

Signs of Domestic Violence

GUIDELINES FOR ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS

Whether you are conducting a home visit, responding to an animal control report, or treating an animal in your clinic, be aware that you may encounter pet owners whose own well-being is at risk. While your professional focus is on the animals, you may also be uniquely positioned to notice warning signs of domestic violence.* You do not necessarily need to enter a home to detect such signs. They may show up in conversation, appearance, behavior, or even how an animal is being cared for. If abuse is evident, or something you observe raises concerns regarding an individual's well-being, consider discreetly asking whether they fear for their safety (e.g., "Are you concerned about your safety or that of your pet?") and offering them information on local domestic violence resources and the number for the **National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-799-7233)**. Reporting your concerns to the proper authorities might also be warranted.

Family Dynamic and Behavioral Signs

- Discomfort or fear in the presence of certain people
- Hesitancy or refusal to communicate in the presence of certain people
- Controlling behavior by an accompanying individual (e.g., pointedly answers questions for the person and/or speaks over them)
- Comments about fearing or receiving physical abuse or threats from a certain individual
- References to financial resources being withheld or controlled by others

Physical Signs of Abuse

- Bruising, welts, or bite marks
- Multiple injuries in various stages of healing (for people or animals)
- Injuries to both sides of the body (accidental injuries are more likely to be one-sided)
- Resistance to being touched

- Signs of malnutrition or dehydration (fatigue, confusion, hollowed appearance, etc.)
- Poor hygiene (body odor, soiled or stained clothing, etc.)
- Lack of proper pet care (malnourished, untreated injuries, etc.)
- Inappropriate clothing for the weather (e.g., no shoes or coat in winter)

Living Environment

- Rigid or excessive household rules and housekeeping standards
- Unsafe or unsanitary living conditions (for people or animals)
- Lack of functional utilities (no electricity, water, or heat)
- Shortage of food and basic necessities in the home (for people or animals)
- Lack of adult presence or supervision for dependent individuals
- Isolation/lack of access to outside support

Notes:

*NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of the signs of domestic violence; rather, it is intended to highlight the signs animal welfare professionals might be most likely to encounter in the typical course of their work.