

# When Children Witness Animal Abuse

## AN ASSESSMENT GUIDE FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROFESSIONALS

When there is knowledge that a child has witnessed animal abuse, the following information should be obtained from the child or their caretaker.

1. What is the relationship of the child to the abuser? If it was a family member, do a thorough assessment of other abuse that may be occurring in the family and take appropriate action:

---

---

2. The relationship of the child to the animal:

---

3. The type and severity of the abuse and who was involved:

---

---

4. How many times it occurred:

---

5. The victim(s)' response to the abuse, as well as the response of the perpetrator(s) and witnesses:

---

---

6. The child's role in witnessing animal cruelty—active or passive, encouraging or discouraging, coerced (real or perceived):

---

---

7. Ask the child, “what bothers you the most about what happened?”:

---

---

8. Assess the child’s immediate and long-term emotional response to being a witness:

a. Does the child exhibit any of the following?

- Anxiety
- Nightmares
- Difficulty sleeping
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty eating
- Problems concentrating
- Disorganized or agitated behavior
- Repetitive play with themes or aspects of trauma

b. Does the child report feeling any of the following?

- Shame
- Guilt
- Remorse

c. Does the child display either of the following?

- Restricted range of affect
- Feelings of detachment or numbness

9. Is the child fearful of reprisal?

---

---

10. Did the child speak about the abuse to anyone?

---

---

11. If so, how did that person respond?

---

---

*Sources: Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences, PhD; AniCare Child: An Approach for the Assessment and Treatment of Childhood Animal Abuse, by Mary Lou Randour, PhD, Susan Krinsk, LMHC, and Joanne Wolf, MA.*