



# PETS AND FAMILY VIOLENCE: WHAT IS THE “LINK”?

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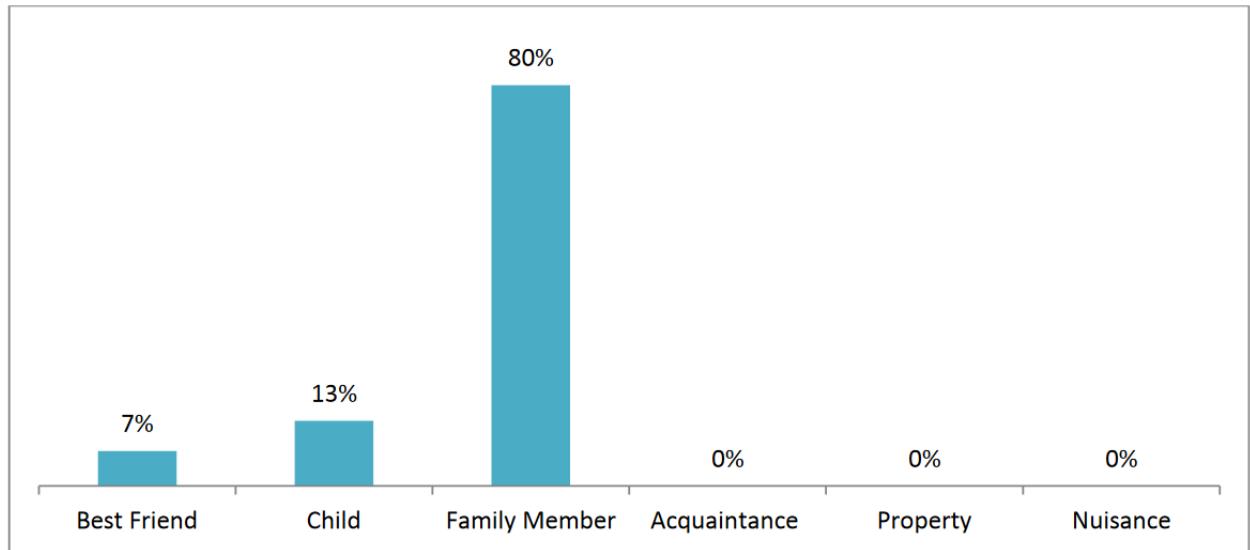
# THE CHANGING DEFINITION OF FAMILY



# “WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER PET(S) TO BE?”

## Consideration of Pet(s)

Survey respondents were asked “What do you consider your pet(s) to be?” The vast majority of respondents (80 per cent) indicated that they felt their pet was a member of the family. Thirteen per cent considered their pet their child, while seven per cent thought of them as their best friend.



**Figure 13.** What do you consider your pet(s) to be?

# The Movement to Bury Pets Alongside People

"Whole-family cemeteries" make the case that you should be allowed to rest with your dog or cat.

SONYA VATOMSKY | OCT 10, 2017 | HEALTH



**Dogs and Divorce—Is it Time For a New Approach?** Commentary by Greg Kincaid (October 2017)

Animalia

## In a first, Alaska divorce courts will now treat pets more like children

By Karin Brulliard January 24



MAR 30, 2017 @ 11:39 AM 1,504

## Estate Planning: Include Your Pets!

Forbes

## THE LAWYER'S DAILY

Published by LexisNexis Canada

Adjudicator calls for specialized court to tackle pet ownership and custody issues

Thursday, August 24, 2017 @ 2:44 PM | By Donalee Moulton

Nova Scotia small claims court adjudicator Eric Slone is frustrated with being legally compelled to treat Fido like a Ford Focus or other four-wheeled vehicle.

### ONTARIO DIVORCE FAMILYLLB

Divorce Support

#### Who Gets to Keep Fluffy?

by familyllb on September 19, 2011

Who Gets to Keep Fluffy?

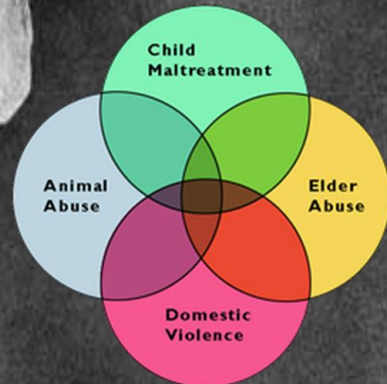
The details surrounding separation and divorce are always difficult: there must be decisions made on who gets the custody of any children, how any treasured family mementos must be divided, and how everyday items should be split evenly and fairly between the separating partners.

# WHAT IS “THE LINK”?

**“WHEN ANIMALS ARE ABUSED,  
PEOPLE ARE AT RISK.**

**WHEN PEOPLE ARE ABUSED,  
ANIMALS ARE AT RISK.”**

**(Phil Arkow,  
The National Link Coalition)**



# PETS AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



**By abusing animals, perpetrators are able to “demonstrate their power... teach submission, isolate a woman from a network of support... express rage at self-determined action by women and children... perpetuate the context of terror... launch a pre-emptive strike against a woman leaving... punish and terrorize by stalking and executing an animal... force her to be involved in the abuse... confirm their power.”**

**(Carol J. Adams, “Women-battering and harm to animals,” 1995)**

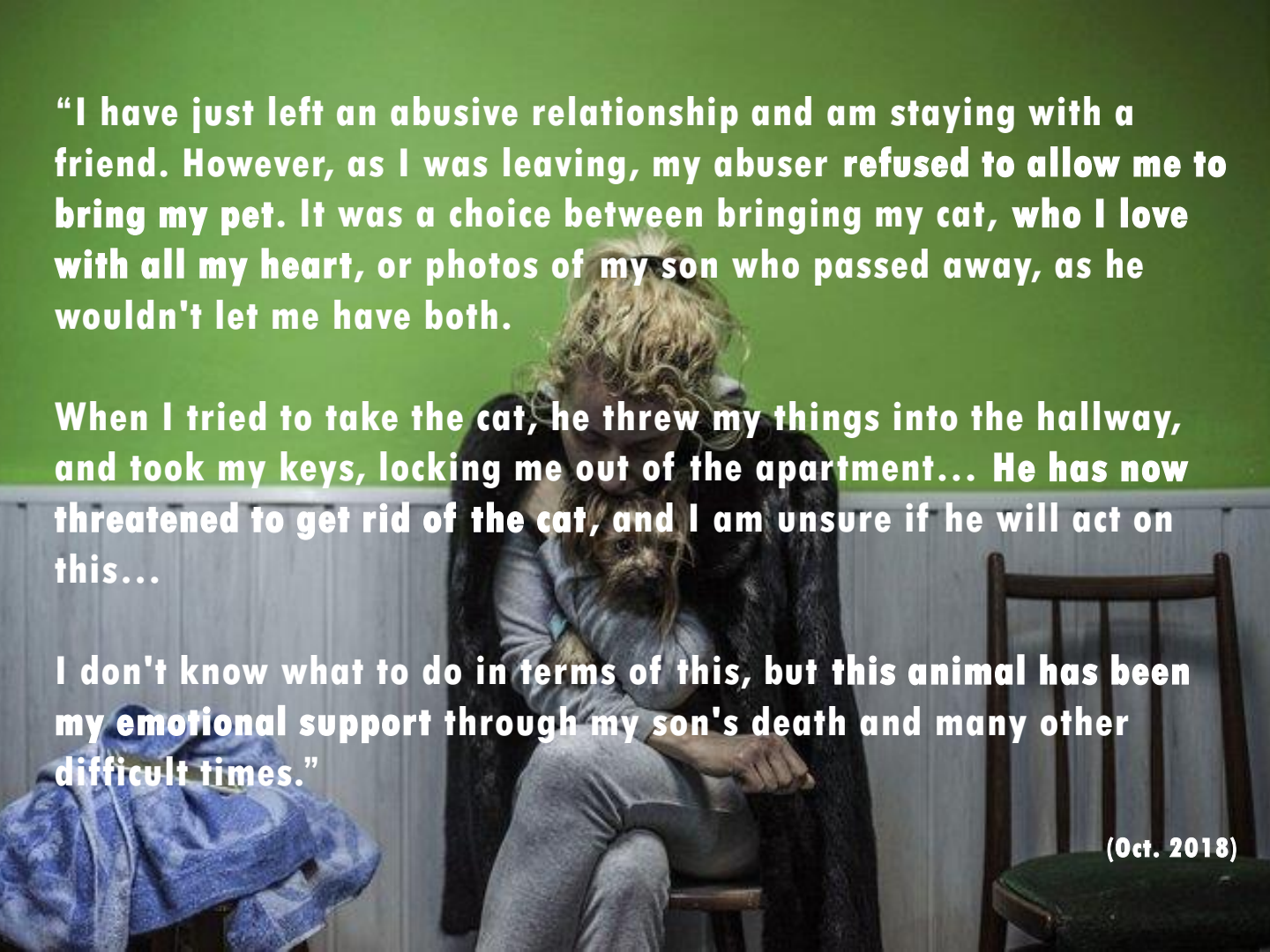


**“I have just left an abusive relationship and am staying with a friend. However, as I was leaving, my abuser refused to allow me to bring my pet. It was a choice between bringing my cat, who I love with all my heart, or photos of my son who passed away, as he wouldn't let me have both.**

**When I tried to take the cat, he threw my things into the hallway, and took my keys, locking me out of the apartment... He has now threatened to get rid of the cat, and I am unsure if he will act on this...**

**I don't know what to do in terms of this, but this animal has been my emotional support through my son's death and many other difficult times.”**

**(Oct. 2018)**



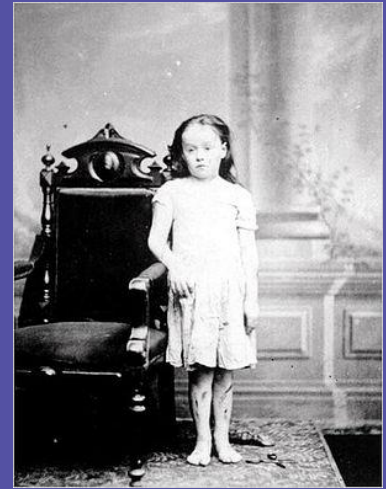


# PETS AND CHILD ABUSE

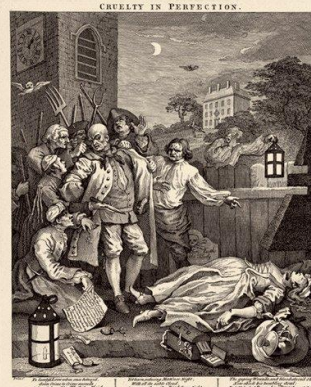
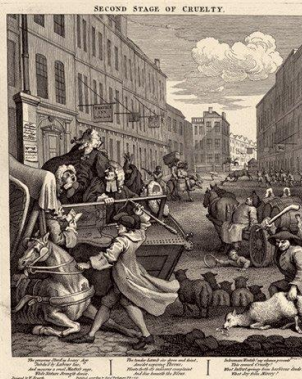
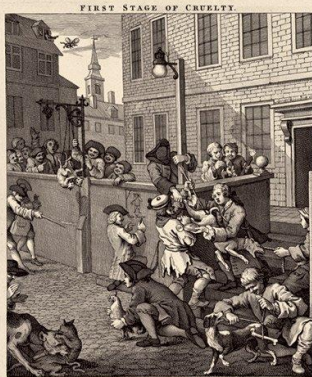


# A COMMON HISTORY

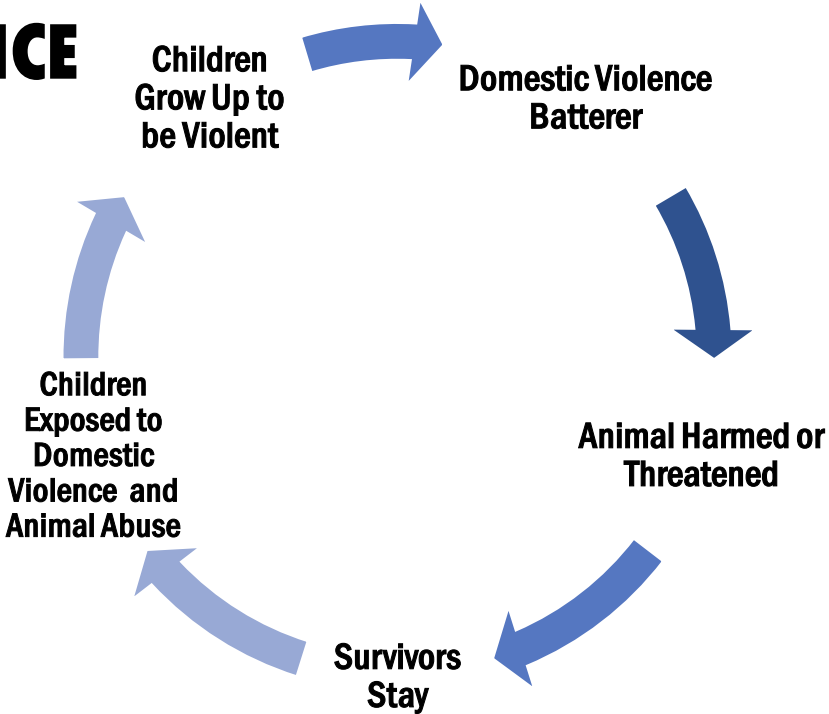
Mary Ellen McCormack,  
1874



*The Four Stages of Cruelty*, William Hogarth, 1751 (England)



# THE INTER-GENERATIONAL CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



NATIONAL LINK COALITION  
*Working together to stop violence against people and animals*

# ANIMAL ABUSE AND CHILD ABUSE

- Cruelty to animals is one of the earliest symptoms of conduct disorder, showing up at the age of 6-1/2. (*Frick et al., 1993*)
- Children who abuse animals are 2-3 times more likely to have been abused themselves. (*Lee-Kelland & Finlay, 2018*)
- Sexually abused children are 5 times more likely to abuse animals (*Ascione et al., 2003*)
- Childhood witnessing of animal cruelty results in significantly more risk of adolescent or adult interpersonal violence. (*DeGue & DeLillo, 2009*)
- 62-76% of animal abuse in the home occurs in the presence of children (*Faver & Strand, 2003*)

# ANIMAL ABUSE AS AN “ACE”

Barbara Boat, National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse (2014):

“If witnessing intimate partner violence and experiencing other forms of violence and abuse is potentially toxic to the health of the child’s brain, the costs to the child may be **even greater** when violence toward a family pet is added.”

From National Link Coalition (U.S.A.):

“Treat childhood exposure to animal abuse as an Adverse Childhood Experience that creates toxic stress, harms the child’s developing brain architecture, **desensitizes the child to violence**, and leads to long-term hyper-responsiveness to perceived threats and lifelong health concerns.”

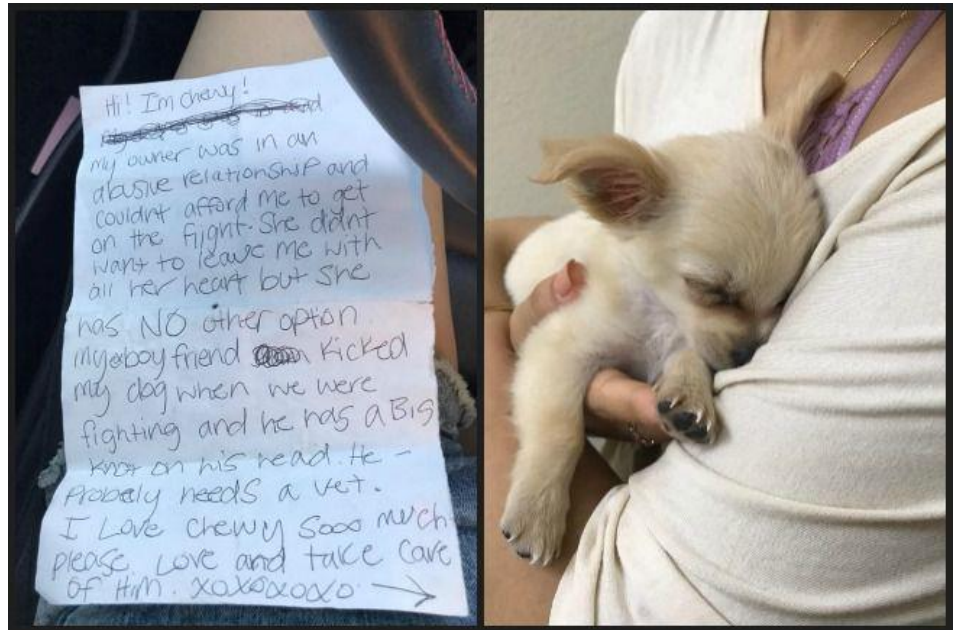


## **Link T.O.'s SafePet Program**

# THE NEED

“Children can be very worried when a pet is left behind, adding to their fears that they, too, may be abandoned.”

- Barbara Boat



# THREE MODELS

## 1. Co-Sheltering

- In rooms
- Indoor/Outdoor Kennels
- Heated Garage or Basement
- **Eg.** Bethesda House (Durham), NYWS (Toronto)

## 2. Boarding

- At veterinarians
- At kennels or groomers
- May be useful for rural areas (to maintain distance, etc.)

## 3. Fostering

- Short-term and long-term options
- **Eg.** Link T.O.'s SafePet Program; SafePet Ottawa



# Link T.O.'s SafePet Program



Survivor

Vet  rina  n

Foster  Home 

## 1. Ask about animal abuse. Start the conversation.

**Include questions** about the presence, welfare, and turnover of pets in intakes, referrals, assessments, and treatment plans.

Children are more likely to open up about their animals than about themselves.

Showing concern for their pets builds rapport and trust and opens a window into the child's world.

# BEST PRACTICES

*“Do you — or have you ever had — a favorite or special pet?”*

*“Was there ever a time when you were upset and your pet was a source of comfort to you?”*

*“Do you — or did you — ever worry about bad things happening to your pet?”*

*“How is your pet taught to be good?”*

*And then, “Tell me about that.”*

## 2. Look for signs of animal abuse.

Check for the presence of dangerous and/or abused animals when conducting **home visits**.

Ask to see family pets. Look at their condition: Are they matted? Bruised? Limping? Fearful?

Evidence of cruelty can be used as evidence.



# BEST PRACTICES

**85% of abused women with both children and animals reported that the children witnessed the threat or harm to the animal. In 50% of those cases, it was the child's own pet that was threatened or harmed.**

Alberta SPCA, 2012



### 3. Know where to report *all* forms of violence/abuse.

Establish lines of communication with local animal protection agencies.

Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act -  
January 1, 2020

PROTECT OUR  
ANIMALS

When an animal needs help, call:

**1-833-9-ANIMAL**  
(264625)



[ontario.ca/animalwelfare](http://ontario.ca/animalwelfare)



# BEST PRACTICES



[www.linktoronto.org](http://www.linktoronto.org)

Having women and children witness these acts [of animal cruelty] serves to instill emotional damage, hold the entire family hostage, and extract revenge.

(Ascione, 2014)

## 4. Respect the human-animal bond.

Understand that victims of abuse may be lying in order to protect themselves and/or their pets – and they may feel ashamed about this.

Be gentle but persistent. If clients know you take animal cruelty seriously, they may open up about it.

## 5. Spread the word!

Talk to colleagues about “the link”.

Include “the link” in training and educational materials.

# BEST PRACTICES

## What is “the link”?



# RESOURCES



- Boat, B.W. (2014). “Connections among adverse childhood experiences, exposure to animal cruelty and toxic stress: What do professionals need to consider.” [Available online]
- Arkow, Phil. (2015) “A Link Across the Lifespan: Animal Abuse as a Marker for Traumatic Experiences in Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse”
- **National Link Coalition website (U.S.A.)**

# QUESTIONS?



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*Thank you!*