



# PETS AND FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS TOOLKIT

A TOOLKIT TO ASSIST FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS IN PROVIDING INCLUSIVE SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS WITH PETS

Prepared by the Family Justice Center Alliance, the National Link Coalition, and RedRover



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



## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The Pets and Family Justice Centers Toolkit was developed in partnership with The National Link Coalition (The Link) and RedRover in response to requests from Family Justice Center directors and at the suggestion of survivors. As Family Justice Centers (FJC) expand their resources, they should understand how best to serve survivors with pets to eliminate this common barrier to entry for services. This toolkit aims to serve as a foundation for Family Justice Centers in the development of processes for serving those survivors with pets.

### OBJECTIVE

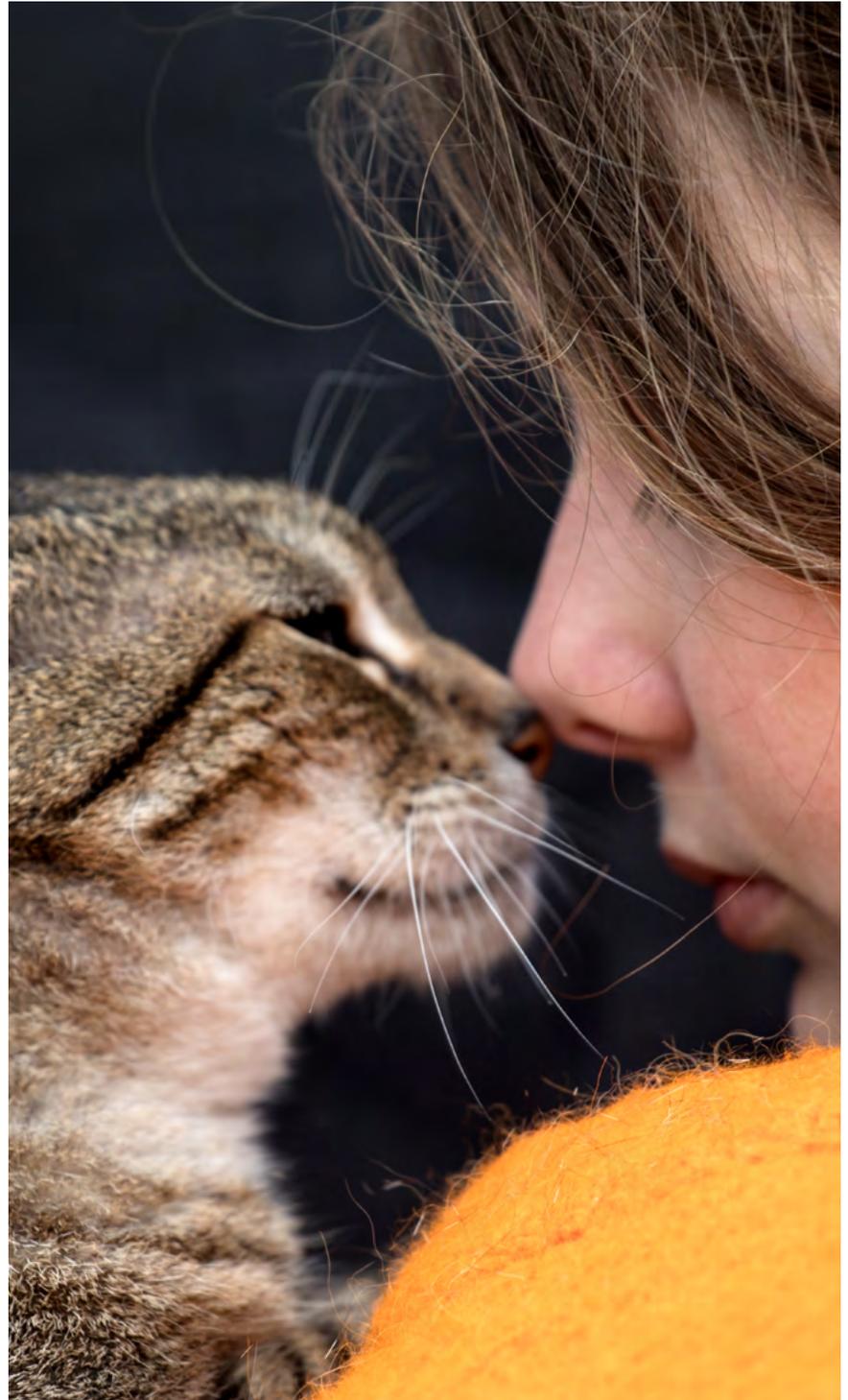
To devise a recommended Family Justice Center protocol that effectively systematizes assistance for survivors with pets:

- incorporating clients' pets in their initial intake process and assessing for any risks or dangers to the pets;
- helping clients strategize a pet-inclusive plan for safety; and
- knowing how to identify and reach out to local resources that can help with caring for pets.

If there is domestic violence in a home, the pets are at risk for violence and abuse. The greater the level of control exercised by the abuser, the more likely pets are to be injured or killed.

### HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This Toolkit should be used by Family Justice Center staff (directors, advocates, partners) to assist in the development of a Pet Protocol as part of the client intake process. It includes background information on the issue, a sample intake questionnaire, strategies for before and after a client wants to leave an abusive partner, how to address the concerns of children involved, and advice from RedRover on how to become a pet-inclusive Family Justice Center.



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## CHAPTER ONE

# ANIMAL ABUSE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS

## INTRODUCTION

Animal abuse within the context of domestic violence is now widely recognized as a significant barrier to safety and stability for survivors. Pets are more than companions; they are integral members of the family, providing emotional support and comfort during times of crisis. Abusers frequently manipulate these deep bonds by threatening, injuring, or even killing animals as a means of control, forcing many survivors to delay leaving. For children, witnessing violence against beloved animals can create lasting trauma, intensify feelings of fear, and contribute to the perpetuation of violence.

Family Justice Centers (FJCs), with their coordinated, survivor-focused model, are uniquely equipped to confront this intersection of domestic violence and animal cruelty. This Toolkit has been designed to help FJCs build comprehensive, pet-inclusive responses that reduce barriers to safety and healing. This chapter introduces strategies for incorporating questions about pets into the intake process, developing safety plans that address the needs of both survivors and their animals, and fostering partnerships with community organizations that can provide support and sheltering options. It also examines the evolution of co-sheltering programs and highlights the risks and prevalence of animal abuse in abusive households. By acknowledging the central role pets play in survivors' decision-making, FJCs can more effectively protect every vulnerable member of the family and strengthen their overall capacity to deliver compassionate, holistic services.

In the early 1990s domestic violence shelters began confronting a challenge that had not previously been considered: many survivors were arriving at shelters with dogs, cats, and other companion animals with which they had powerful emotional attachments.

Many of these animals had also been victimized and/or threatened by abusers to coerce survivors and their children into staying at home, lest the abuser further harm or even kill the animals should she\* attempt to escape. Shelters, unequipped to co-house the animal companions, were forced to turn many survivors away; often, survivors chose to live in their automobiles with their pets rather than return to the abuser's control.

The domestic violence community responded by collaborating with local and national animal welfare organizations to create partnerships and procedures for either off-site foster care or on-site co-sheltering of survivors' beloved pets. Today, more than 300 domestic violence shelters in the United States co-house companion animals; hundreds of others have collaborative programs with local animal shelters, veterinarians, boarding kennels, foster families, and other pet care options.

This growing need to address survivors with companion animals is now expanding to the Family Justice Center movement. This Toolkit is designed to provide Family Justice Centers with workable strategies, innovative ideas, and practical resources to help craft individualized pet-inclusive programs that meet both the capabilities of the FJC and the needs of the clients served. We emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all model for all Family Justice Centers. But our wish is that the facts and ideas presented here will inspire you to take the steps necessary to address the needs of all the victims of family violence—including animals.

*\* Throughout this Toolkit, we will use "woman", "her" and "she" in a generic sense to represent the survivors of intimate partner violence. We recognize that women can abuse men, and that intimate partner violence occurs in same-sex relationships, but the dynamic of men abusing women is so pervasive that we will use this generalization as a matter of convenience.*

## WHY IS ANIMAL ABUSE, AND YOUR CLIENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR PETS, IMPORTANT?

When Harbor House of Central Florida created a co-housing program for the pets of survivors in the Orlando area, they promoted a photo of a child and a dog with the profound and simple question: "Why would we ask her to leave either of her babies behind?"



Why would we ask her to leave either of her babies behind?

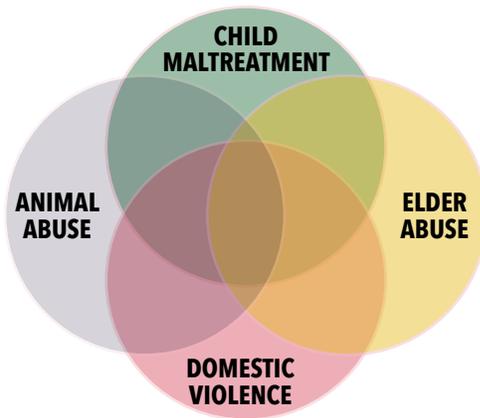
The simple truth is that many abused women and their children will not leave their abusers unless their pets' safety and well-being can be guaranteed as well. The statistics behind this reality are compelling.

## THE LINKS BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ANIMAL ABUSE SOURCE: THE NATIONAL LINK COALITION

- 99% of pet owners consider their animals to be close companions or members of the family.
- Pets are overwhelmingly found in homes with children: 2/3 of homes with children under age 6, and 3/4 of homes with children over age 6, have pets. A child in the U.S. today is more likely to grow up with a pet than with a live-at-home father.
- The woman in the household is the animals' caretaker in more than 80% of homes with pets.
- The responsibilities of caring for pets (and, in rural areas, farm animals and livestock)—and the emotional attachments involved with nurturing and caring for them—make animals "soft targets," "collateral damage," and a convenient point of vulnerability that abusers will exploit to coerce and control their human victims. By threatening, harming or killing the animals, abusers send not-so-silent signals of power and control. The message persists that additional human and/or animal victims could be next if they try to escape. *See Figure 3 for ways in which animals are victimized in domestic violence settings.*
- Crisis line officials in Nashville, Tenn. identified threats to mutilate or kill pets, access to weapons, and threats of suicide as the 3 greatest risks of a woman being killed by her abuser.
- First responders face a great risk of death in domestic violence incidents; that risk doubles when animal cruelty co-occurs.
- 71% of pet-owning women in Utah domestic violence shelters reported their husband or boyfriend killed, hurt or threatened the animals; 32% reported their children had hurt or killed animals.
- Researchers identified the 4 greatest risk factors for someone becoming a domestic violence abuser: (1) a low level of education; (2) mental health issues; (3) substance abuse; and (4) a history of actual or threatened animal abuse.
- Studies in Alberta and Colorado reported that children who have been exposed to domestic violence are 3 times more likely to be cruel to animals than children not in domestic violent situations. These children are 5 times more likely to have "severe" problems and 3 times more likely to be "struggling."
- 30% of Chicago dog-fighters and individuals arrested for animal cruelty have histories of domestic violence.
- A survey of 2,500 callers to the National Domestic Violence Hotline reported that:
  - 97% said that keeping their pets with them was an important factor in deciding whether to seek safety;
  - 50% would not leave if they could not take their pets with them;
  - 48% feared the abuser would kill or harm the pets;
  - 30% said their children had witnessed or been aware of the harm or threat to animals.
- When animal cruelty co-occurs with domestic violence, the intimate partner violence is more deadly and hands-on. Researchers in Indianapolis found:
  - While it often takes 7 or 8 prior incidents before a survivor can finally escape, when animal cruelty co-occurs, there may be as many as 50 prior incidents before a survivor escapes;
  - 76% of survivors of co-occurring domestic and animal abuse had been strangled;
  - 26% had been forced to have sex with the abuser;
  - 80% feared they would be killed.

Pets are significant sources of companionship and emotional support through times of crisis not only for abused women, but also for children who come to Family Justice Centers (See Chapter 5). Children are especially drawn to animals in general—and their pets in particular—and often confide their secrets, fears and angers to their pets; abused children are more likely to do this. A pet may be a child’s only friend in a chaotic home. Pets often act as buffers against the chaos and abuse swirling around them. Bonds broken with companion animals—including an abuser killing or taking away a beloved pet—can reverberate and resonate across the child’s lifespan.

The connections between animal cruelty, abuse and neglect and other forms of family violence—domestic violence, child maltreatment and elder abuse—are articulated by the National Link Coalition and other organizations in what is called “The Link.” The basic premise behind The Link is that these four forms of abuse rarely occur in isolation but frequently overlap through polyvictimization.



However, professionals in social services, law enforcement, medical and court systems have rarely recognized animal abuse as one of these four forms. Animal abuse is often the first link in the chain of family violence. By responding to animal abuse as a potential sentinel indicator or predictor of other crimes, Family Justice Centers and other community agencies can be more effective. Comprehensive initiatives to prevent, prosecute and punish animal cruelty not only benefit “Man’s Best Friend” —they also benefit “Man,” and they especially benefit “Woman.” The National Link Coalition’s motto is simple:

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

Asking Family Justice Center clients about any concerns they may have about their animals’ safety serves several key purposes:

- Pets can be vital members of clients’ emotional support systems.
- Clients in crisis or under extreme stress may be unwilling or unable to clearly articulate their situation. They may feel safer talking about their pets’ welfare than about their own traumas. Asking about pets starts a comforting dialogue that builds immediate rapport and trust.
- This dialogue can then lead more easily into a discussion of their own concerns and help identify the client’s risk factors and sources of resilience. Because animals slip under the radar of human defense mechanisms, asking questions about their pets and their welfare may help open a window into the person’s or family’s underlying issues.
- This dialogue not only helps you solve clients’ immediate and long-term concerns but also allows for earlier intervention that protects not only the clients but also all vulnerable members of her family.

*See Chapter 2 for a sample Pet-Inclusive Assessment of Clients’ Needs.*

In short, animal abuse is a crime, and it often indicates or predicts other crimes. Abusers target family pets to normalize a culture of violence, to hold the rest of the family hostage, and to get revenge. They may even target the pets of family members and friends who aid any escape attempts. They may be jealous of their partner being more emotionally attached to the animals than to them.

The “canary in the coal mine” of an abusive home may literally be an abused bird or other animal. By responding to the injury or death of that animal, we can potentially save many other pets and people. We can no longer excuse animal abuse or consider it an act that occurs in isolation from other power-and-control dynamics of family violence. Recognizing animal abuse as an indicator that something is wrong in the household—and responding accordingly—may be the first step in stopping the cycle of violence.

## HOW MIGHT FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS BECOME AWARE OF, AND INVOLVED IN, ISSUES WITH CLIENTS' ANIMALS?

Family Justice Centers often become aware of concerns related to clients' animals during **intake, safety planning, or direct service conversations**, especially when trust has been established and survivors feel safe disclosing the full scope of their situation. Because abuse frequently extends beyond the individual to include pets and animals, questions about pets should be **intentionally integrated into survivor-centered assessments**.

FJs that include **animal welfare questions during intake**, such as "Do you have pets or animals you're concerned about?" or "Have threats to animals been part of the abuse?," are more likely to identify cases where harm to or fear for animals is present. In many cases, survivors may **delay leaving an abusive situation out of concern for a pet's safety**, and the absence of safe sheltering options for animals can become a major barrier to escape.

Centers may also become involved through **partnerships with local animal shelters, humane societies, or veterinary networks**. In jurisdictions where cross-reporting laws exist, **coordinated referrals** between animal control and domestic violence services can further strengthen the safety net for both survivors and their pets. Additionally, some FJs partner with national programs like **RedRover** or **The Link** (National Link Coalition), which provide training and resources around the connection between animal abuse and interpersonal violence.



**How Animals Are Victimized in Domestic Violence:** Abusers often exploit their human victims' emotional vulnerabilities by targeting their animals. The National Link Coalition modified the "Power and Control Wheel" model of the forces inherent in domestic violence to demonstrate how pets are threatened and harmed as collateral damage.

# A PET-INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT OF CLIENTS' NEEDS

## INTRODUCTION

Chapter One outlined the powerful connection between animal abuse and domestic violence, underscoring how threats or harm to pets can trap survivors in dangerous situations and deepen trauma for both adults and children. For Family Justice Centers, recognizing this dynamic is an essential step toward building holistic, survivor-centered services. By acknowledging that pets are often targets of abuse and vital sources of comfort, FJCs can better understand the full scope of a survivor's experience and respond with interventions that prioritize safety for every member of the family - human and animal alike.

Chapter Two moves from understanding why pets matter to how FJCs can integrate this awareness into practice. A critical starting point is the intake process, where advocates can ask thoughtful, trauma-informed questions about survivors' relationships with their pets. Systematically including pet-related questions not only identifies risks but also validates survivors' concerns, builds trust, and opens the door to meaningful safety planning. This chapter provides sample intake questions, practical guidance, and strategies for tailoring assessments to the unique needs of each community. By embedding pet-inclusive assessments into daily practice, FJCs can strengthen their capacity to protect survivors, support their children, and safeguard their animals.

The Family Justice Center Alliance recommends that affiliated Centers routinely and systematically include a questionnaire about clients' pets at intake. Inquiring about the presence (or absence) of pets, the stability (or turbulence) of these animals in the home, clients' history with and attachments to animals, and whether the animals are considered friendly or dangerous can reveal critical information about the home environment and interpersonal relationships. These questions can:

- Give you more comprehensive assessments of the family and identify their risk and resilience factors;
- Validate important intra-familial relationships;
- More quickly identify abusive behaviors; and
- Address clients' animal care concerns with practical, appropriate and affordable solutions.

It doesn't matter if you are animal-friendly: if your clients have pets, it's an issue. Addressing animal needs is one more way to help people. But if you don't ask, you won't know.



The following questionnaire was developed with advice from survivors, directors of Family Justice Centers, Family Justice Center advocates, and The Link.

It is a sample from which you organization can change, and update based on the needs of your community and clients. Once your intake has identified a survivor has pets, please use the following questions to better assess their needs.

## RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS TO ASK AT INITIAL INTAKE

1. Are there any animals at home?
2. How are they cared for and who cares for them?
3. What kind are they? (Breed and weight)
4. What are their names?
5. How old are they?
6. Do you play with them?
7. Do you share secrets with them?
8. Has anyone ever hurt or threatened your pet(s)?
9. Are you worried about their welfare?
10. Are you worried about their safety?
11. Is your concern for them keeping you from leaving the abuser?
12. Have any pets ever gone missing?
13. If so, are you sad over the loss of your pet?
14. Are any of your animals certified as a service animal or an emotional support animal?
15. If so, would you care to share with us the specific medical or emotional purpose they serve for you?
16. Do any of your pets have any special medical needs or require specific equipment?
17. Do you have a veterinarian contact who is familiar with your animals?
18. Do you have an emergency contact for the animals in case we cannot contact you?



## CHAPTER THREE

# GUIDANCE FOR THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER: HELPING CLIENTS BEFORE THEY FLEE

## INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two emphasized the importance of pet-inclusive intake and assessment, highlighting how thoughtful, trauma-informed questions can uncover hidden risks, validate survivors' experiences, and build trust from the very first point of contact. Yet assessment is only the beginning. In Family Justice Centers, the next step often involves detailed safety planning.

Chapter Three focuses on practical guidance that equips FJCs to help clients protect themselves and their pets before and after they flee. By routinely asking about animals, establishing strong community partnerships, and incorporating pets into safety planning, Centers can anticipate needs and reduce barriers that might otherwise keep survivors in harm's way. This chapter also explores how FJCs can leverage local and national resources, create clear protocols, and build relationships that expand safety options for every member of the family. With preparation and collaboration, FJCs can strengthen their role as trusted lifelines—ensuring survivors, their children, and their animals are not left behind in the pursuit of safety.

## ROUTINELY ASK ABOUT ANIMALS

It's not just when the client comes to the Center's door that the engagement with animal-related issues begins; initial telephone calls, screenings, crisis line inquiries, and community outreach events should regularly include opportunities to ask whether she has any pets and if there are any concerns about the animals. The Center's website, social media pages, printed brochures and publications should routinely include information about the Center's concern for ALL victims of the violence—human and animal.

## DEVELOP LOCAL CONTACTS AND COLLABORATIONS IN ADVANCE

Establishing lines of communication in advance with community agencies more knowledgeable about animal welfare issues can save you significant time, headaches and heartaches when a client has a need concerning her animals—whether a single dog or cat, a menagerie of dozens of animals, unusual species including birds, reptiles and lizards, horses, or livestock. Animal organizations may not be aware of the Family Justice Center and your services, so an informal meeting with them can be an excellent opportunity to establish lines of communication, share informational literature, and provide cross-training to staff, advocates and volunteers.

The landscape of local animal care and control resources can be extremely complex and intimidating. Knowing your resources in advance can be of immense value when you need to make an immediate referral.



Local resources may include the following types of organizations:

## GOVERNMENT ANIMAL CONTROL SHELTERS

Governmental animal shelters exist where cities and counties establish “animal control” or “animal services” departments—with widely varying levels of capacity, law enforcement powers, sophistication, training, and resources. They may be part of the police or sheriff, health department, code enforcement, or an independent entity. Some may only handle dogs. If they have law enforcement powers, they may be able to share information with you about prior investigations at the client’s residence.

## NONPROFIT ANIMAL WELFARE SHELTERS

These may exist near your organization: a Humane Society, an SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)\*, an Animal Rescue League, or something similar. Some provide contracted services to cities or counties for humane law enforcement (animal cruelty investigations, picking up stray animals, licensing, etc.) in addition to sheltering unwanted animals and making them available for adoption. Some are “open admission” and accept all animals needing new homes; others are “no-kill” and have more limited holding capacity to avoid having to euthanize animals that are not adopted. What they all have in common is a nonprofit focus, enormous passion for protecting animals, and the ability to reach out to other more specialized organizations better equipped to handle unusual animal needs.

*\* Note: These are not affiliates of the Humane Society of the U.S. or the ASPCA; they are all independent nonprofits with their own boards of directors and widely varying levels of expertise, law enforcement powers, and animal holding capacity.*

## NON-SHELTERED ANIMAL RESCUES

Many communities have passionate animal welfare and animal rights advocates who form “animal rescue” groups—which may or may not be formally recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Lacking the overhead and responsibilities of more structured animal shelters, they function more informally in seeking to find homes for unwanted animals.

## NON-SHELTERED ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS

Many smaller towns lack a full-scale program but are required by state law to appoint an animal control officer, dog warden, humane law investigator, or similar title. They may be full- or part-time. They may or may not be required to take pre-professional training or continuing education.

## VETERINARIANS

Local veterinarians are highly trained and extremely knowledgeable but often face concerns regarding the finances of a small business and balancing the interests of their clients against those of their patients. Some may conduct pro bono or reduced-rate services to treat animals of domestic violence victims or provide temporary housing for them. Some offer mobile services. In addition to individual practitioners, [Colleges of Veterinary Medicine](#) and state and regional [Veterinary Medical Associations](#) may have resources to assist your clients. Veterinarians (two-thirds of whom are women) are slowly becoming sensitized to how domestic violence among their clients can impact their patients’ well-being. Researchers in Scotland identified veterinarians, dentists and beauticians as the three professions most likely to encounter an abused woman. You can enhance this growing awareness by introducing veterinarians to your Center’s programs and needs, asking to display Center literature in clinic lobbies, training veterinary staff to recognize signs of intimate partner violence, and assisting in developing pet-inclusive safety planning.

## BOARDING KENNELS, STABLES, AND PET GROOMERS

For-profit boarding kennels, stables and groomers may also be resources to assist your clients with temporary housing needs and animal care. Some groomers offer mobile services.

## HOW TO FIND OUT WHO'S WHO IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Several national organizations have compiled directories of local resources. Identifying these agencies in advance and establishing lines of communication will greatly help you to help your clients. These include:



### **THE NATIONAL LINK COALITION'S NATIONAL DIRECTORY OF ABUSE INVESTIGATION AGENCIES**

A state-by-state list of 6,500 counties and cities with phone numbers to call to report suspected animal abuse, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and elder abuse.



### **DOMESTICSHELTERS.ORG**

DomesticShelters.org, a program of Alliance for HOPE International, maintains a national directory of Family Justice Centers, domestic violence shelters and other programs including information about whether they offer pet options.



### **SAFE HAVENS FOR PETS**

The Animal Welfare Institute maintains a searchable national directory of programs to assist the pets of domestic violence survivors.



### **SHELTERING ANIMALS AND FAMILIES TOGETHER (SAF-T™)**

A searchable international list of domestic violence shelters that offer co-housing with pets, and a start-up manual to assist shelters in creating on-site pet housing for families fleeing violence.



### **REDROVER**

RedRover offers Safe Housing grants to help domestic violence shelters create on-site pet housing for families fleeing violence, and Safe Escape grants to help individuals with expenses in helping their pets escape family violence. Through a partnership with Greater Good Charities, they also provide resources and support to domestic violence shelters looking to welcome pets.



### **MY DOG IS MY HOME**

This national nonprofit expands service providers' programs to increase access to shelter for individuals with companion animals experiencing homelessness.



### **PETS OF THE HOMELESS**

This national nonprofit provides pet food and emergency veterinary care to pets belonging to people experiencing homelessness.



### **APARTMENTS.COM**

This national directory of apartments, condos, townhomes and houses allows searchers to identify rental properties that accept dogs and cats.



### **NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE**

The Hotline offers a searchable online directory of local assistance providers.



### **THE PET-INCLUSIVE HOUSING INITIATIVE**

The Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative, a program of Michelson Found Animals and the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute, works with housing providers, pet owners and animal welfare organizations to remove pet-restrictive barriers to individuals seeking housing opportunities.

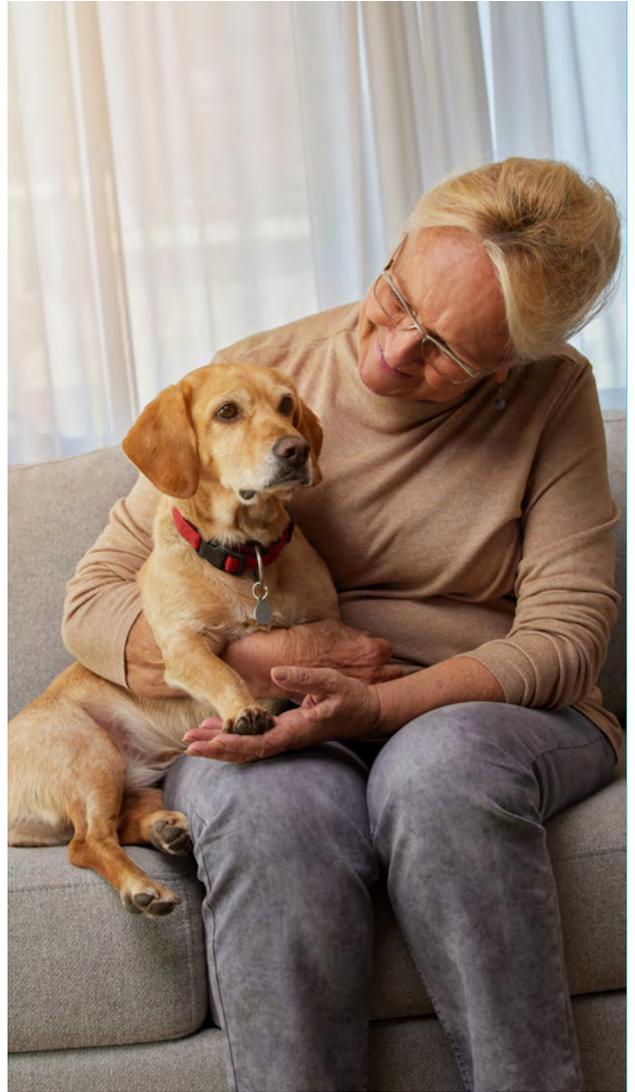


## MAKE A PET-INCLUSIVE SAFETY PLAN

Safety planning materials should routinely include lists of pet supplies and documents that should be ready-to-go at a moment's notice. Clients' action steps may include:

- Ask family, friends or co-workers if they can provide secret and temporary care for your pet(s) while you seek safety.
- Create a "go" bag with the pets' emergency supplies, such as food, bowls, collars, leashes, vaccination and other health records, microchip information, rabies/license tags, medications, grooming supplies, and favorite blanket and toys. Keep the "go" bag in a safe and secure location where your abuser is unlikely to find it.
- Create a new identification tag that does not have your home address but instead the phone number of a trusted friend.
- Make a list of specific feeding and medication schedules and instructions, and any pet behavior problems, for anyone who will be caring for your pet(s).
- A cage, dog crate or cat carrier may also be essential.
- Have photos of your pet(s).
- Make sure all vaccinations are current. Have all veterinary records changed to be in your name and ask your veterinarian to give you copies. After you leave home, be prepared to switch veterinary clinics to remove one way that you and your pet(s) can be tracked.
- Avoid posting photos or information about your pet(s) on social media.
- Know your pets' favorite hiding places to reduce time finding them. Avoid visiting your pet or taking it for a walk in public if that is a way your abuser may find you.
- If you must return home to reclaim your pet(s), ask to have a law enforcement officer accompany you.

*See Appendix A for examples of safety plans that include the animals.*



## GET ALL PET DOCUMENTATION INTO THE CLIENT'S NAME

If custody of the animals devolves into a bitter dispute, whether in a divorce settlement or other legal battle, your client's likelihood of gaining possession of the animals will be greatly enhanced if she can provide written documentation that she has been the primary caregiver. Payments for veterinary care, animal food, grooming, licenses, vaccinations, microchips, boarding, and other expenses should all be in her name to establish an ongoing pattern of responsibility.

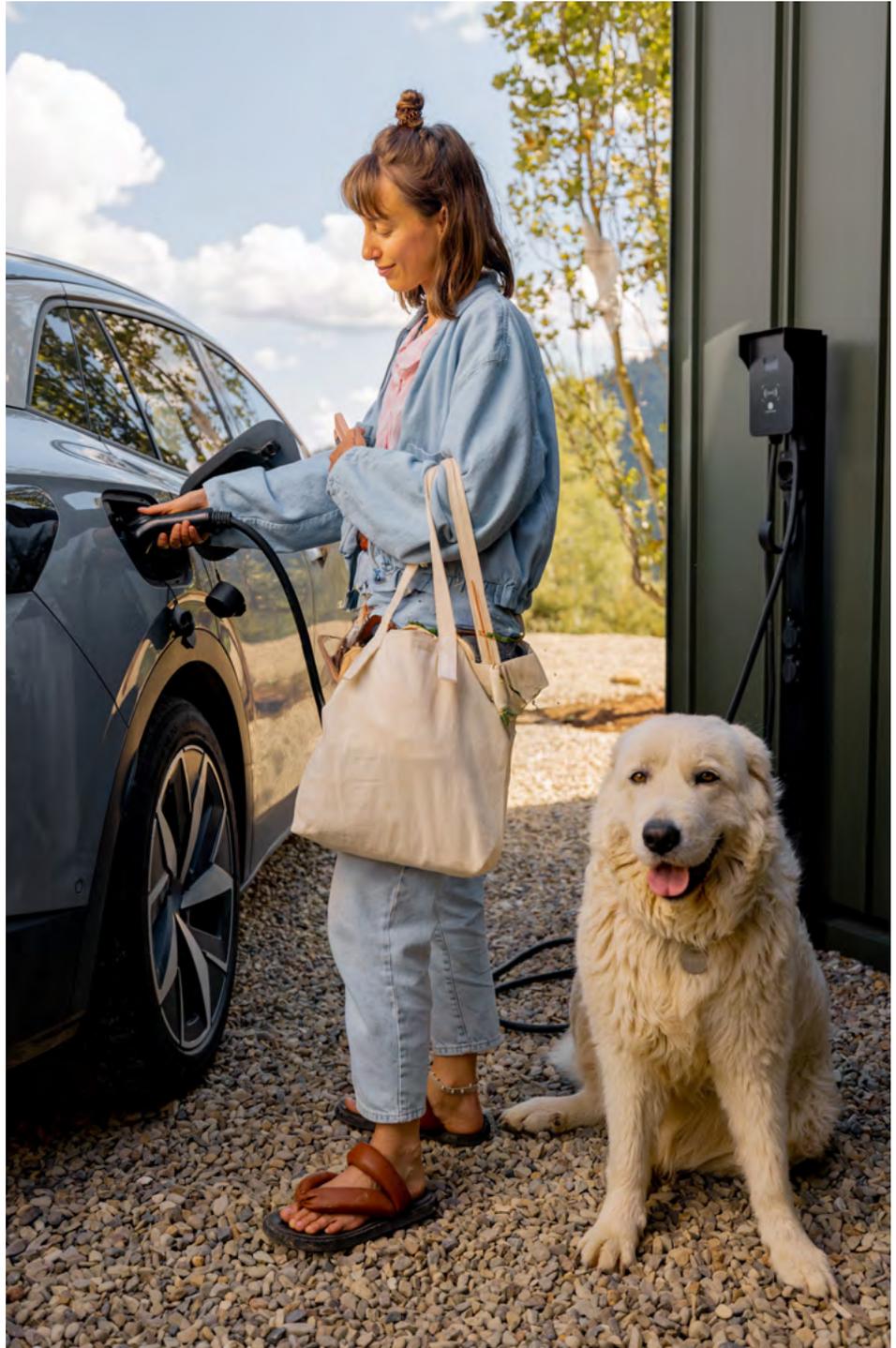
## CHAPTER FOUR

# **GUIDANCE FOR FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER ADVOCATES: SHE'S LEFT, NOW WHAT ABOUT HER PETS? EXPLORING THE PET HOUSING OPTIONS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter Three outlined the critical steps Family Justice Centers can take to help survivors prepare for safety before leaving an abusive relationship, emphasizing the importance of routine questions about pets, strong community partnerships, and pet-inclusive safety planning. Yet the challenges do not end once a survivor makes the courageous decision to leave. In fact, for many survivors, the question of “what happens to my pets now?” becomes one of the most urgent and complex issues after leaving.

Building on the safety planning discussed in Chapter Three, Chapter Four focuses on how FJCs can continue supporting survivors and their pets during the critical period after they leave. From housing options and foster care arrangements to navigating legal protections and custody disputes, FJCs play a vital role in helping survivors secure both their own safety and the safety of their animals. This chapter explores the range of pet housing possibilities, highlights legal considerations, and offers practical tools to ensure animals are not overlooked. By anticipating these needs and connecting survivors with resources, FJCs can remove yet another barrier to safety, helping families, including their pets, move towards hope and healing together.



Survivors of intimate partner violence have several options when they must also consider the welfare and safety of their companion and farm animals. Each option has challenges and complications, and no single option is always suitable for every client. We'll briefly summarize some of the options and issues to consider:

### **LEAVE THE ANIMAL BEHIND**

In many cases, this may be the only available option. If the abuser has demonstrated physical violence or attacked or threatened the animal as coercive control, this poses risks; the abuser may harm or kill the animal or dispose of it as an act of retribution or simply because he has no interest or ability to provide for the care of "her" pets. In too many cases, concern for the animal(s) forces the survivor to return home.

### **PUT THE PET UP FOR ADOPTION**

Some survivors would rather have the animal re-homed by a local animal shelter or rescue organization than let the abuser continue to threaten or harm the animal. This is not an ideal scenario, but it can help ease the survivor's mind and remove one barrier to her escaping. Check with local groups (*See Chapter 3*) to identify options and if they can guarantee confidentiality to prevent the animal from being returned to the abuser.

### **STAY IN HER CAR**

Unfortunately, many survivors are forced to take this option in the absence of local pet-friendly housing or shelters. This option can be avoided if she is willing or able to relocate to a community with more pet-housing options.

### **STAY WITH RELATIVES OR FRIENDS**

This option assumes that the relative or friend is willing to house animal(s), does not have animal allergies, and can accommodate animals in their home. It also assumes that the abuser will not think to look for her there.

### **PET FOSTER CARE**

Many communities have animal welfare organizations and veterinarians who partner with domestic violence shelters and Family Justice Centers to offer off-site short- or long-term boarding for a limited number of companion animals. We've listed resources to find these options in Chapter 3. Each program has its own policies and procedures. While off-site foster care offers respite for the pets, it denies the rest of the family the opportunity to heal together with their animals. This option also assumes that appropriate confidentiality provisions are in place so the abuser cannot locate the animals.

### **CO-SHELTERING IN A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER OR FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER**

This is the ideal solution. Currently, more than 300 shelters in 47 states offer co-sheltering. [A directory of these shelters](#) is maintained by Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T™).



### **FIND AN APARTMENT**

In addition to paying rent and pet damage deposits, finding apartments that accept pets—especially some breeds that are perceived as being potentially dangerous—can be challenging. Many rentals have restrictions prohibiting certain breeds, such as pit bulls. In Chapter 3, we listed several directories where prospective tenants can search for rentals that accept animals.

## WHAT ARE A CLIENT'S LEGAL OPTIONS?

Abusers' acts of animal cruelty, abuse and neglect expose clients and Family Justice Centers to numerous legal considerations. These may include:

- Deciding whether the client wishes to file criminal charges against the abuser;
- Seeking additional protection for the animals by including them in protection-from-abuse and restraining orders;
- Gaining temporary or permanent custody of the animals.

Let's look at the issues with each of these options.

### SEEK OUT A MANDATED REPORTER TO REPORT ANIMAL CRUELTY

Unlike most state laws in which either everyone, or certain professionals, are required by law to report suspected child, elder or domestic abuse, the reporting of suspected animal cruelty, abuse and neglect is largely a voluntary matter and left up to the discretion of individuals who may witness an incident or learn about it second-hand.

While no states specifically name Family Justice Center personnel as mandated reporters of animal cruelty, several states specifically name departments of children and families, adult protection, and similar agencies as either mandated or permitted to report suspected animal abuse to appropriate local authorities who can then investigate the allegations further.

In addition, 43 states now require or permit veterinarians to make such reports. The National Link Coalition maintains a list of which professionals are mandated or permitted reporters. This information is also available in greater detail at [MandatedReporter.com](http://MandatedReporter.com).

To identify which agency in your community is designated to investigate suspected animal maltreatment, see the [National Link Coalition's National Directory](#) of 6,500 local abuse investigation agencies.



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



## SEEK TO CHARGE THE ABUSER WITH ANIMAL CRUELTY

While all states have laws prohibiting animal cruelty, abuse and neglect, the terminology and interpretation of each state's statutes—and the interest and ability of law enforcement and prosecutors to pursue allegations—varies considerably. There are no uniform definitions. The Michigan State University's Animal Legal & Historical Center maintains a [directory of each state's anti-cruelty statutes](#).



There are several distinct types of animal maltreatment: neglect; physical abuse; failure to provide adequate veterinary care; abandonment; animal fighting; and animal hoarding. Unlike domestic, child and elder abuse, there is no crime of "emotional abuse" in animal welfare. Most state laws require animals to have "adequate" food, water and shelter—with no definition of what constitutes "adequate." Many state laws limit animal cruelty to only certain species.

Filing charges involves a certain amount of risk: she will have to provide convincing, conclusive evidence (see below) regarding specific incident(s), be willing to testify against the abuser in court, and risk possible retribution that could jeopardize her safety. These obstacles frequently discourage many victims from filing criminal charges, which only serves to enable the abuser to continue a pattern of "getting away with it."

## WHAT EVIDENCE DOES SHE NEED?

Animal cruelty, abuse and neglect are crimes. Like all other crimes, investigators and prosecutors can pursue an allegation ONLY if they have concrete, specific details. They cannot respond to a complaint that someone is "always" hitting an animal: they need specific dates, times, location, who witnessed the event, and any other information to enhance the case. Photographic or video evidence can be extremely helpful. Many veterinarians are now being trained in veterinary forensics and can examine animals' injuries to establish whether they were inflicted by accidental or non-accidental causes.

Animal Protection of New Mexico has published a [handy guide](#) describing how to recognize and report animal cruelty and what evidence might be helpful in proving the case.

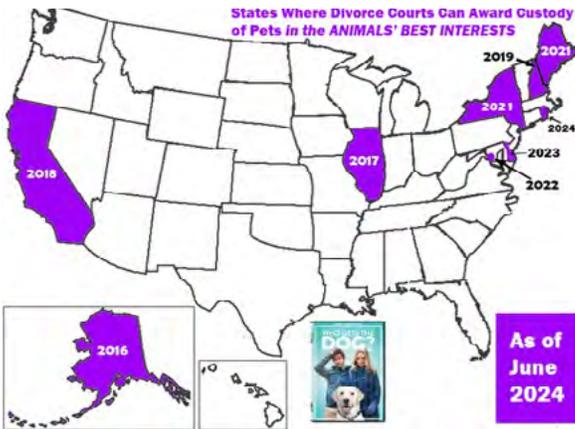


## CHARGING ANIMAL CRUELTY AS AN ACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As of this writing, 17 states and the District of Columbia define acts of animal abuse intended to threaten or intimidate another family or household member as not only animal cruelty, but also as an act of domestic violence. Several additional states define these acts as coercion, coercive control, or stalking.

*See Appendix B for the National Link Coalition's list of these states' statutes.*





The Animal Welfare Institute has a [state-by-state directory](#) for attorneys and advocates seeking to include pets in protection orders. Following the widespread inclusion of pets in protection orders, the U.S. government in 2018 enacted the PAWS (Pet And Women Safety) Act. It allows individual states’ pet-protection orders to be enforced across state lines if the survivor and her pets relocate and authorizes grants to agencies that provide support services for the pets of victims of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

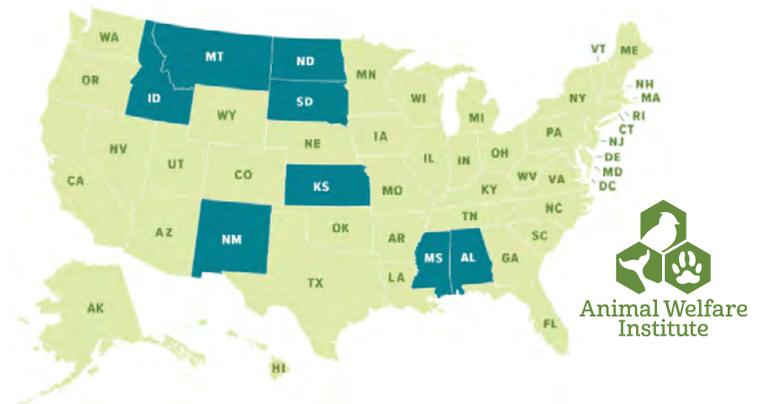


### INCLUDING PETS IN PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDERS

A case in Maine in 2006 introduced domestic violence advocates to a gap in the protective system: while plaintiffs’ pets could be included among the “property” listed in protection and restraining orders, unless animals are specifically itemized, neither victims nor court officials instinctively think to include them. States began to amend their statutes, and as of this writing, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico allow courts to include pets, service animals and, in some cases, farm animals. Provisions vary from state to state, but generally allow courts to:

- Award the petitioner exclusive care, possession or control of any animal owned, possessed, leased, kept, or held by either the petitioner, the respondent, or a minor child.
- Enjoin respondents from removing, hiding, damaging, harming, mistreating, or disposing of a household pet.
- Order the respondent to allow the petitioner or a family or household member acting on the petitioner’s behalf to retrieve a household pet.
- Prohibit the respondent from knowingly coming within a specified distance of locations where the pet is regularly found.

See Appendix C for National Link Coalition’s most current directory of these state laws.



### AWARDING CUSTODY OF PETS IN THE DIVORCE SETTLEMENT

When domestic violence results in a divorce or marriage dissolution, decisions regarding custody arrangements and disposition of property, including animals, can be especially acrimonious. In a novel approach initiated in Alaska in 2016, eight states and the District of Columbia currently specifically empower courts to determine custody of the animals based on what the court determines to be in the animals’ best interests.

# GUIDANCE FOR FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER ADVOCATES: WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

## INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four examined the urgent question of pet safety once a survivor leaves, outlining housing options, foster care arrangements, and legal protections that Family Justice Centers can help navigate. While the immediate safety of survivors and their animals is paramount, another equally critical concern emerges: the impact of animal abuse on children. Just as pets are deeply intertwined in survivors' decisions and healing, children's safety, stability, and well-being are profoundly shaped by the presence of both domestic violence and animal abuse in the home.



Building on the strategies of pet-inclusive safety planning, Chapter Five focuses on how Family Justice Centers can support children exposed to domestic violence and pet abuse. For many children, pets are a source of unconditional comfort and stability during chaos. Making threats to harm or harming a pet is uniquely devastating to a child. This chapter explores the trauma children experience when witnessing pet abuse, the ways pets can serve as protective factors, and the heightened safety risks children face when trying to shield their animals from harm. This chapter also provides guidance for advocates regarding assessment, safety planning, and collaboration with partners to ensure children and pets are supported as interconnected members of the family. By centering the needs of children alongside survivors and their animals, FJCs can take a holistic approach that promotes safety, healing, and long-term community for the entire family.

Children exposed to domestic violence are significantly more likely to commit suicide, experience substance abuse, and have various health problems. They are far more likely to commit domestic and community violence as adults and are abused or seriously neglected at a rate 1500% higher than the national average. Finally, exposure to domestic violence causes the same kind of harm to a child's mental health and learning as if the child had been physically abused.

For domestic violence advocates, it's crucial to understand the intricate relationship between children, pets, and the dynamics of abuse. Pets are not simply bystanders; they are often deeply intertwined in the emotional and psychological landscape of a child exposed to domestic violence. Here's what advocates should consider, with a deeper dive into the specific ways pets provide crucial support:

### **WITNESSING PET ABUSE IS TRAUMATIC FOR CHILDREN**

Children who witness animal abuse, whether directed at their own pet or another animal in the home, experience this as a profound form of trauma. This trauma is often amplified because:

- The child feels a deep sense of helplessness in protecting a vulnerable being they love.
- It shatters their sense of a safe and predictable world.
- It can lead to severe trust issues, as the abuser violates the child's understanding of compassion and care.

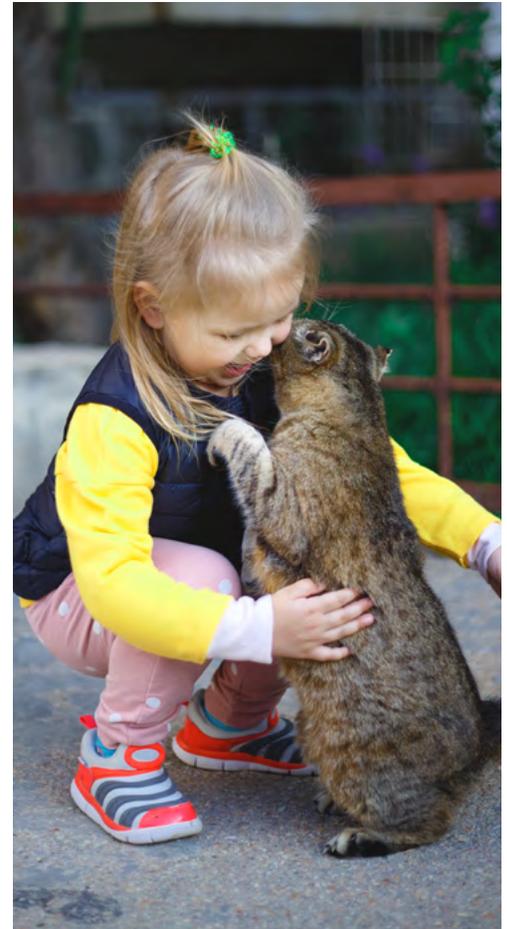
This can lead to:

- Increased anxiety, fear, and hypervigilance.
- Feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and guilt.
- Emotional numbing and withdrawal, isolating the child further.
- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, and flashbacks.
- Development of aggressive behaviors as a learned response or a manifestation of internalized anger.

The trauma of witnessing pet abuse can be just as significant, if not more, than witnessing violence directed towards a human family member, as it violates the child's innate sense of empathy and protection.

### **EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT AND SECURITY: A LIFELINE IN CHAOS**

- Pets often serve as a significant, and sometimes the only, source of unconditional emotional support and security for children, especially in chaotic and unpredictable environments.
- They offer a constant, non-judgmental presence, providing a sense of stability when everything else feels unstable.
- They provide physical comfort through cuddling and affection, which can be incredibly soothing for traumatized children.
- They offer a sense of normalcy and routine, as caring for a pet can provide a predictable structure in an otherwise chaotic life.
- Children may confide in pets, seeking comfort and companionship when they feel unsafe or unable to express their feelings to adults, offering a safe outlet for their emotions.
- The threat of harm to a beloved pet becomes a powerful tool of control and manipulation, directly targeting the child's emotional vulnerabilities.



### **SAFETY CONCERNS AND CHILD PROTECTION: INTERTWINED SAFETY**

- Children may put themselves at significant risk to protect their pets from abuse, leading to potential physical harm and exacerbating their trauma.
- Abusers may use threats against pets to coerce children into silence or compliance, effectively holding them hostage emotionally.
- When assessing child safety, it is vital to consider the safety of the pet as well. A child's feeling of safety is directly linked to the pet's safety.
- Advocates should include detailed questions about pet safety during intake interviews with both children and adults, understanding the pet's role as a family member.

## IMPACT ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT: LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

- Exposure to violence and pet abuse can severely and negatively impact a child's emotional, social, and cognitive development.
- It can disrupt the development of healthy attachment patterns.
- It can lead to chronic feelings of insecurity and fear.
- It can impair their ability to regulate emotions and form healthy relationships.
- Children may experience increased aggression, difficulty forming healthy relationships, and emotional regulation issues, impacting their long-term well-being.
- The presence of a pet can also be a powerful protective factor, offering comfort and stability, but this protective factor is completely compromised, and reversed, when the pet is also being abused, causing further trauma.

## ADVOCACY STRATEGIES AND HOLISTIC SUPPORT

- Advocates should include detailed questions about pets in their assessments and safety planning, recognizing them as integral family members.
- Collaborate with animal welfare organizations to provide safe housing and resources for pets, ensuring the safety of the entire family unit.
- Educate children about safe ways to protect themselves and their pets, empowering them with knowledge and safety strategies.
- Advocate for policies that recognize the link between animal abuse and domestic violence, promoting systemic change.
- When safety planning, ensure that the pet is included in the plan, as their safety is inextricably linked to the child's.

By understanding the vital and multifaceted role pets play in the lives of children exposed to domestic violence, advocates can provide more comprehensive, empathetic, and effective support, ultimately contributing to the safety and well-being of both children and their animals.



# GUIDANCE FOR FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER ADVOCATES: DEALING WITH SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

## INTRODUCTION

Chapters Four and Five explored the essential role Family Justice Centers play in supporting survivors and children, emphasizing the critical importance of addressing pet safety and the complex interplay between domestic violence, children, and animals. While these chapters addressed common scenarios and strategies, Family Justice Center advocates also encounter situations that fall outside the typical framework. These cases may involve unusual pets, service and emotional support animals, military-connected clients, or survivors experiencing homelessness. Often these special circumstances present unique logistical, legal, and emotional challenges that require thoughtful planning, creativity, and collaboration with community partners.



Chapter Six provides guidance for navigating these more complex and atypical situations. It examines considerations for clients with service or emotional support animals, large or exotic pets, military affiliations, or housing instability, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities for effective intervention. This chapter also outlines resources, protocols, and strategies to help Family Justice Center advocates respond with confidence, ensuring that all family members, including nontraditional pets, receive the support and protection they need. By anticipating and planning for special circumstances, FJC's can uphold their commitment to holistic, trauma-informed care, extending safety, stability, and hope to every survivor and their family, no matter how complex their situation.

## CLIENTS WITH SERVICE ANIMALS

A service animal is any animal—usually a dog, but it could be a miniature horse or other unique animal—that has been individually trained to provide assistance or perform tasks for a person with a physical, sensory or mental disability. They are not considered companion animals, and they are distinguished from Emotional Support Animals (see below). Service animals are guaranteed full access to accommodations and transportation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Family Justice Centers must accept them with full access to the entire facility and must make reasonable modifications or accommodations so that a person with a disability (with or without a service animal) can have access to your facility. The animal's owner is responsible for the animal's care and behavior at all times. ADA does not limit the type of disability for which a service animal can be used. You are allowed to ask the owner only two questions regarding the animal: Is the animal required because of a disability? What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

If a client says her animal is a service animal, it is good practice to take her at her word; ADA prohibits asking for documentation or certification for her animal. If she says she has a disability, it is recommended that you accept her word and assume she is protected by disability rights laws. However, when a survivor applies for space in a shelter or transitional housing, the Fair Housing Act applies, and a housing provider may ask for a statement from a healthcare or mental health professional stating that the client is a person with a disability and will be assisted by a service animal.

## CLIENTS WITH LARGE OR UNUSUAL ANIMALS

Because each Center's facilities and capabilities are unique, and because the range of species and number of animals that clients may have is infinite, there is no one-size-fits-all protocol for responding to a client with 20 iguanas, a miniature horse, several tanks of fish, a pig, or a llama. However, there are several steps you can take to be prepared for these circumstances:

- Initiate a dialogue with the animal care and control organizations in your community to ascertain who they know who might temporarily care for various species needing foster care.
- Create a temporary safe holding space where animals can be safely housed until a more permanent solution can be located.
- Establish a Facebook or other social media private group of other Family Justice Centers where you can all share how you manage unusual situations.

## CLIENTS WITH EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS

Considerable confusion has arisen with the growing popularity of Emotional Support Animals (ESA). ESAs provide emotional comfort for their owners without performing specialized tasks. They are not covered under the ADA, but the term was created to allow them access to housing and air travel under the Fair Housing Act of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Air Carrier Access Act. There are no legal requirements for training them, nor are there uniform standards for mental health clinicians who must designate them and document a client's need for them. Airlines have begun to strictly limit which species they will accept as ESAs after people bringing snakes, pigs, wallabies, and peacocks on board became problematic.

If your Family Justice Center offers co-sheltering, HUD and the Fair Housing Act have special rules for assistance animals which can sometimes be labeled as Emotional Support Animals. You may need to have your attorney research the specifics for any individual client.



## MILITARY-CONNECTED CLIENTS

Active service members and their dependents face several specific considerations. They may or may not have access to, or be aware of, family violence units on military bases. Their emotional attachments to their pets may be heightened if their spouse/partner is deployed for long periods of time. Forced separation from their pets—e.g., when the family is transferred to another military installation—can result in additional emotional trauma and even lead to animosity toward the military service. (Currently, the military will help offset costs to relocate only one pet to another change-of-station, but the program is in limbo due to CDC regulations.)

Meanwhile, intimate partner abuse is a serious issue in the military. Female military personnel are said to be more likely to be sexually assaulted by a fellow service member than to be killed in combat. Service members returning from deployments in combat zones may experience traumatic brain injuries, PTSD and elevated stress levels. They may have difficulty readjusting to the normal routines of family life after the intensity of combat and the camaraderie of their unit members.

In addition, unique factors in military life make victims particularly isolated and easy targets for family violence:

- They have a history of being called “dependents” –they literally depend on the service member for almost everything (housing, insurance, money, social life).
- Frequent relocations disrupt normal social connectivity.
- Base courts and protection orders exist only at the base commander’s discretion; not all bases have them.
- A spouse may be afraid to report abuse: to do so would impact the service member’s career and result in being demoted to a lower rank which affects the family’s income.
- Military spouses who do not speak English may have language and cultural barriers.
- Most domestic violence offenders are young males; in the military, they are invariably in the lower ranks.
- Military members have a well-honed capacity and training for violence and familiarity with and access to weapons.

Finally, there are jurisdictional issues as to whether acts of animal cruelty (which were added to the Uniform Code of Military Justice only as recently as 2016) and domestic violence/sexual assault would be prosecuted via military courts-martial or through civilian criminal prosecutions.

Several resources can assist military families with the cost of transporting pets during deployment or relocation to other domestic or international bases:



### **DogsonDeployment.org:**

Locates foster families for pets of military families deploying or transferring.



### **Pathways To Safety International:**

Provides resources to domestic violence survivors and their pets stranded overseas.



### **Air Force Aid Society:**

Financial assistance for pet (dog or cat) surgery or illness.



### **Army Emergency Relief:**

Pet transportation assistance during Permanent Change of Station: \$5,500 no-interest loans, grants for VA service animals.



### **Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society:**

\$5,500 no-interest loans for up to 2 dogs/cats during overseas Permanent Change of Station.



### **Leave No Pets Behind USA:**

Helps with transportation costs for pets whose family members relocate.

## CLIENTS WHO ARE HOMELESS

The emotional bonds between individuals without housing and their pets can be extreme: these animals are not only emotional supports but also provide a sense of safety, opportunities to initiate conversations and donations from passers-by, and even warmth in cold weather. Several national organizations, such as the [Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative](#), are working to eliminate dog breed and weight restrictions and additional damage deposits charged by rental housing operators. In some communities, low- or no-cost veterinary services may be available for pets of the homeless.

The established concept of domestic violence shelters accepting pets is slowly being expanded to shelters for the homeless. Family Justice Center advocates should establish dialogue with community agencies serving these populations in advance and be prepared to offer referrals.

## OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

A good resource is the [Start-Up Manual](#), published by Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T®). The Manual offers insights into the questions that need to be asked and guidelines for facilities that are considering co-sheltering people and pets.

Resources for assisting homeless individuals with pets are available from [MyDogIsMyHome.org](#) and [PetsOfTheHomeless.org](#).

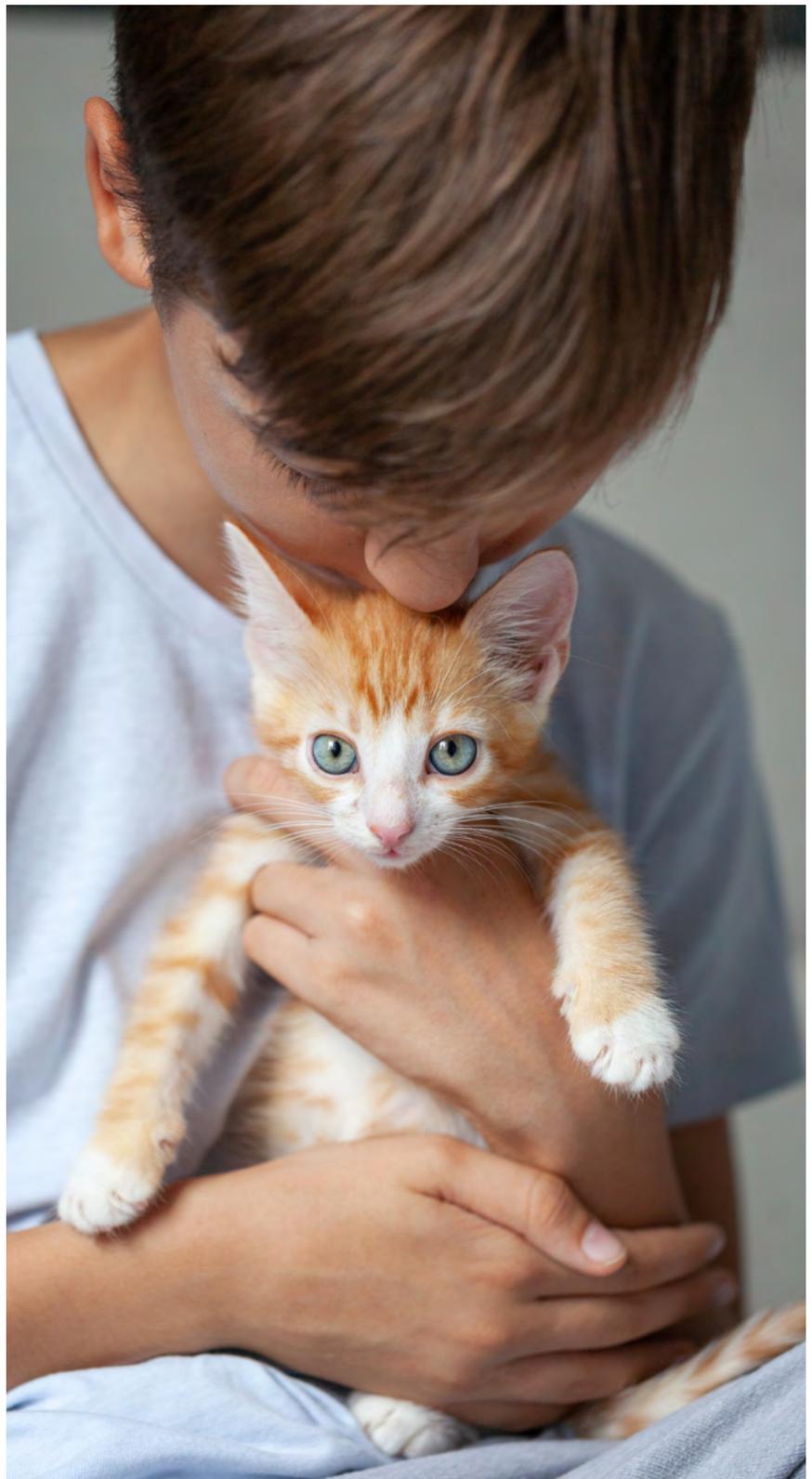


# BECOMING A PET-INCLUSIVE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

## INTRODUCTION

Chapters Four through Six explored the critical ways Family Justice Centers support survivors, children, and pets, emphasizing safety planning, legal protections, and strategies for navigating special circumstances. While these chapters provided guidance on addressing immediate and complex needs, the next step is building a fully integrated, pet-inclusive approach within FJC operations. Creating a pet-inclusive environment requires more than reactive solutions; it involves proactive policies, procedures, and partnerships that recognize the human-animal bond as an essential component of holistic, trauma-informed care.

Chapter Seven focuses on the strategic and operational aspects of becoming a pet-inclusive Family Justice Center. It addresses how FJC staff and FJC partner staff can embed pet support into legal services, housing assistance, counseling, outreach, and community engagement. This chapter also highlights opportunities to collaborate with animal welfare organizations, veterinary professionals, and other community partners to ensure that pets are considered in all facets of survivor support. By integrating pet-inclusive practices across programs, FJCs can strengthen their capacity to meet the diverse needs of survivors, enhance engagement, and promote healing for the entire family unit. In embracing this model, FJCs move from providing individual interventions toward creating an organizational culture that fully acknowledges the importance of pets, ensuring that every survivor and family member receives comprehensive, compassionate care.



## **SUPPORTING SURVIVORS WITH PETS: THE EXPANDING ROLE OF FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS**

Family Justice Centers play a critical role in supporting survivors of family violence, sexual abuse, and human trafficking. These centers provide a coordinated, trauma-informed approach to safety, healing, and justice. To provide effective support to all community members, advocates must account for a variety of diverse and complex family structures—including those with pets.

Recognizing and accommodating the bond between survivors and their pets is a vital part of holistic service. To truly serve all survivors, Family Justice Centers must integrate pet-inclusive policies and practices into every aspect of their programming—from legal services and housing to counseling and community outreach.

### **LEGAL SERVICES**

Legal advocacy is a core function of the FJC framework, and it's important for legal professionals to familiarize themselves with pet-related laws and restrictions—such as licensing laws, vaccine mandates, including animals in protection orders and divorce settlements, and breed-specific legislation—and be prepared to guide clients to appropriate resources. Additionally, legal advocates must understand and apply protections for service animals and emotional support animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Housing Act (FHA), to better assist clients with reasonable accommodation requests.

In cases involving family violence, legal advocates can support survivors by seeking protective orders that include their pets, ensuring that both the person and their companion animal are shielded from further harm.

### **HOUSING SUPPORT**

Many survivors face barriers to housing due to “no-pets” policies, breed restrictions, or costly deposits and fees. Family Justice Centers can advocate on behalf of survivors by collaborating with housing providers, identifying pet-friendly options, and helping clients cover pet-related move-in costs.

Additionally, developing partnerships with local landlords and housing organizations can help ease these transitions and ensure that survivors aren't forced to choose between housing and their pets.



### **SAFETY PLANNING**

In emergency situations, survivors need comprehensive safety plans that include their pets. Advocates can help prepare survivors for a quick departure with a pet “go-bag,” packed with essential items like pet food, medications, veterinary records, ID tags, a leash, collar, and a carrier. Advocates can also help clients fleeing family violence establish ownership of their pets with documentation like veterinary records, adoption paperwork, and pet licenses.

Additionally, helping survivors update microchip information or obtain new care providers in safe, undisclosed locations can prevent abusers from using pets to track or harm them.

### **COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

For many survivors, pets play a therapeutic role in their healing journey. FJCs can facilitate connections to mental health providers who can provide pet owners with documentation that supports their need for an emotional support animal. For those experiencing the loss of a pet, consider offering counseling or support groups to help owners navigate their grief.

## ONSITE SERVICES

Family Justice Centers can directly support pet-owning survivors by offering onsite accommodations for animals. Safe, clean, and welcoming spaces where pets can rest while their owners receive services can significantly reduce stress and increase engagement. A simple pet wash station or a partnership with a mobile groomer can go a long way in maintaining the health and comfort of clients' pets. Similarly, partnering with a mobile veterinary clinic to provide onsite health exams, vaccines, and preventative care is a powerful step that Family Justice Centers can take to support the human-animal bond. Unvaccinated pets can be a barrier to housing and shelter. Providing affordable, onsite care can expedite housing placement. Finally, helping survivors of violence establish veterinary care in their name can be especially important. Veterinary records can be used as evidence in situations of contested ownership of a pet.

## OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Outreach is an essential component of any Center's work. Including pet-related supplies—like food, toys, leashes, and flea prevention—in outreach distributions ensures that pet-owning families feel included and supported. Signage and promotional materials should also reflect pet-inclusive messaging to let survivors know their animals are welcome.

Involving local animal welfare organizations, mobile groomers, and veterinarians in community events strengthens these efforts. Providing staff with training on animal behavior and safety helps ensure meaningful, safe interactions with pet-owning clients.

## COLLABORATION

Strong partnerships are the foundation of effective FJC operations. Collaborating with animal welfare groups expands the network of support available to survivors and their pets. These partnerships can provide access to resources like free or low-cost veterinary care, pet food banks, and spay/neuter services. Animal welfare professionals can also be valuable additions to coalitions, boards, and interagency teams working to address the broader needs of survivors.

Family Justice Centers are uniquely positioned to lead the way in providing truly inclusive, survivor-centered services. By recognizing pets as part of the family and integrating pet support into their core programs, FJCs can offer a more compassionate, effective, and complete response to the diverse needs of those they serve.



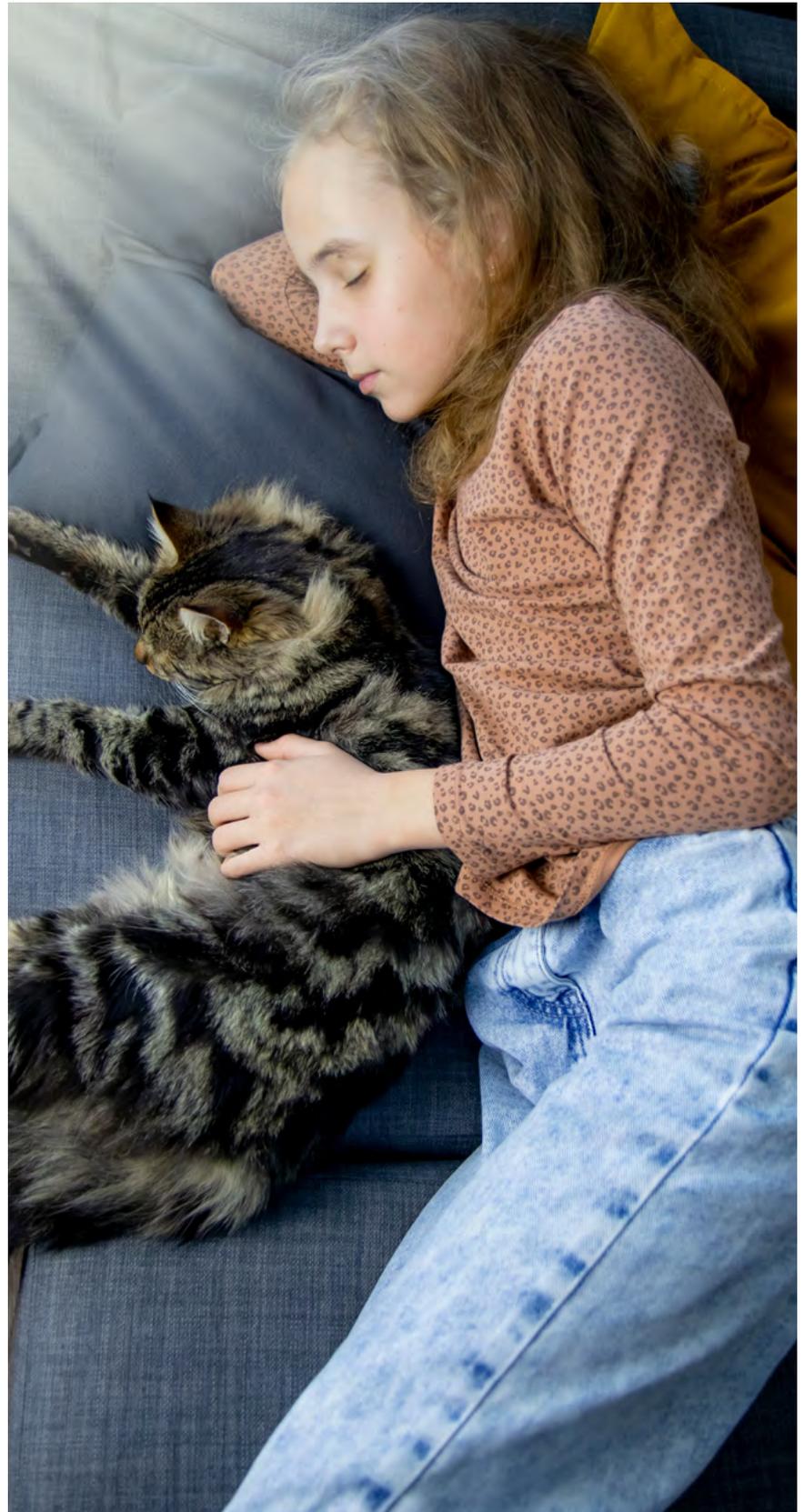
## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

Chapters Four through Seven examined the multifaceted ways Family Justice Centers support survivors, children, and pets, highlighting practical strategies, safety planning, legal protections, and organizational approaches to creating pet-inclusive environments. While these chapters provided guidance on implementing effective interventions and integrating pet support into daily operations, FJC professionals also benefit from access to specialized tools, research, and reference materials to inform their practice and strengthen advocacy.

There are many dynamic organizations that address the intersection of domestic violence, child welfare, elder abuse, and animal protection. This Toolkit is designed to be a short guide that can help guide FJCs in helping survivors with pets coming forward for help. By leveraging these resources, Family Justice Center staff can deepen their knowledge, enhance evidence-based practice, and identify partners and services that extend the continuum of care for survivors and their pets. This chapter underscores the importance of staying informed and connected, equipping FJC professionals with the tools they need to respond comprehensively to the diverse and evolving needs of families impacted by violence. By integrating these resources into everyday practice, Family Justice Centers can ensure that their staff are supported with the latest information, guidance, and networks, fostering an environment where every survivor, child, and animal receives the informed, compassionate care they deserve.

The authors of this Toolkit are all available to be a resource to Family Justice Centers grappling with meeting the needs of survivors with pets/animals.



## THE NATIONAL LINK COALITION

The National Link Coalition is the only international educational and advocacy organization working to prevent animal cruelty, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and elder abuse by showing how they intersect. As the international resource center on The Link between animal cruelty and human violence we train multi-disciplinary professionals, showcase programs, and publicize legislation and research to foster collaborations that create safer communities by recognizing that when animals are abused, people are at risk, and when people are abused, animals are at risk.

The National Link Coalition's website includes updated reports and information about many topics relevant to Family Justice Center advocates addressing the needs of clients with pets. These include:

[Fact Sheets](#) about animal abuse and the link between animal abuse and other forms of violence, and implications for various professionals

[Domestic Violence Linked with Animal Abuse](#)

[Child Maltreatment Linked with Animal Abuse](#)

[Elder Abuse Linked with Animal Abuse](#)

[National Directory](#) of 6,500 city and county agencies that investigate animal, domestic, child, and elder abuse

[Bibliography](#) of over 2,400 references

### Contact Information for the National Link Coalition:

c/o Phil Arkow, President/Secretary

16 Grasshopper Drive

Etowah, NC 28729

828-595-9750

[NationalLinkCoalition.org](http://NationalLinkCoalition.org)

[arkowpets@snip.net](mailto:arkowpets@snip.net)

## THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER ALLIANCE

The Family Justice Center Alliance (FJCA), a program of Alliance for HOPE International, is the national training and technical assistance provider for Family Justice Centers and other co-located, multidisciplinary models serving survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, and trafficking. Founded by the team behind the first FJC in San Diego, the Alliance supports communities through strategic planning, training, leadership development, and sustainability guidance. With a focus on trauma-informed, hope-centered practices, FJCA promotes collaboration that increases safety, reduces violence, and improves outcomes.

### Contact Information for the Family Justice Center Alliance:

501 W. Broadway, Ste. A, #625

San Diego, CA 92101

[familyjusticecenter.org](http://familyjusticecenter.org)

[fjca@allianceforhope.com](mailto:fjca@allianceforhope.com)

## REDROVER

RedRover's mission is to bring animals out of crisis and strengthen the bond between people and animals through emergency sheltering, disaster-relief services, financial assistance and education. We accomplish this by engaging volunteers and supporters, collaborating with others, and maximizing the use of online technology.

### Contact Information for RedRover:

P.O. Box 188890

Sacramento, CA 95818

(916) 429-2457

[redrover.org](http://redrover.org)

[info@redrover.org](mailto:info@redrover.org)

## APPENDIX A

# SAMPLE PET-INCLUSIVE SAFETY PLANS

Producing a safety plan that includes pets can be as simple as adding a paragraph to an existing safety plan, or as detailed as creating a specific brochure. The National Link Coalition has compiled examples of several types of safety plans that include animals, available for free download:

Compilation of eight examples of safety plans that include pets:

<https://nationallinkcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/DV-SafetyPlanningCompilation.pdf>

Example of a resource guide for human services workers about warning signs of possible abuse, how animal abuse is a form of family violence, questions to ask clients, and animal safety planning:

<https://nationallinkcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Saskatchewan-SPCA-Resource-Guide-for-Human-Services.pdf>

Example of a resource guide for animal welfare professionals about warning signs of possible abuse, how animal abuse is a form of family violence, questions to ask clients, and animal safety planning:

<https://nationallinkcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Saskatchewan-SPCA-Resource-Guide-for-Animal-Welfare.pdf>



### HELP IS AVAILABLE

**Interpersonal violence and abuse**  
If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, help is available. Look in the front of the SaskTel Direct West phone book for the Abuse Help Lines page for help in your community.  
**For emergency assistance: Call 911**

**Animal cruelty**  
If you suspect an animal is being neglected or abused, contact the appropriate authority in your area:

**Pets in the following cities:**

<b>Regina Humane Society</b> 306.543.6363	<b>Moose Jaw Humane Society</b> 306.692.1517
<b>Saskatoon SPCA</b> 306.374.7387	<b>Prince Albert SPCA</b> 306.763.6110

**Pets (all other locations):**  
**Animal Protection Services of Saskatchewan**  
1.844.382.0002 (toll free in SK) or 306.382.0002

**Livestock (anywhere in the province):**  
**Animal Protection Services of Saskatchewan**  
1.844.382.0002 (toll free in SK) or 306.382.0002

**Emergency/after hours**  
Please contact your local police or RCMP detachment.

### ANIMAL SAFEKEEPING

The Saskatchewan SPCA has received funding under the provincial Community Initiatives Fund to begin work on a new Animal Safekeeping Program. Through discussion, training, and collaboration, the program aims to build partnerships between animal and human service providers, with the goal of helping to protect both humans and animals from violence.

**For further information on the relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence, please contact:**

**Saskatchewan SPCA**  
1.877.382.7722 (toll free in Saskatchewan) or 306.382.7722

**STOPS to Violence**  
306.565.3199

**Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS)**  
306.522.3515

**Veterinary Social Work Program**  
**Western College of Veterinary Medicine**  
306.966.2852



## theLINK



### Resource Guide for ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS

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



**Community Initiatives Fund**

The Community Initiatives Fund invests in the quality of life of Saskatchewan residents by offering grants for community projects that help support community development, inclusion, leadership and vitality.



**SASKATCHEWAN SPCA**

Box 37, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3K1  
1.877.382.7722 or 306.382.7722  
[www.sspca.ca](http://www.sspca.ca) | [info@sspca.ca](mailto:info@sspca.ca)

## APPENDIX B

# STATE LAWS THAT DEFINE INTIMIDATING OR THREATENING ACTS OF ANIMAL CRUELTY AS ACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As of this writing, 17 states and the District of Columbia define acts of animal abuse that are intended to threaten or intimidate another family or household member as not only animal cruelty, but also as an act of domestic violence. The National Link Coalition’s list of these statutes includes:

STATE	STATUTE	COERCIVE ANIMAL CRUELTY IS ALSO:
Alaska	AS 18.66.990(3)	Domestic violence; Crime of domestic violence
Arizona	Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 13-3601	Domestic violence
Arkansas	ACA § 9-15-403	Emotional abuse; Spousal abuse
Colorado	C.R.S. Ann. § 18-6-800.3(1); C.R.S. Ann § 13-14-101	Domestic violence; Domestic abuse
Delaware	§ 1041, Title 10 of the Delaware Code	Abuse
Indiana	Ind. Code Ann. § 31-9-2-42; Ind. Code Ann. § 34-6-2-34.5; Ind. Code Ann. § 35-46-3-12.5	Domestic or family violence; Domestic violence animal cruelty
Kentucky	KRS § 403.720; KRS § 456.010	Domestic violence and abuse; Dating violence and abuse
Maine	MRSA § Title 17-A, Chap. 9, Sec. 201-A	Stalking
Massachusetts	Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 209A, Section 1	Abuse; Coercive control
Mississippi	Miss. Code. Ann. 97-3-107	Stalking (pets included as “property”)
Missouri	V.A.M.S. 565.225 (2.1)	Stalking
Nebraska	Neb. Revised Statutes § 43-2922	Domestic intimate partner abuse
Nevada	Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 33.018(1)(e)(7)	Domestic violence
New Hampshire	RSA 173-B:1	Domestic violence; Abuse
Texas	Texas Penal Code §42.072; Texas Penal Code §25.07	Stalking; Violation of protection order in family violence, sexual assault or abuse, indecent assault, stalking, or trafficking case
Utah	Utah Code 77-36-1; Utah Code 76-5-106.5	Domestic violence; Domestic violence offense; Stalking; Emotional distress
Washington	RCW 7.105.010	Coercive control
District of Columbia	Official Code §16-1001	Intrafamilial offense

## APPENDIX C

# STATE LAWS THAT ALLOW ANIMALS TO BE INCLUDED IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDERS

The National Link Coalition maintains this list, which is constantly being updated with new legislation. As of September 2025, the following statutes allow courts to include pets, service animals, and/or farm animals in ex parte or permanent protection orders. State laws are constantly changing; please independently confirm the statutes listed here:

STATE	STATUTE
AK	AS 18.66.100(c)
AZ	A.R.S. 13-3601 & 13-3602
AR	Ark. Code 9-15-205; Ark. Code 9-15-219
CA	Sec. 6320, Family Code; Sec. 15657.03, Welfare & Institutions Code
CO	C.R.S. 18-1-1001; C.R.S. 18-6-800.3 – 803.5; C.R.S. 13-14-101 – 103
CT	G.S.C. 46b-15(b); G.S.C. 46(b)-38(c); G.S.C. 54-1(k)
DE	§ 1041, Title 10 of the Delaware Code
FL	F.S. 741.30 (5)(a); F.S. 741.30 (6)
GA	O.C.G.A. 19-13-4
HI	H.R.S. 586-4
IL	725 ILCS 5/112A-14
IN	IC 34-26-5-9
IA	I.C. 236.3(1); I.C. 236.4(3A); I.C. 236.5(1b)
KY	KRS 403.740; KRS 456.060
LA	R.S. 46:2135(A)(7) Children's Code Art. 1569(A)(7)
ME	19-A MRSA §4007(1); 19-A MRSA §4011 (2); 19-A MRSA §4006(5-a); 19-A MRSA §4007 (1-E1)

STATE	STATUTE
MD	Ann. Code of Md. 4-501; Ann. Code of Md. 4-504.1; Ann. Code of Md. 4-505; Ann. Code of Md. 4-506.
MA	Section 49. Chapter 209A of General Laws
MI	MCL600.2950 (1)(j) and (30)(a-d)
MN	Minn. Stat. 518B.01 subd. 6 (14) & (15)
MS	Miss. Code. Ann. 97-3-107
MO	RSMo 455.032; RSMo 455.045; RSMo 455.050; RSMo 455.513; RSMo 455.520; RSMo 455.523
NE	RSN 42.924
NV	NRS 33.018; NRS 33.030
NH	R.S.A 173-B:4(a)(10)
NJ	P.L. 2011 C.213; 2C:25-29(19)
NY	NY FAM CT § 842
NC	G.S. § 503-B
OH	R.C. § 109.42; R.C. § 2151.34; R.C. § 2903.214; R.C. § 3113.31; R.C. § 3113.33
OK	22 O.S. 2001 60.2(E); 22 O.S. 2001 1105(B)

STATE	STATUTE
OR	ORS 107.718
PA	Pa. Consolidated Statutes, Title 23 (Domestic Relations) § 6108 (9.1)
RI	R.I. General Laws § 15-15-3(a)(2)
SC	S. C. Code 20-4-60
TN	Tennessee Code 36-3-601(1) Tennessee Code 36-3-606(a)
TX	Sec. 85.021, Family Code
UT	Laws of Utah §78-B-7-105; Laws of Utah § 78B-7-404; Laws of Utah § 76-5-106.5
VT	15 V.S.A. § 1103
VA	Code of Va. § 16.1-253; Code of Va. § 16.1-253.1; Code of Va. § 16.1-253.4; Code of Va. § 16.1-279.1; Code of Va. § 19.2-152.8; Code of Va. § 19.2-152.9; Code of Va. § 19.2-152.10
WA	RCW 26.50.060; RCW 26.50.110
WV	WV Code 48-27-503
WI	W.S.A. 813.12
WY	W.S. 8 35-21-105
PR	Law No. 154, P.S. 2552
DC	D.C. Official Code Title 16, Chap. 10, Sec. §16-1005 (c); D.C. Official Code Title 16, Chap. 10, Sec. §16-1003(a)



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