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Pet Fostering for Victim Survivors of Domestic Abuse: A UK Perspective

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Veterinary Director, Dogs Trust
Chair, The Links Group



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Links Pet Fostering Group



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Links Pet Fostering Group: Purpose

- Develop and promote service standards and best practice in pet fostering services for survivors of domestic abuse
- Provide a trusted networking space for members where knowledge and experience can be shared
- Evidence and highlight the need and impact the services have on pet owners fleeing domestic abuse



Links Pet Fostering Group: Aims

- Promote collaborative working
- Contribute to proposed changes in legislation
- Publish combined service impacts
- Work with microchip databases
- Suggest and share relevant CPD
- Support relevant research opportunities



Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference

POLICE

EDUCATION

PROBATION

HOUSING

IDVA & DA
SERVICES

ACTION PLAN

HEALTH

CHILDRENS
SERVICES

ADULT
SERVICES

MENTAL
HEALTH

DRUGS &
ALCOHOL



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Collaborative Working: MARAC

Typical actions might include:

- **All agencies:** Identifying high risk victims so they can provide an enhanced and responsive service in the event of an incident.
- **Police:** Placing the victim's home on 'cocoon watch'; taking further action against the perpetrator if required; target hardening; providing panic alarms.
- **Health:** Heightened awareness by health professionals around injuries sustained; ensuring that the victim is separated from the perpetrator upon presentation so that she is attended to by health professionals whilst she is alone.
- **IDVA:** Feeding back MARAC actions to the victim where safe; providing ongoing support to the victim; attending appointments with victims; assisting victim with finding new housing and education; ongoing co-ordination and communication between all agencies; continued risk assessment; feeding back on repeat victimisation to the MARAC; assisting victims with seeking legal assistance.
- **Children and Young People's Services (CYPS):** Agreeing to undertake an initial assessment of children involved in MARAC cases as appropriate; give additional support to the family; making referrals to children and adolescent mental health services.
- **Housing:** Assisting with finding alternative accommodation; supporting applications for housing benefit and homelessness; implementing safety devices on the home property.
- **Education:** Sharing information with appropriate staff to support children effectively; monitoring school performance and behavioural issues.
- **Probation:** Using information from MARAC for pre-sentence report writing.
- **Adult services:** Making referrals to vulnerable adults team and/or voluntary sector support, for example, Age Concern.
- **Refuge:** Providing refuge accommodation; providing ongoing support to the victim.
- **Drug and Alcohol team:** Fast tracking access to specialist services and support.

The responsibility for actions lies with each agency so transparency and accountability are crucial.

Collaborative Working: 16 Days of Activism

- 16 Days of Action Against Gender Based Violence is an international campaign that runs from November 25th (the United Nations Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to December 10th (Human Rights Day) and encourages action and awareness against all forms of violence against women and girls
- Utilise this framework to raise awareness of pet fostering services / engage with wider stakeholders

Legislation:

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

- Controlling or coercive behaviour
 - Using animals to control or coerce a victim, e.g. harming or threatening to harm, or give away, pets or assistance dogs
- Economic abuse
 - Not allowing a victim to buy pet food or access veterinary care for their pet;



The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

- Emotional or psychological abuse
 - Using violence or threats towards assistance dogs and pets to intimidate the victim and cause distress, including threatening to harm the animal as well as controlling how the owner is able to care for the animal;
- Technology-facilitated abuse
 - Use of spyware or GPS locators on items such as phones, computers, wearable technology, cars, motorbikes and pets;



Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018

- *52. Section 10 (2) provides that “behaviour” includes... an intentional failure to do, say or otherwise communicate something (e.g.**a failure to feed a family pet**).*
- *53. Section 10 (3) provides that behaviour directed at a person includes behaviour directed towards property.....**Property includes pets or other animals** (for example agricultural livestock) whether belonging to the victim or others.*



Legislation: Housing

- Explore what legislation impacts survivors of DA; respond to consultations if appropriate



Links Pet Fostering Group Terms of Reference Service Standards



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Service Standards

- Offer free service
- Run service to appropriate level for 12 months
- Charity, CIC or voluntary body
- Specify geographical area / no overlap
- At least one employed female member of staff
- Member of Women's Aid
- Seek advice from men's DA services



Service Standards

- Let other members know if services cease
- Embed confidentiality and safety of clients, volunteers and staff
- Full client and pet anonymity (RA for case studies)
- PFS contact details / referral response criteria
- Home based fostering
- Clear client (pet owner) agreement



Service Standards

- Clear volunteer agreement
- Actively update clients
- No waiting lists
- Rehoming policy
- Protect reputation of fellow members
- Abide by relevant animal welfare legislation



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Using Existing Legislation

Animal Welfare Act 2006

- S4: Unnecessary suffering
- S5: Mutilation
- S6: Tail docking
- S7: Administration of poisons
- S8: Fighting
- S9: Duty of care

Animals Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021

- Sections 4, 5, 6 (part), 7 and 8 of AWA



Using the AWA

- Section 18
 - *Subsection 5* authorises an inspector or constable to take a protected animal into possession where a veterinary surgeon certifies that it is suffering or is likely to suffer.
- Section 20
 - Where an animal has been taken into possession under section 18(5) and the animal is being retained, this section enables a magistrates' court to make an order for the treatment, giving up, disposal or destruction of the animal.



Legislation (Scotland)

Animal Health and Welfare Scotland (Act) 2006

- S19: Unnecessary suffering
- S20: Mutilation
- S23: Animal fights
- S24: Ensuring welfare of animals

Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020

- S1: Penalties for offences (S19 and S23 of AWA)
- S19: Taking possession of animals: additional powers



Combined Service Impacts

- Work with other agencies providing a service, collate data in a similar way so that can promote the impact of these services



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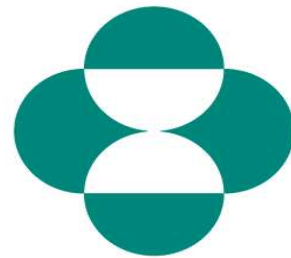
Veterinary Undergraduate Training

- Bristol
- *Cambridge*
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- London (RVC)
- Liverpool
- Nottingham



Surrey

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MSD

Animal Health



Veterinary Undergrad Agenda

- **Identifying Non-Accidental Injury**
- **The Animal Welfare Act – the Role of the Vet**
- **Case Studies / knowing what to do**

- **Veterinary Forensic Pathology**
- **Documentation: Recording Vital Information**



What is Abuse?

- Exploit
- Maltreat
- Hurt
- Misuse
- Damage
- Take advantage of
- Interfere with
- Cruel and violent treatment
- Treat badly
- Cast aspersions on
- Harm
- Revile
- Injure
- Ill-treat
- Wrongdoing
- Misconduct



Types of Abuse

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Neglect



Diagnostic Indicators: NAI Child, NAI Pet

- History inconsistent with injury
- Discrepant history
- Repetitive injury
- Behaviour of parent/child or owner/pet

(Certain patterns of injury)



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Challenges facing the Veterinary Profession

- As veterinarians, we see multiple species. It is the differing attitude / approach which increases the challenge
- We see the tip of the iceberg re cases
 - Often animals are killed so we do not see them
 - Many veterinarians have had no awareness raising of the concept of abuse / non-accidental injury



Incidence

Animal Abuse

- 48% of 404 practitioners
- Personal communication: 1%

Domestic Abuse

- 1 woman in 3 will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime (ONS Domestic Abuse in England and Wales, 2019)
- 2 women are killed each week in England and Wales by a current or former partner (ONS stats y/e Mar 18 – Mar 20)
- 20% of children in the UK have been exposed to domestic violence (ONS)
- 62% of children in domestic households are also directly harmed (ONS)



Pet Population Data

	2019	2022
Dog (PFMA / UK Pet Food)	9m	13m
Dog (PDSA)	9.9m	10.2m
Cat (PFMA / UK Pet Food)	7.5m	12m
Cat (PDSA)	10.9m	11.1m



Non-Accidental Injury: Difficulty of Diagnosis

“The diagnosis of physical abuse (non-accidental injury) is a difficult intellectual & emotional exercise.

It is one of the most difficult subjects in clinical work, needing time, experience and **emotional energy.**”

“The most important step in diagnosing non-accidental injury is to **force yourself to think of it in the first place.**”

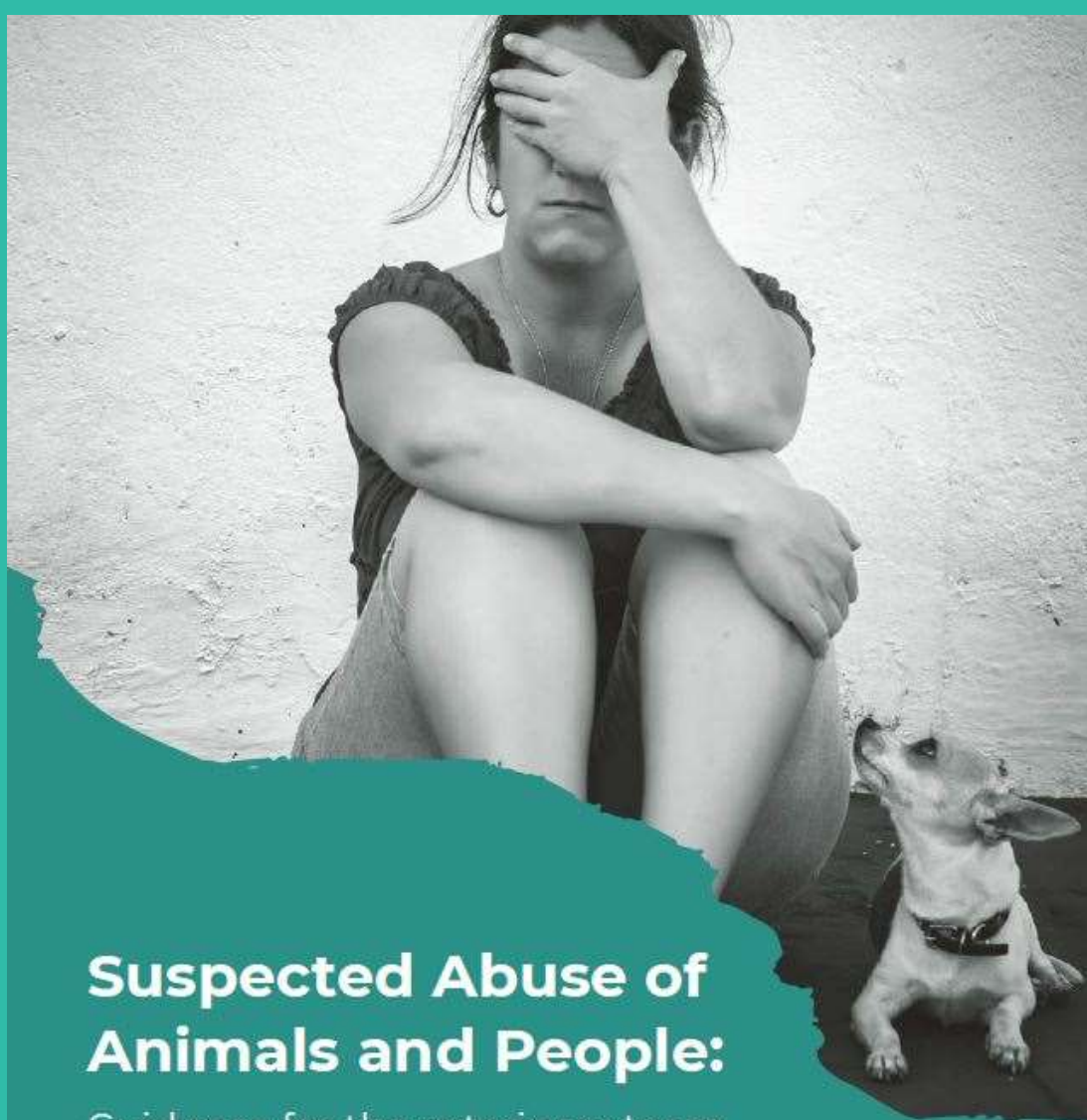
“All those working with children should be warned that their overwhelming impulse on confronting their first case will be to **want to cover it up.**”

Resources



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Suspected Abuse of Animals and People:

Guidance for the veterinary team

To be used in conjunction with

Domestic Abuse Awareness: Guidance for Veterinary Practice Managers and Employees

Kindly funded by the
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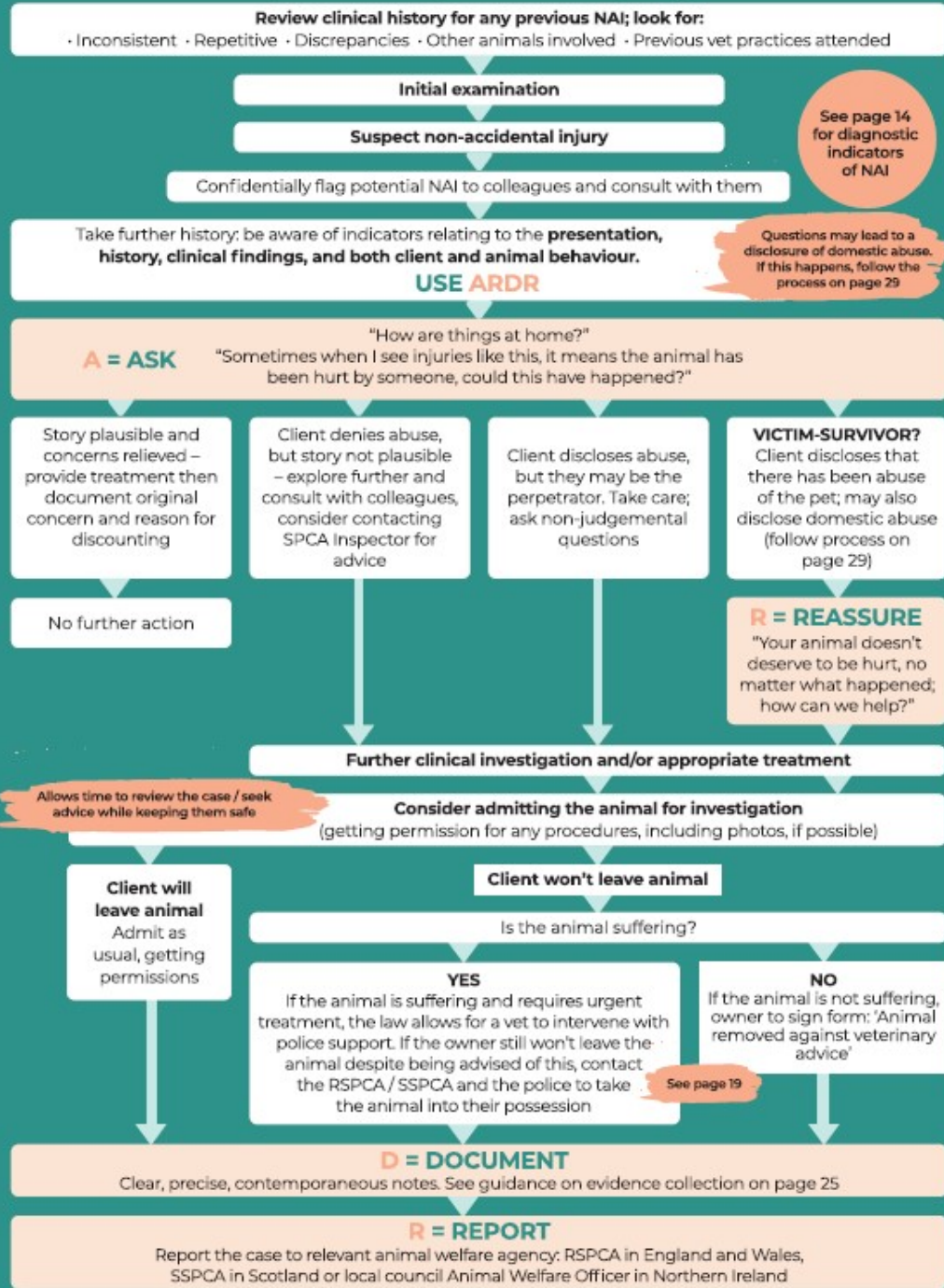
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The ARDR process if animal abuse is suspected: Ask, Reassure, Document, Report



If there is any immediate danger, follow your practice safeguarding policy and phone 999

ARDR Programme

- Ask; open questions (injury may be the result of a deliberate act; is everything ok at home)
- Reassure: never ok to hurt an animal or human
- Document: good clinical notes, if the client discloses the cause, record verbatim
- Refer: to the relevant agency, signpost to DA services

Veterinarians are *not* required to be experts in animal or human abuse



IVC NAI Support

NAI SUPPORT FOR ALL
POWERED BY IVC EVIDENSIA

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SCAN ME

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Registered Charity Number 1196067 (England and Wales)



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0808 2000 247

24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline

www.thelinksgroup.org.uk

*Raising awareness of the link between abuse
of people and animals through support,
training and inter-agency working.*



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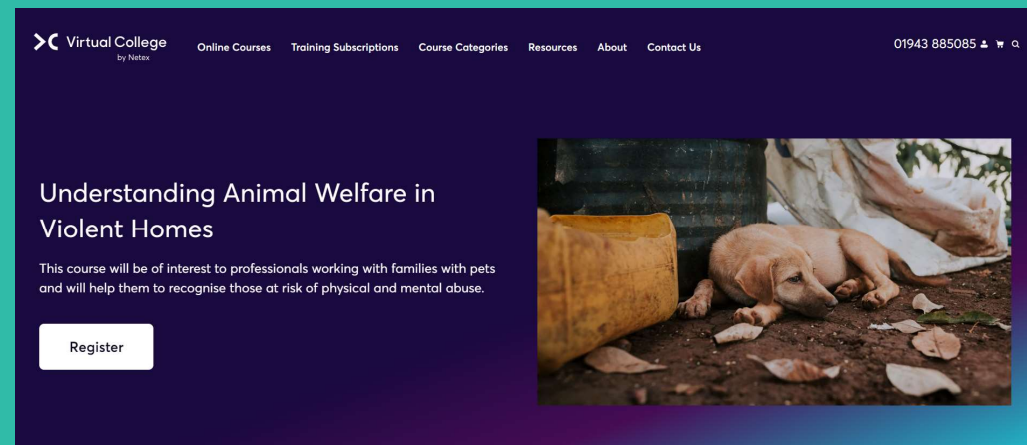
Understanding Animal Welfare: for the **Human Healthcare Professional**

- Understanding pets
- Recognise good welfare
- Assess an animal's wellbeing
- How recognise signs of neglect or abuse
- Understand the link between human abuse and animal abuse and what to do about it
- Where to get help
- How to contact a vet for advice

<https://www.virtual-college.co.uk/resources/free-courses/animal-welfare>



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Virtual College
by Netex


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Understanding Animal Welfare in Violent Homes

This course will be of interest to professionals working with families with pets and will help them to recognise those at risk of physical and mental abuse.

Register





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Links Veterinary Training Initiative



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