

What Victim Advocates and Domestic Violence Shelters Can Do

Safety Planning

Pets need to be included in safety plans because owning a pet can be a barrier for individuals fleeing domestic violence.

59% of abused women with animals were afraid to seek help out of concern for their animals. Victims of family violence often refuse to leave abusive situations without their pet(s) so it is important to include pet(s) in safety plans.

Intake Assessment

When an individual makes the courageous decision to call a family violence hotline, questions about pet ownership should be included on the initial intake assessment.

36% of abused women with animals reported that their abuser threatened or harmed their animals. Including questions about pets in the intake process allows the referral process for temporary shelter to commence and gives the client peace of mind knowing that their beloved pet won't be left behind.

Paperwork

Intake forms should include questions about threats or injuries directed towards the pet. This helps victim's get orders of protection that include pets and it keeps a record of abusive behavior. In addition, paperwork should collect proof of pet ownership so that the abuser cannot attempt to gain custody of the pet(s).

Pet Safekeeping

It's important for domestic violence agency staff to help clients retrieve pets that have been left behind. In many situations, pet owners rely on them for comfort and security. It is important to work with local humane societies, animal control agencies, veterinarians, and other individuals to retrieve and place pets.

If your community does not have a Pet Safekeeping program, you should work with humane societies, animal control agencies, veterinarians, social workers, and other professionals with relevant expertise to create a pet safekeeping program.