

# SPOT ABUSE STOP ABUSE



## Spotting Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence: Guide for Veterinarians and Veterinary Technicians

### Why should you report?

You could save a life – human or animal. Animal abuse is often the first sign a family is in trouble. Every veterinarian has an obligation to protect the health and welfare of animals. Therefore, the AVMA considers it the responsibility of every veterinarian to report animal abuse to appropriate authorities, even when such reporting is not mandated by law or local ordinance. Such reporting is for the benefit of the animals, but there are often implications for people, as well.” By working together, professional and public awareness will be raised which, in turn, will lead to safer and healthier communities.

**Georgia Law: O.C.G.A. § 4-11-17 provides that licensed veterinarians and veterinary technicians are immune from criminal and civil liability if they report animal cruelty in good faith.**

- Familiarize yourself with the animal cruelty and domestic violence statutes (visit [AnimalLawSource.org](http://AnimalLawSource.org)). Remember neglect IS abuse.
- Document in detail what the client tells you when explaining the animal’s condition. Note if the client’s account changes or if the client’s account is inconsistent with another person’s account. Document the animal’s demeanor, the demeanor of the client and anyone with the client.
- Observe how the animal reacts when each individual comes near or speaks to it.
- Listen to and observe the children’s and any other individual’s responses to questions about the animal.
- Compare the animal’s injuries with the history given by the individual who brings in the animal. If it is not the owner, ask how they came to be in possession of the animal. Note if any of the people accompanying appear to have bruises, cuts, scratches or any other signs of physical or emotional abuse.
- Animal cruelty is NOT a sign of normal childhood behavior. If you experience a situation involving a child abusing an animal it should be reported to law enforcement immediately.

### Warning Signs

- Animals with chronic untreated injuries or medical conditions.
- Documented injuries evidencing different stages of healing.
- Owners who use the services of several veterinarians or a vet far from home.
- Owners who tend to only bring in young animals.
- Injuries attributed to unknown causes. Be aware that the client may claim the injury was accidental when it was not. Some accidental injuries are admitted, yet some intentional injuries may be blamed on unknown causes.

### How to Help

- Know your local resource for victims of domestic violence and pets - the Ahimsa House. Provide brochures for local resources for domestic violence victims.
- On your client information forms, ask your client if pets are safe at home.
- Contact local law enforcement or animal control if you have reason to believe an animal has been the victim of cruelty.

For additional questions, please contact: Claudine Wilkins and Jessica Rock with Animal Law Source at [info@animallawsource.org](mailto:info@animallawsource.org).  
Visit the Vet Section under Professions at [AnimalLawSource.org](http://AnimalLawSource.org).

\*This guide is only a basic introduction. Please consider seeking Continuing Education to help you recognize signs and document a case correctly.

### Do’s

- If you are concerned about the immediate safety of your staff, the client or any animals on the premises, call 9-1-1.
- Conduct a thorough examination, take close up and whole body photographs from all angles and sides and document your findings.
- Document any statements made by any of the individuals in the room.
- You may excuse yourself from the examination room with the pet for a more thorough exam, which may include whole body x-rays.
- Get weight and temperature of animal.
- If the animal is deceased, conduct a proper necropsy (if you have learned how to do one) or advise the police or animal control to have a necropsy performed.
- Collect any relevant evidence such as a collar, a bullet fragment, fecal sample, etc. and mark it and put it in a secure place.
- Call a board certified toxicologist or forensic pathologist to help.
- If you are able to do so, offer space at your clinic or kennel as a “safe haven” for pets.

### Don’t’s

- If at all possible, do not return the animal to the suspected abuser and do not cremate the animal prior to a necropsy. Dead or alive, the animal is evidence.
- Do not compromise timely treatment of an animal. If an animal must be euthanized document in detail the reasons why (ex. “extreme pain and suffering”).
- Do not directly accuse someone of animal cruelty, child abuse, or domestic violence. You are not responsible for investigating or proving the matter. Report suspected abuse to your local law enforcement and allow them to handle the matter.



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