

The Intersections of Animal Abuse, Interpersonal Violence, and Child Abuse

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Advocacy programming that helps assure justice for victims and produces a positive, sustainable impact



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OVC TTAC Vital Subjects Series



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This series addresses topics that are critical to victim services work across the country.

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Your Hosts:



Maggie Harris

Noah's Animal House
Peer Trainer



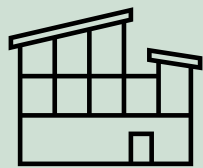
Marlene Richter

Noah's Animal House
Executive Director

Learning Objectives



Explain the correlation between animal abuse and interpersonal violence and how it impacts both human and animal victims.



Describe at least two best practices for implementing pet-friendly policies and facilities in domestic violence shelters to ensure the safety and well-being of both survivors and their pets.

Do You Have at Least One Pet?



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CNN Heroes Spotlight





My Journey



Noah's Animal House by the Numbers

2007–2017

Client intakes	947
Pet intakes	1,511
Domestic violence (DV)/ victim of violence (VV) clients	305
DV/VV pets	876
Repeat clients (6% cumulative)	54
Abandoned/relinquished pets (6% cumulative)	84

The Human–Animal Bond

”The human–animal bond is a **mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship** between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors essential to the health and well-being of both.

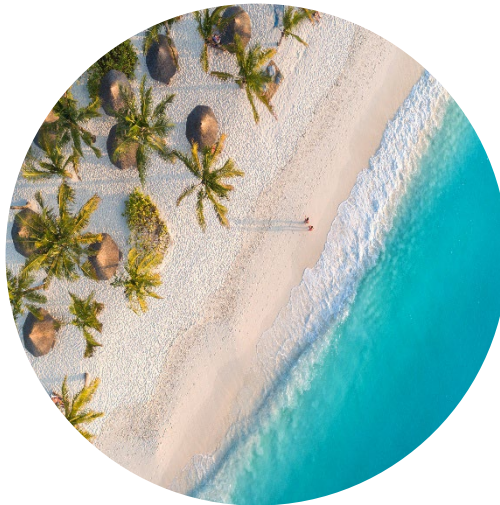
This includes, among other things, **emotional, psychological, and physical** interactions of people, animals, and the environment.”



Our Relationship With Companion Animals



91% consider their companion animal part of the family

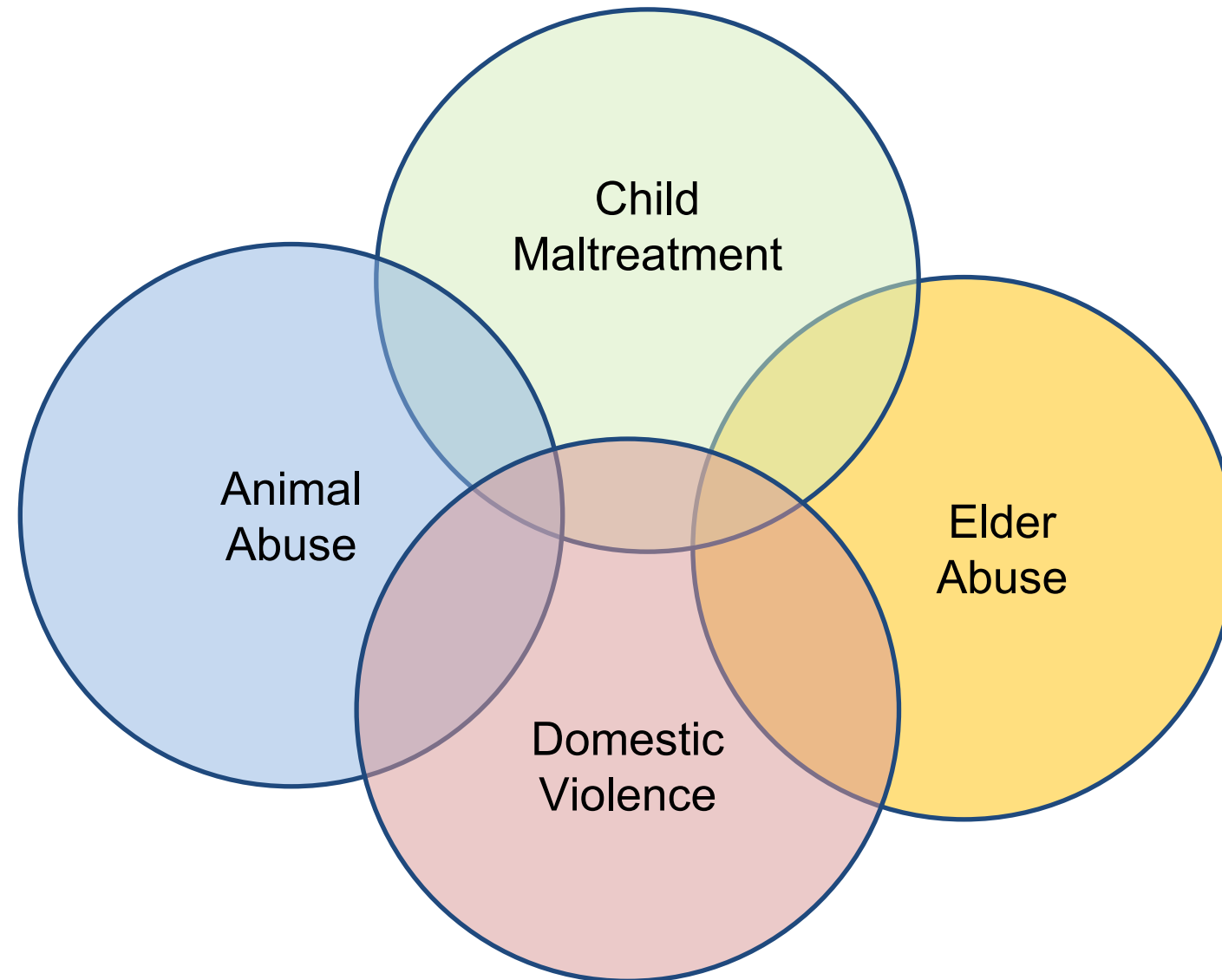


More than half of companion animal owners stated that they preferred a dog or cat to a human companion if stranded on an island.



40% of married female dog owners say they receive more emotional support from the animal than from their husband or kids.

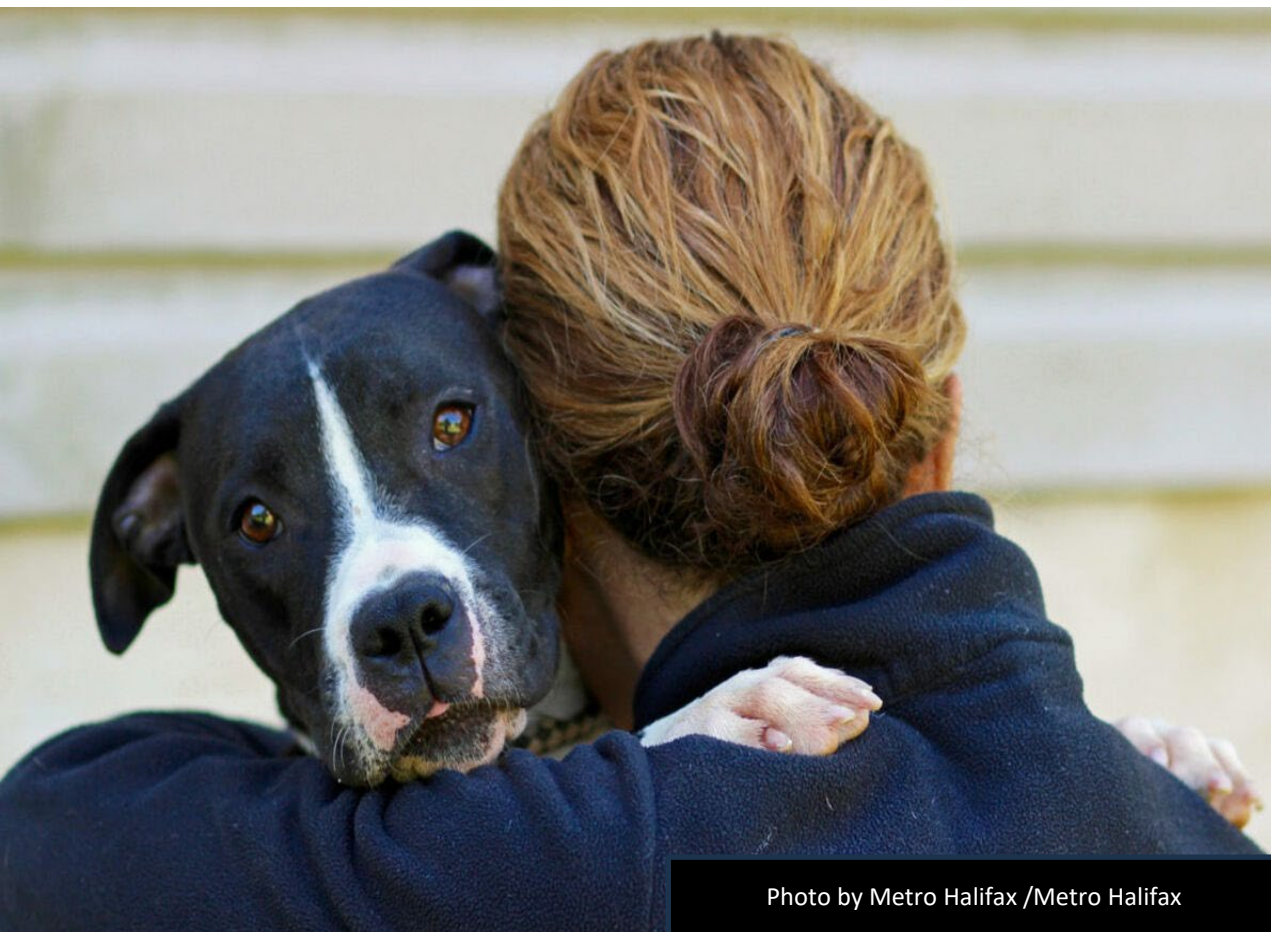
The Link



Power and Control Wheel of Animal Abuse & Domestic Violence



The Link to Domestic Violence



- As many as **89%** of victims with pets say their abusers threatened, hurt, or killed their pets as leverage to prevent them from leaving or to force them to return to care for their animals.
- Harming or threatening to harm animals is **one of the four greatest risk factors** for someone becoming a DV abuser.

The Link to Domestic Violence (Continued)

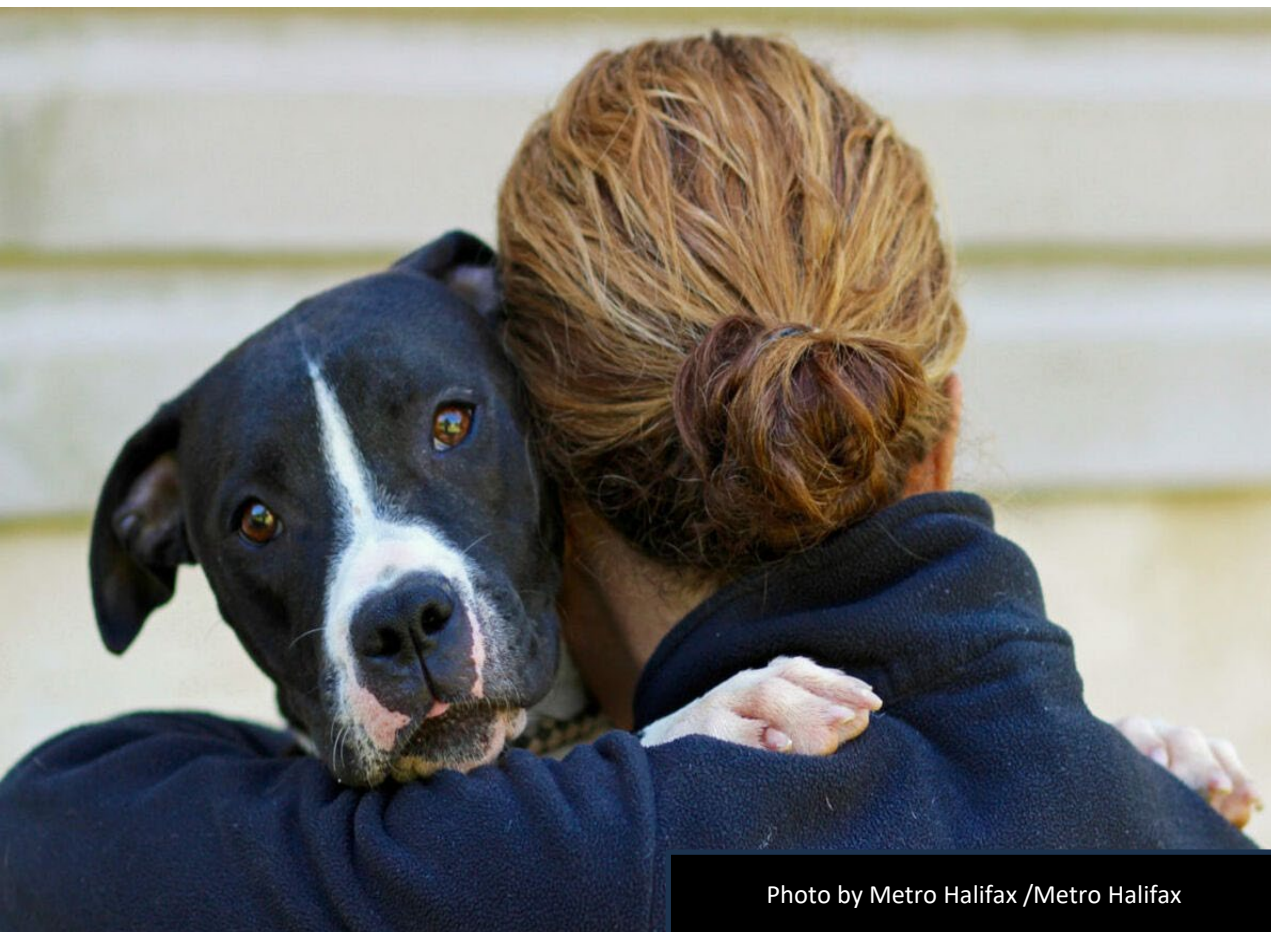
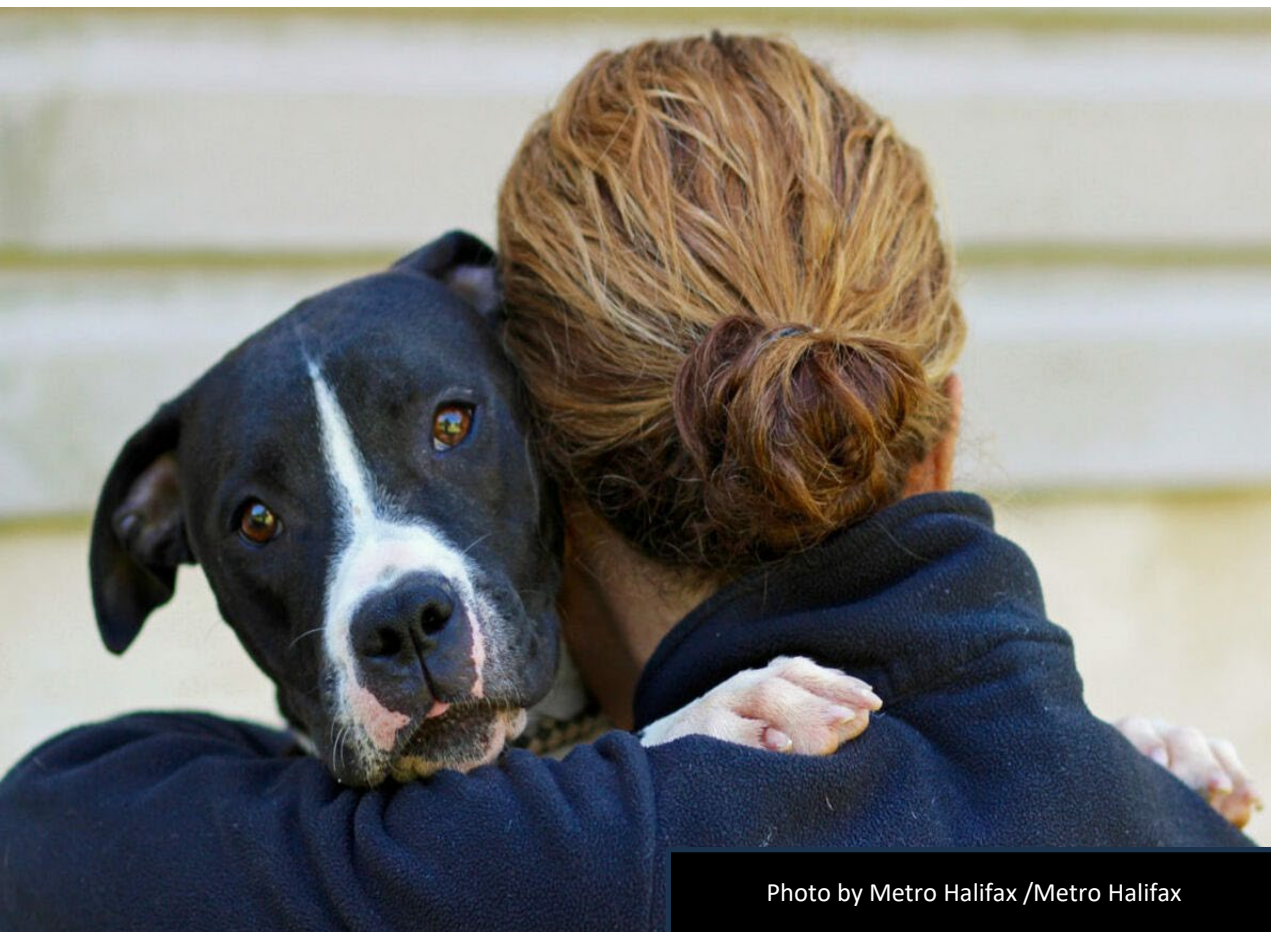


Photo by Metro Halifax /Metro Halifax

- Abusers who victimize both animals and people have **more than twice the rate of access to guns**.
- **78%** of victims whose abusers also have histories of pet abuse **fear they will be killed**.
- **76%** have **been strangled**, and the risk of death to first responders in these cases **doubles**.

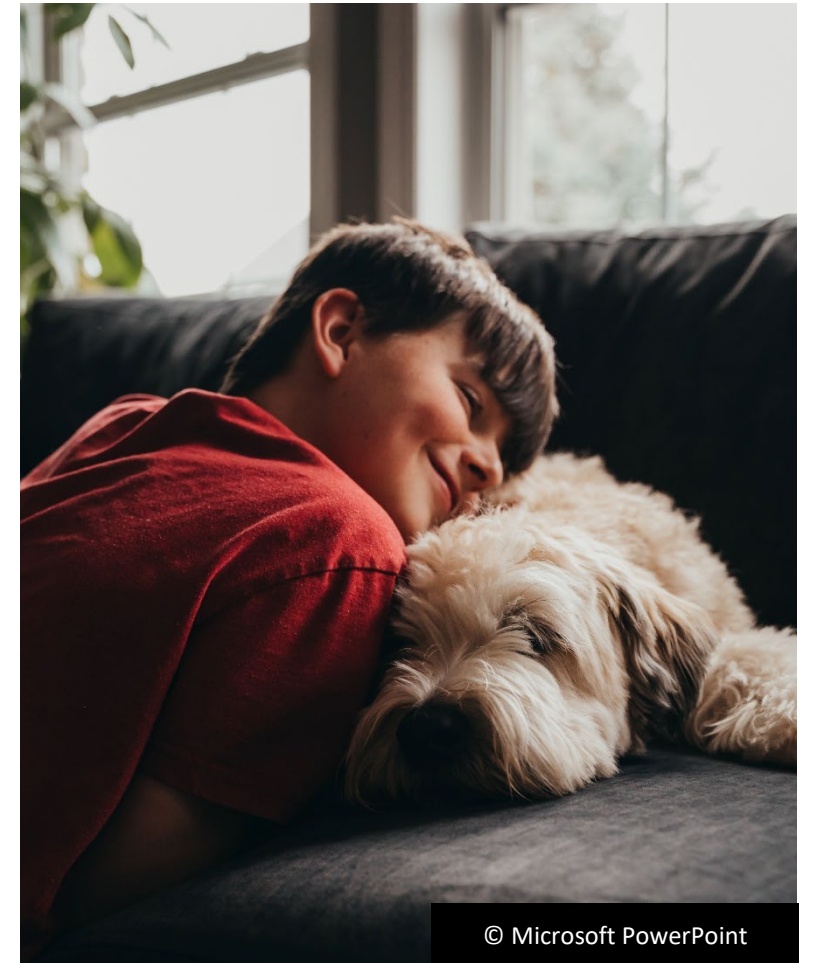
The Link to Homelessness



- **38%** of victims of DV experience homelessness at some point in their lives.
- Between **23%** and **30%** of women overall experience DV, but more than **60% of women experiencing homelessness** do.
- **70%** of women experiencing homelessness reported being physically assaulted by a family member or someone they knew.

The Link to Child Abuse

- 88% of **families investigated for physical abuse** also reported animal abuse.
- 62%–76% of **animal cruelty in the home** occurs in front of children.
- 82% of families investigated for animal abuse were **known to social services agencies**.
- Children who were sexually abused were **five times** more likely to abuse animals.
- **Witnessing animal cruelty in childhood** was the strongest predictor of committing violence in adulthood.



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Don't Forget The Pets

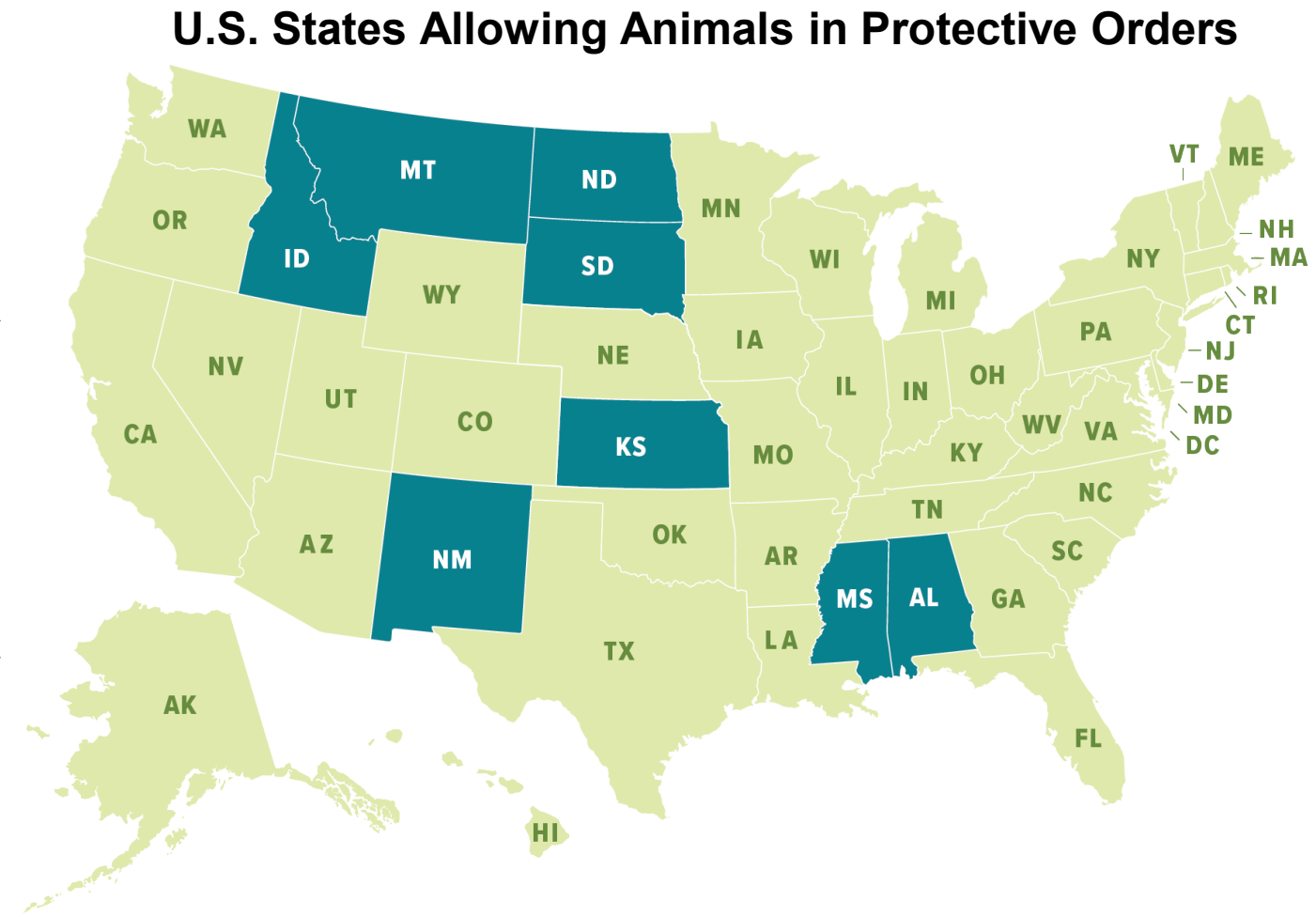
The Link to Violent Crime



- 70% of **people charged with animal cruelty** were also known for other violent behavior (including homicide).
- 50% of school shooters **have a history of animal cruelty.**
- 63% of aggressive criminals had **deliberately inflicted harm to an animal** in childhood.
- 48% of rapists and 30% of child molesters **committed animal abuse** in adolescence.

The Good Work Being Done

- All **50 U.S. states and 4 territories** have felony provisions for first-time offenses.
- 44 states and the District of Columbia **have statutes allowing animals to be included in protective orders** (light green ones on the map).
- 12 states and the District of Columbia **mandate or permit child protection and social work officials to report suspected animal abuse**.

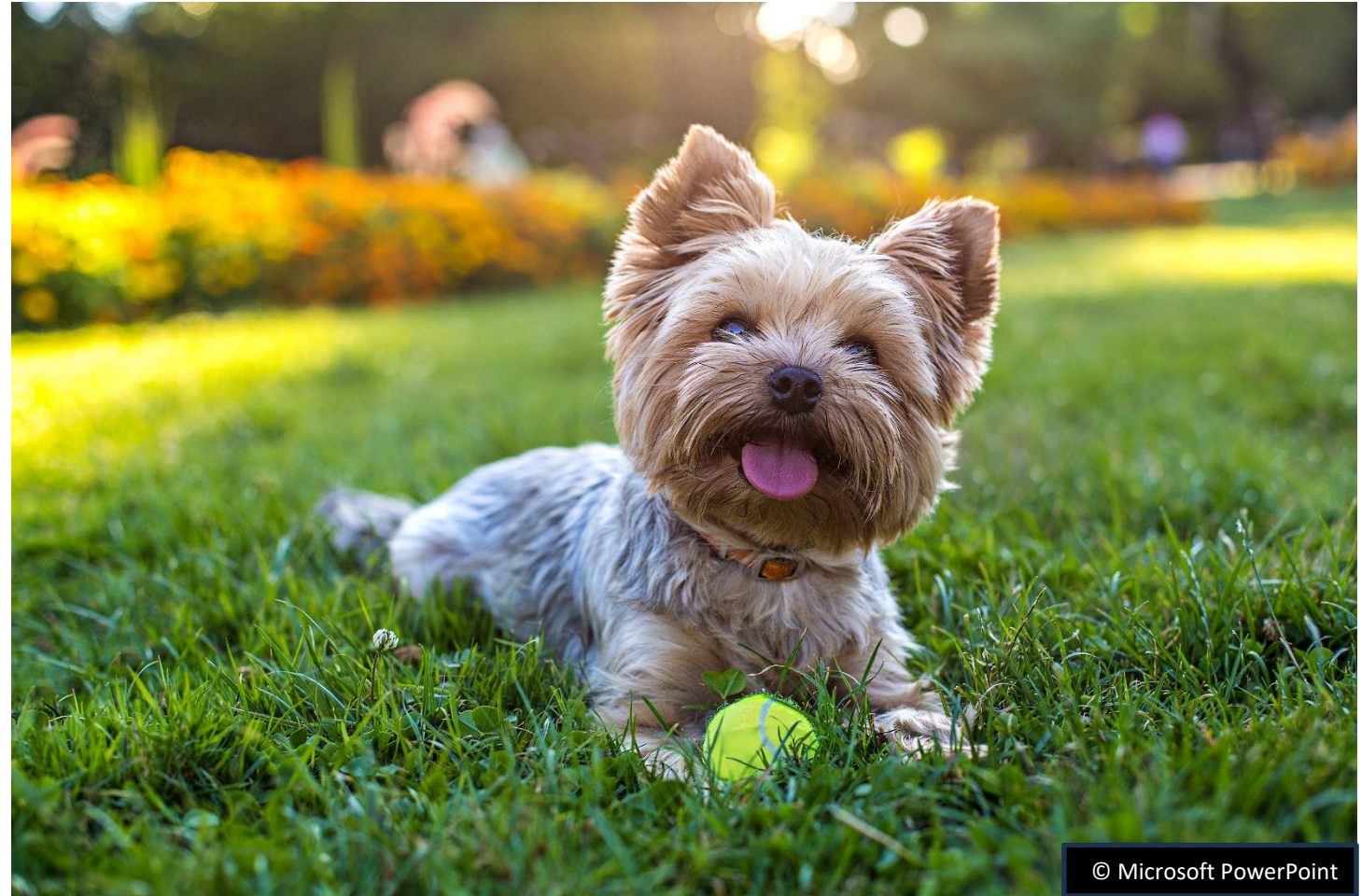


Why Abusers Target Pets

Abusers target pets to:

- Create and sustain fear and intimidation.
- Remove a critical source of support and comfort.
- Exert power and control over victims.

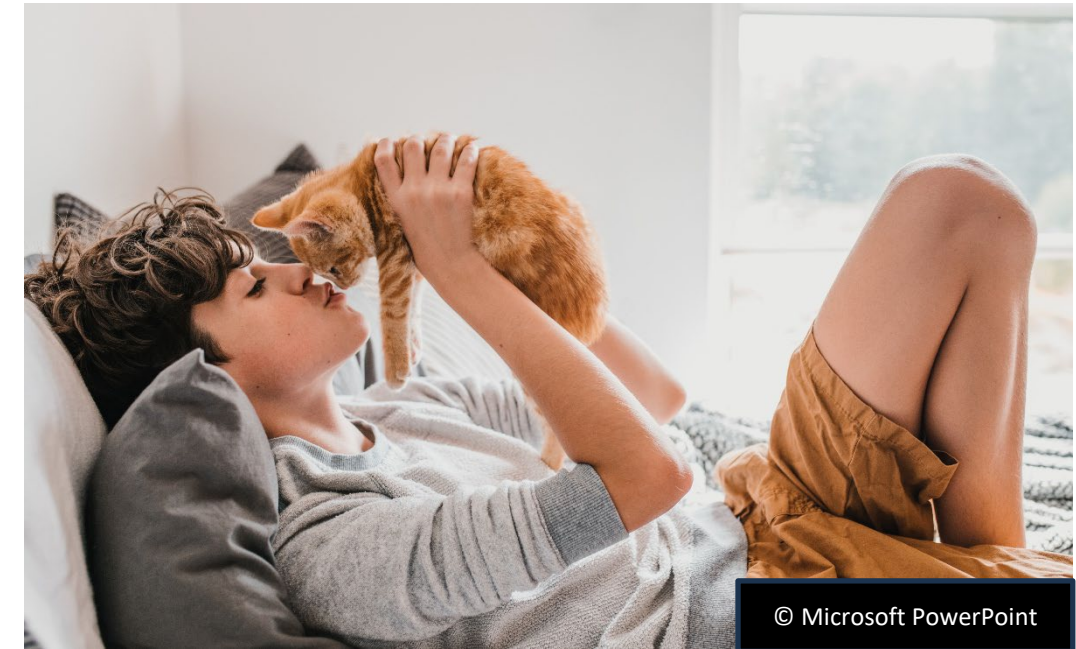
Can you think of any other reasons why?



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U.S. Pet Statistics

- 66%–71% of U.S. households **own at least one pet** (roughly 90–94 million households). In other words, *about 2 out of 3 American households have a pet.*
- Studies suggest **10%–25% of individuals who are not securely housed have a pet**, with some estimates higher (up to ~1 in 3 people), depending on location and method.
- ~254,000 pets **owned by unhoused people** in the United States.



The Human–Animal Bond

- Unconditional love and connection
- Emotional grounding and mental health support
- A sense of identity, purpose, and dignity
- Protection and survival
- Family continuity and belonging
- A trusted bridge to services and support
- Mutual rescue and reliance
- Reduced stress and physiological calming
- Recognition of pets as family



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Animal-Centered Policies

Key principles:

- Co-sheltering whenever possible (allowing pets to stay with survivors)
- No restrictive breed or size policies unless safety requires it
- Confidentiality protections for both survivor and pet location

Why it matters:

- Pets are often used as tools of coercion (“the link” between animal abuse and DV).
- Survivors may not leave if pets are excluded (nearly half report this barrier).

Best Practices

- Include pets in intake assessments and safety planning.
- Develop pet-specific safety protocols (for custody, transport, and emergency evacuation).
- Allow flexible documentation requirements, recognizing that many survivors flee without paperwork.
- Include questions about pets when screening hotline callers to identify safety risks and service needs.



3

TYPES OF

SUPPORT ANIMALS

SERVICE DOGS

THERAPY DOGS

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS

COMPARISON	SERVICE DOGS	THERAPY DOGS	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
ADA covered: Rights to bring animal into public establishments			
Needs to tolerate a wide variety of experiences, environments, people			
May live with their Disabled owners, even if "No Pets" policy in place			
Primary function is to provide emotional support, through companionship			
Specifically trained to assist just one person			
Provide emotional support and comfort to many people			

ONLY TWO questions:

1. Is the dog a service animal because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

Policy Considerations (Continued)

ANIMAL CATEGORY COMPARISON	SERVICE ANIMALS	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS	THERAPY ANIMALS	COMPANION ANIMALS
Rights as outlined by the ADA allowing Service Animals into public places including food establishments	✓	✗	✗	✗
Needs to tolerate a wide variety of environments and people	✓	✓	✓	✓
Specifically trained to assist just one individual with a disability needs	✓	✗	✗	✗
Primary function is to provide emotional support to one individual	✗	✓	✗	✗
Provides support and comfort to many people	✗	✗	✓	✗
Allowed to ride in shopping carts or sit on tables and chairs	✗	✗	✗	✗



COMPARISONS AT A GLANCE

* Comparisons are for general guidance only



Service Animal – any dog or miniature horse individually trained to do work and/or perform tasks for the benefit of the person with a disability.

Emotional Support Animal – animals that provide comfort and support in forms of affection and companionship for a person with various mental and/or emotional needs.

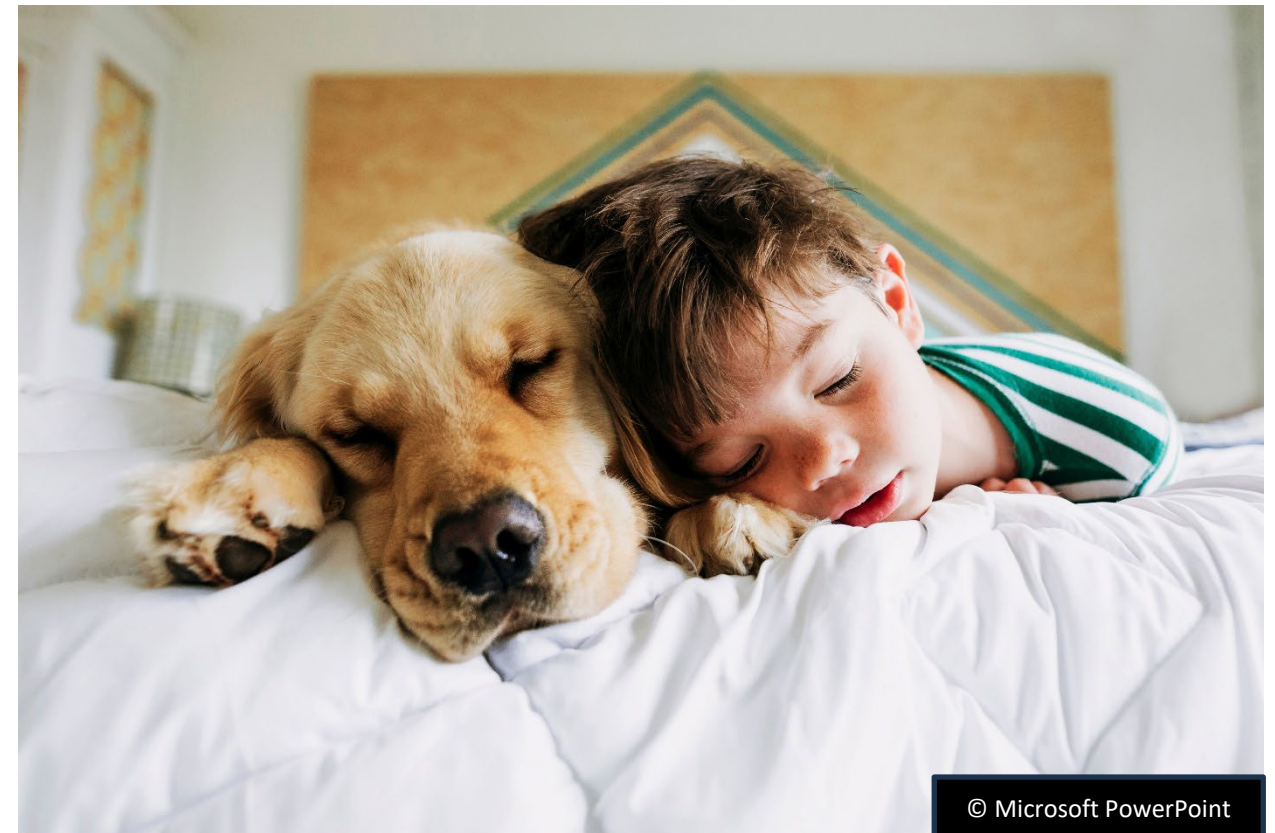
Therapy Animal – animal that is trained to provide affection, comfort, and love to people in hospitals, nursing homes, disaster areas, etc.

Companion Animal - an animal that does not “work” by doing specific tasks for a person with a disability but instead provides companionship for a person with out without a disability.

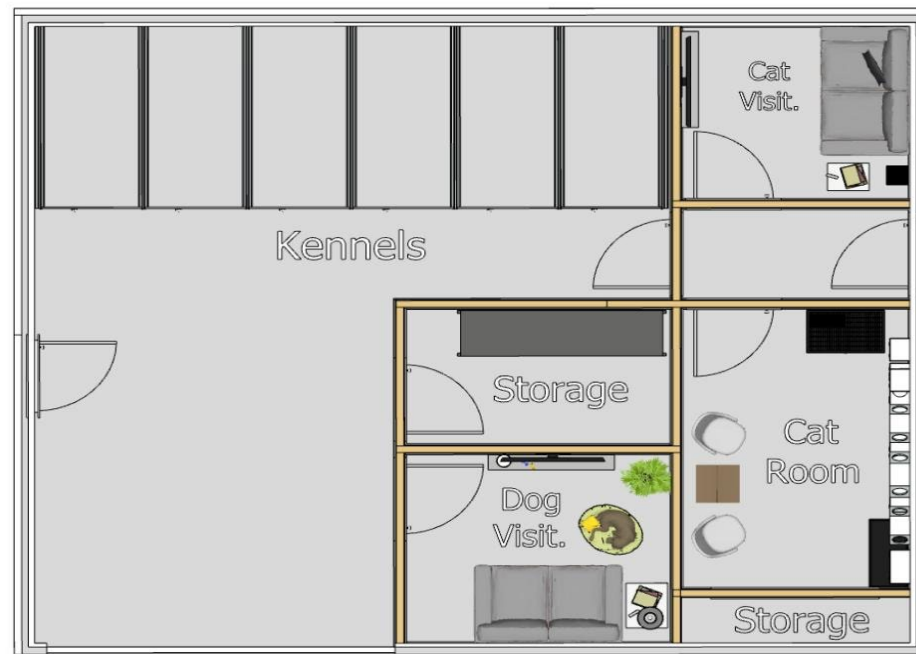
Facility Design

Design features:

- Private or semi-private rooms for families with pets
- Clear boundaries of where pets can and cannot be
- Pet relief areas (e.g., outdoor running areas, designated walking routes)
- Ventilation and soundproofing to reduce stress
- Secure entry and exit to prevent abuser tracking



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Facility Examples

Alternate Models

- About 1,200 Safe Havens programs exist nationwide, including:
 - Onsite programs
 - Off-site programs, such as fostering and temporary boarding

[Safe Havens for Pets](#)

Building Partnerships

Critical partners:

- Animal shelters and humane societies
- Veterinary clinics
- Foster networks
- Law enforcement and legal aid

Why this matters:

- Cross-reporting and collaboration improvement
- Early intervention and safety outcomes

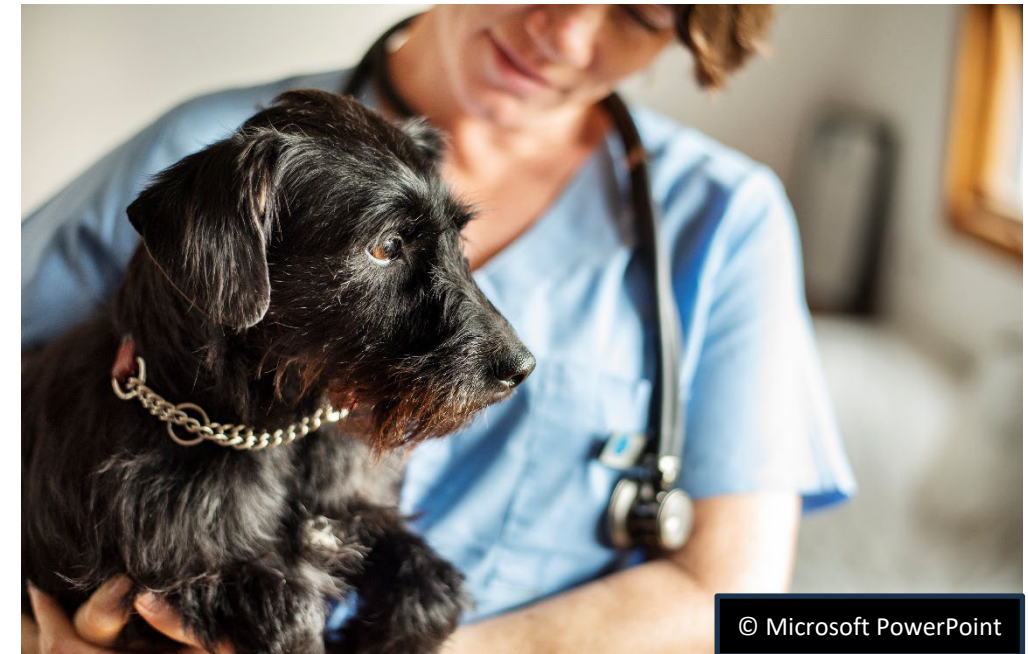
Examples of support services:

- Temporary foster care (Safe Havens)
- Free or low-cost veterinary care
- Pet food banks and supply programs



Intake

- Have a caseworker ensure the pet parent completes a consent/release form authorizing veterinary care in the pet parent's absence.
- Outline financial responsibilities for all collaborative partners.
- Establish clear vetting protocols for foster parents.
- Complete the initial veterinary exam and provide basic care.



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Pet Resources and Supplies



Essentials to offer onsite:

- Food, bowls, and bedding
- Leashes, crates, and carriers
- Litter boxes and waste supplies
- Basic medical care access

Intake readiness:

- Encourage survivors (when possible) to bring:
 - Vet records, ID tags, and microchip info
 - Medications and comfort items

Health, Safety, and Risk Management

Animal care protocols:

- Vaccination verification (or onsite vet partnerships)
- Parasite control and sanitation procedures
- Behavior screening for aggression/stress

Human safety considerations:

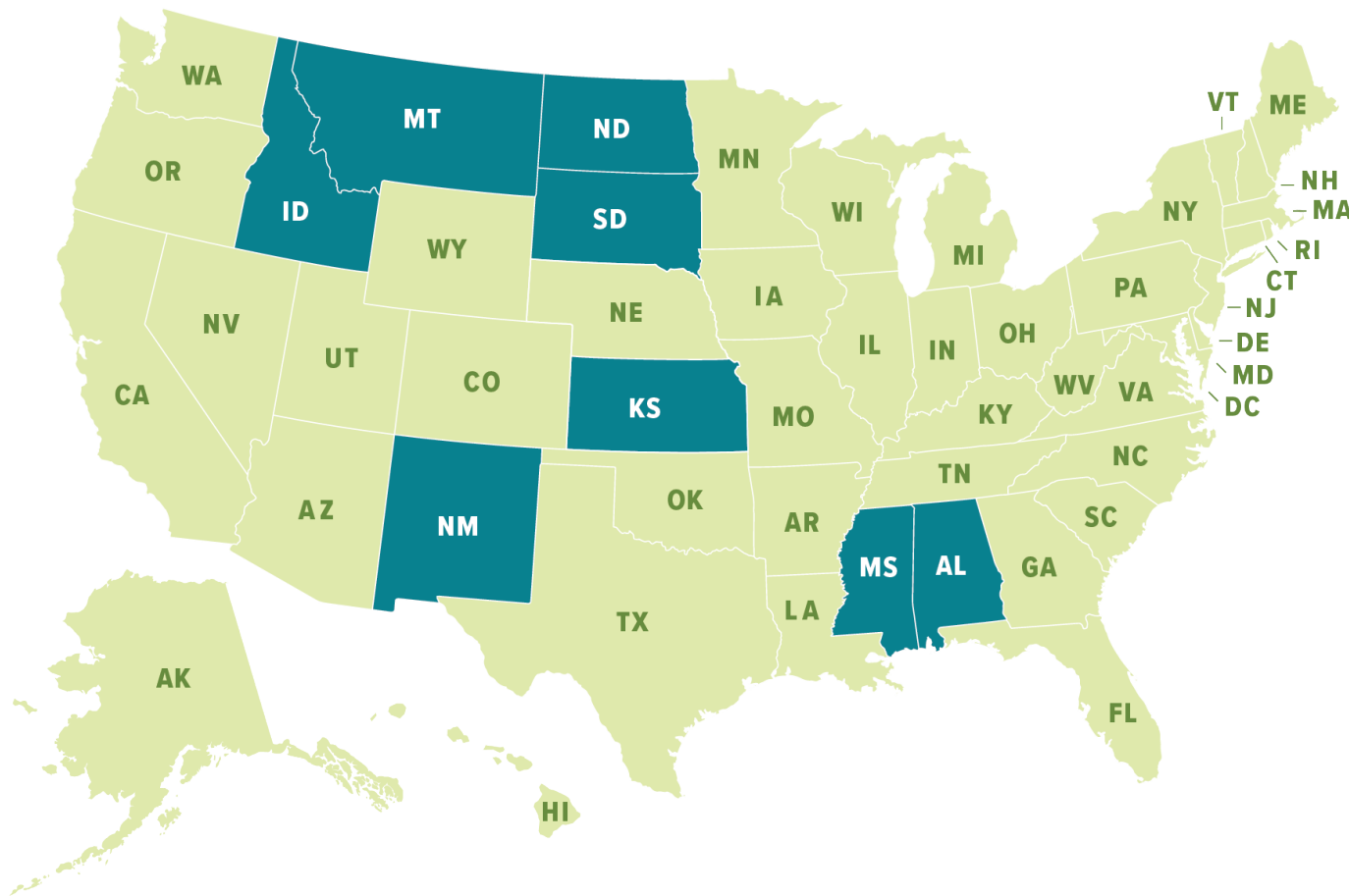
- Clear rules for:
 - Leashing and crating
 - Supervision of pets around children
 - Managing allergies and phobias among residents

Trauma-informed approach:

- Recognize pets as emotional support and a stabilizing presence.
- Avoid policies that unnecessarily separate survivors from their pets.



Legal and Policy Considerations



- Incorporate pets into protective orders (where permitted by the state).
- Clarify ownership documentation to prevent disputes.
- Develop protocols for abuser attempts to reclaim animals.
- Be aware that state laws set specific timeframes before a pet can be legally considered abandoned personal property.

Funding and Sustainability

Common funding sources:

- Grants (e.g., animal welfare organizations)
- Corporate partnerships (e.g., pet food, supplies)
- Community donations

Cost considerations:

- Facility retrofitting (e.g., kennels, ventilation)
- Staff training
- Veterinary partnerships



Key Takeaways

- Pet-friendly shelters are life-saving interventions, not optional amenities.
- Only ~25% of DV shelters currently allow pets.
- Pet integration should be safe, flexible, and trauma informed.
- Collaboration with animal welfare systems is essential.





RESOURCES

Helpful Organizations and Their Websites

- [Animal Welfare Institute](#)
- [Don't Forget the Pets](#)
- [My Dog Is My Home](#)
- [Fear Free Happy Homes](#)
- [National Link Coalition](#)
- [Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative](#)
- [Sheltering Animals & Families Together \(SAF-T\)](#)
- [Greater Good Charities](#)
- [RedRover](#)
- [Urban Resource Institute](#)
- [CattleDog Publishing \(Dr. Sophia Yin/Low Stress Handling\)](#)
- [Midwest Veterinary Supply](#)

Contact Information

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Next National Webinar

Topic: Expert Q&A—Emotional Intelligence in Victim Services

Date: May 20, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET

Featured Hosts: Cassidee Carlson and Krista Flannigan

Wrapping Up

- Certificate of attendance
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Thank You!

Questions?

