www.seattleanimallawyer.com/definitions-of-animal-cruelty.htm>
- 4)Pet-Abuse.com http://www.pet-abuse.com/pages/prevent_abuse.php

Posted by **Christina Ryan** at September 2, 2010 10:44 a.m.

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