

Pets and the Socialization of Children

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ABSTRACT. Despite the widespread ownership of pet animals in American families, there is very little analysis of the role of pets in child development. This paper will examine the influence of pet animals on child development; the impact of pet loss and bereavement on children; the problem of child cruelty to animals and its relationship to child abuse; and the role of pets in both normal and disturbed families. The authors will also review their own research study of adult prisoners and juveniles in institutions in regard to their experiences with pet animals.

INTRODUCTION

Given the large numbers of children who have had pets, it is striking how little attention has been paid to the role pets play in the emotional and developmental lives of children. In addition to the mythological, symbolic and utilitarian aspects of the animal/human relationship, recent research has focused on the developmental aspects of this relationship. While there is a literature on the role of animals in myths, fairytales, dreams and nightmares, very little has been written on companion animals and children. This paper will focus on what is known about the normal developmental interactions between animals and children and the implications of this knowledge to the everyday lives of children. In addition to a review of the literature on companion animals and children, we will also report on our surveys of juveniles and adults in correctional institutions and their experiences with pet animals (Robin, ten Benschel, Quigley and Anderson, 1983, 1984; ten Benschel, Ward, Kruttschnitt, Quigley and Anderson, 1984).

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COMPANION ANIMALS AND CHILDREN

Companion animals are a vital part of the healthy emotional development of children. As children develop, animals play different roles for the child at each stage of development. The period of childhood encompasses a number of developmental tasks—the acquisition of basic trust and self-esteem, a sense of responsibility and competence, feelings of empathy toward others and the achievement of autonomy—that can be facilitated for the child by a companion animal. The constancy of animal companionship can help children move along the developmental continuum and may even have an inhibiting effect toward mental disturbances (Levinson, 1970).

In what ways can a pet meet the mental health needs of a child? In the first instance, a pet is an active and energetic playmate, which facilitates the release of a child's pent-up energy and tension (Feldman, 1977). In general, a child who is physically active is less likely to be tense than one who is not. The security of the companion animal may encourage exploratory behavior, particularly for fearful children in unfamiliar situations. It may also serve as a bridge or facilitator towards relationships with other children. And for those living in situations without other children, a pet may be a substitute for human companionship. As one child said, "Pets are important especially for kids without brothers and sisters. They can get close to this animal and they both can grow up to love one another" (Robin, ten Bensel, Quigley and Anderson, 1983).

Caring responsibly for a pet will help a child experience the pleasures of responsible pet ownership. Levinson (1972) suggests that responsibility for pet care should be introduced gradually and that parents should recognize there will be periods when even for a conscientious child the care of a pet will be too much. Adolescents living in normal family environments more often shared the responsibility of pet care with other family members which became a source of mutual enjoyment (Robin, ten Bensel, Quigley and Anderson, 1983). The successful care of a valued pet will promote a sense of importance and being needed. By observing the pet's biological functions, children will learn about sexuality and elimination (Levinson, 1972; Schowalter, 1983).

In laboratory experiments, it was found that people of all ages, including children, use animals to feel safe and create a sense of intimacy. As Beck and Katcher (1983) have noted, pairing an animal with a strange human being apparently acts to make that person, or

the situation surrounding that person, less threatening. For example, in an experiment where children were brought into a room with an interviewer alone or with an interviewer with a dog, the children were found to be more relaxed as measured by blood pressure rates when entering a room with the interviewer and an animal (Beck and Katcher, 1983). In another study in England, Messant (1983) found people in public parks were considered more approachable for conversation when accompanied by a pet. In general, the presence of companion animals seems to have a relaxing and calming effect on people. When people talk to other people there is a tendency for blood pressure to rise; however, when people talk to or observe animals there is a tendency for blood pressure to lower.

Pets as Transitional Objects

It is widely accepted that the key factor in the relationship between children and companion animals is the unconditional love and acceptance of the animal for the child, who accepts the child "as is" and does not offer feedback or criticism (Levinson, 1969, 1972; Beck and Katcher, 1983). As Siegel (1962) has written, "The animal does not judge but offers a feeling of intense loyalty. . . . It is not frightening or demanding, nor does it expose its master to the ugly strain of constant criticism. It provides its owner with the chance to feel important." The simple, uncomplicated affection of an animal for his master was also noted by Freud in a letter to Marie Bonaparte, "It really explains why we can love an animal like Topsy (or Jo-Fi) with such an extraordinary intensity: affection without ambivalence . . . that feelings of an intimate affinity, of an undisputed solidarity. Often when stroking Jo-Fi, I have caught myself humming a melody which, unmusical as I am, I can't help recognizing as the aria from Don Giovanni: A bond of friendship unites us both" (Freud, 1976).

Pets as Parents

Beck and Katcher (1983) have suggested that as children get older, the pet acquires many of the characteristics of the ideal mother. The pet is unconditional, devoted, attentive, loyal and non-verbal—all elements of the primary symbiotic relationship with the mother. From a developmental point of view, a major task of childhood is the movement away from the primary symbiotic relationship with

the mother and the establishment of a separate and distinct identity (Erickson, 1980). This process of separation and individuation creates feelings of "separation anxiety" that occur throughout the life process, particularly at stressful times of loss or during new experiences (Perin, 1983). "One could regard the entire life cycle as constituting a more or less successful process of distancing from and introjection of the lost symbiotic mother, an eternal longing for the actual or fantasied ideal state of self" (Mahler, 1972).

Pets function, particularly for adolescents, as transitional objects, much like the blanket or teddy bear does for infants. As transitional objects, pets help children feel safe without the presence of parents. Pets are more socially acceptable as transitional objects for older children than are inanimate objects. Adolescence brings with it a changing relationship to pets, in large part due to this emergence of pets as transitional objects. At this period pets can be a confidant, an object of love, a protector, a social facilitator or a status symbol (Fogle, 1983). Moreover, the bond between children and pets is enhanced by its animate quality. The crucial attachment behaviors of proximity and caring between children and pets forms an alive reciprocating alliance (Bowlby, 1969). The relationship is simpler and less conflicted than are human relationships.

Like other transitional objects, most of the shared behaviors between animals and children are tactile and/or kinetic rather than verbal. Levinson (1969) has stated that pets may satisfy the child's need for physical contact and touch without the fear of entanglements that accompany contact with human beings. Children have a great need for empathetic listening and association with others. It is the non-interventiveness and empathy that makes animals such good companions. Pets are often perceived by children as attentive and empathetic listeners. As one child wrote, "My dog is very special to me. We have had it for seven years now. When I was little I used to go to her and pet her when I was depressed and crying. She seemed to understand. You could tell by the look in her eyes" (Robin, ten Bensel, Quigley and Anderson, 1983).

Pets as Children

Along with the parental role, pets simultaneously or alternately function as children for the pet owner (Beck and Katcher, 1983). This idea was expressed by the prophet Nathan during antiquity (2

Sam. 12:3): "The poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he bought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own morsel, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was to him as a daughter." Midgley (1984) notes in her discussion of this passage that the lamb was not a substitute for the poor man's children as he had children. His love for the lamb was nonetheless the kind of love suited to a child. The lamb was a live creature needing love, and was able to respond to parental cherishing. The helplessness of the animal drew out from the man nurturing and humane caring.

Fogle (1983) notes that studies in New York State show that pets can elicit maternal behaviors in children as young as three years old. In fact, according to Beck and Katcher (1983), much of the usual activity of children and pet animals resembles a parent/child relationship with the animal representing the child as an infant. Children unconsciously view their pets as an extension of themselves and treat their pets as they want to be treated themselves. This process is what Desmond Morris has called "infantile parentalism," suggesting this is one way children cope with the loss of their childhood (Morris, 1967). Schowalter (1983), for example, discussed the case of a five-year-old insecure boy referred for psychiatric care due to his habit of petting his goldfish. For this boy, petting the fish helped him feel both caring and cared for. Gradually he was able to transfer his affection toward a dog. With increased parental nurturance, he became more confident and outgoing.

Sherick (1981) also presented a case of a nine-year-old girl whose pets became symbolic substitutes for her ideal self. The sick pets that she cared for and nursed back to health represented the cared-for, protected and loved child that she longed to be. The girl's mother was a vain woman concerned with appearances who turned most of her maternal instincts toward the family pet rather than her daughter. The girl's behavior toward her pet was an unconscious effort to model "good enough" mothering to her mother. Searles (1960) points out that many children grow up with parents unable to nurture them, because of their own disturbance, but who can show affection to an animal. The child then grows up thinking if only he or she were an animal then they might receive parental love. Kupferman (1977) presented a case of a seven-year-old boy whose ego development was so faulty that he took on the identity of a cat and meowed to his psychiatrist.

Pets and Families

The role of a pet in a family will be dependent upon the family's structure, its emotional undercurrents, the emotional and physical strengths and weaknesses of each of its members, and the family's social climate (Levinson, 1969). When a pet is acquired by a family a variety of changes frequently occurs in family relationships and dynamics. Cain (1983) found in her study of pets in family systems that families reported both positive and negative changes after acquiring a pet. Some families reported increased closeness expressed around the care of a pet, more time spent together playing with a pet, more happiness of family members, and less arguing. However, other families reported more arguing and problems over the rules and care of the pet and less time spent with other family members; for example, children spent less time with their parents and husbands spent less time with their wives (Cain, 1983).

Pets become, according to the theory of Murray Bowen, part of the "undifferentiated ego mass" of the family and form part of the emotional structure of that family (Bowen, 1965). Many people indeed consider their pet as a member of the family. In Cain's survey of 60 families, 87 percent considered their pet as a member of the family (Cain, 1983). Ruby has also noted that most families include their pets in their family photographs (Ruby, 1983). Family members not only interact with their pets in their own characteristic manner, but they also interact with each other in relationship to the pet. In some families, pets become the major focus of attention and assume a position even more important than human family members (Levinson, 1969).

As Levinson has cautioned, pets may be involved in family pathology (Levinson, 1969). For example, one young woman committed suicide after being ordered by her parents to kill her pet dog for punishment for spending the night with a man. The woman used the same gun on herself that she used to kill her dog (Levinson, 1969). In another case, Rynearson (1978) discussed a severely disturbed adult woman who as a child had a profound fear of her parents and siblings. She turned to her cat as a confidant with whom she shared her troubles. One day her younger sister was scratched by the cat and the woman watched her enraged mother kill the cat with a shovel and then her mother turned to her and said, "Never forget that you are the one who really killed her, because you weren't watching her closely—it's all your fault."

Children can involve their animals psychodynamically in their use of such defense mechanisms as displacement, projection, splitting and identification (Schowalter, 1983). There are times when a child living in a disturbed family will become overly attached to a pet to the detriment of human relationships. Such children have a basic distrust of people which becomes overgeneralized. This basic distrust of human attachments contributes to the intense displacement of attachment to a pet who is consistently receptive as a source of love and caring. In anxiously attaching to the animal, a child can gratify part of the self without risking interpersonal involvement. Disturbed children with limited ego strength will turn to their pets for warmth and caring to meet their regressed, insatiable need for closeness and love (Rynearson, 1978; Levinson, 1972).

In a study of 269 disturbed children institutionalized for delinquency problems, 47 percent said pets were important for children growing up because they provided someone for them to love. For the control group of students in regular public schools, a pet was important to them because it taught responsibility. For many abused and disturbed children, a pet becomes their sole love object and a substitute for family love. As one boy said of his pet, "My kitty was the joy of my life. It never hurt me or made me upset like my parents. She always came to me when she wanted affection." Another boy wrote, "My favorite pet was my dog Bell. I loved her very much. I took care of her all the time and never mistreated her. Sometimes she was the only person I could talk to." Overall, abused and disturbed children in this study were more likely to talk to their pets about their problems. Pets became their sole source of solace at times of stress, loneliness or boredom (Robin, ten Bense, Quigley and Anderson, 1983).

PET LOSS

For many children, the loss or death of a companion animal is the first experience with death and bereavement. In fact, it is often stated that one of the most important aspects of pet ownership for children is that it provides the child with experiences of dealing with the reality of illness and death which will prepare them for these experiences later in life (Fox, 1983). By fully experiencing the grief of losing a pet, the child learns that death is a natural part of the life process, is painful, but is tolerable and does not last forever. A child

can learn that death is permanent and that dead animals will not come back to haunt them. The children can also be taught that guilt feelings following the death of a loved object are common and can be overcome (Levinson, 1972).

There is a tendency, however, to minimize a child's grief over a lost pet. In the vast literature on children and bereavement there are few references to bereavement from pet loss (Nieburg, 1982). The death of a pet has been considered an "emotional dress rehearsal" and preparation for greater losses yet to come (Levinson, 1967). However, there are strong indicators that the loss of a pet is more than a "rehearsal," and it is a profound experience in itself for many children.

In a study of 507 adolescents in Minnesota, over one-half had lost their "special pet" and only two youths reported feeling indifferent to the loss (Robin, ten Benschel, Quigley and Anderson, 1983). Most of the youths whose pets had died had deep feelings of regret and sadness such as those who wrote, "My sorrows are very deep for my special pet, but I know she is in some place where she is treated very well. And I know she is thinking of me because I always think of her." And, "I was sad that he had to be put to sleep but I was glad that he didn't die painfully."

Stewart (1983) also surveyed 135 schoolchildren in central Scotland on their experiences and feelings toward pet loss. She asked the children to write about their pets and how they felt if their pet had died. She found that 44 percent had pets that died and two-thirds of these children expressed profound grief at their loss, such as the child who said, "I didn't believe it, I didn't know where I was." In most cases, the children got over the loss, usually with parental support. But in all the bereavements that seemed unresolved the parents were unwilling to have another animal.

How a child reacts to the loss of a pet depends largely on his or her age and emotional development, the length of time the child had the pet, the quality of the relationship, the circumstances surrounding the loss of the pet, and the quality of support available to the child. Pre-school children are less likely to become deeply attached to their pets, and are less likely to view the pet loss as irrevocable. According to Nieburg and Fischer (1982), children under five years usually experience the pet loss as a temporary absence, and from five years to nine years or so, pet loss is not seen as inevitable and is believed possible to avoid. Stewart (1983) found that school-aged children often expressed profound grief for a short time, and then

seemed to quickly adapt to normal, especially if a new animal was introduced. Most young children miss their deceased animals, but more as a playmate than as an object that satisfies basic emotional needs.

It is usually adolescents who have the most profound experiences with pet loss. From early adolescence on, children begin to develop an adult perception that death is final, permanent and inevitable (Nieburg and Fischer, 1982). Adolescents tend to take longer to get over their grief, in part because their relationships with pets tends to be more intense at this age (Stewart, 1983; Nieburg and Fisher, 1982). How a young adolescent will react to pet loss will depend on the circumstances surrounding the death of a pet. A pet may be lost in a variety of ways such as old age or illness, being run over, theft, given away or traumatic death. Unfortunately, there are very few empirically based epidemiological studies on the nature of pet loss. In Minnesota it was found that abused and disturbed youths suffered more pet loss, had their pets for shorter times, and were most likely to have had their pet killed accidentally or purposely more than any other factor (Robin, ten Bense, Quigley and Anderson, 1983, 1984). Most of those children whose pets were traumatically killed were saddened by the loss of their pet, and, in a few cases, were angry and revengeful toward the person who killed their pet. For example, one child wrote, "He was 11 years old and my mother had my little brother and Duke started being grouchy and nipping at people. So my brother-in-law shot him. It really hurt bad, like one of my brothers died. It was really hard to accept" (Robin, ten Bense, Quigley and Anderson, 1983). Another child wrote, "My sister was taking it for a walk and this man drove over it, then backed over it and then drove over it again. I was hurt very bad. I hated that man. I cried for two days straight" (Robin, ten Bense, Quigley and Anderson, 1983). Not only did abused and disturbed youths experience more traumatic pet loss than did the controls, they were also less likely to have someone to talk to about their grief. Only 56 percent of those youths whose pets died traumatic deaths had someone to talk to about their grief, as compared to 79 percent of the control group who had support after traumatic pet loss.

Most mental health practitioners indicate that the forms of bereavement from pet loss are similar to those of human loss (Levinson, 1967). Some children might be surprised and embarrassed by the intensity of their grief and feel the need to conceal their grief from the outside world. Parents should be sensitive to the child's

grief and not minimize or ridicule its impact. Some young children tend to view the death of a pet as punishment from their misdeeds. If so, children should be assured that they were not to blame for their pet's death. Given that our society has no public rituals for the death of pets, families may enact funerals to acknowledge the importance of the pet to the family (Levinson, 1967; Nieburg and Fischer, 1982). Children should also be offered a replacement pet; however, there is disagreement if the replacement should be deferred for a time (Levinson, 1981; Nieburg and Fischer, 1982) or take place immediately (Stewart, 1983).

CHILDHOOD CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Interest in childhood cruelty to animals grew out of the notion that cruelty to animals has a disabling effect on human character and leads to cruelty among people (ten Bensel, 1984). This idea was articulated by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) who said: "Holy scriptures seem to forbid us to be cruel to brute animals . . . that is either . . . through being cruel to animals one becomes cruel to human beings or because injury to an animal leads to the temporal hurt of man" (Thomas, 1983). Likewise the philosopher Montaigne (1533–1592) wrote that "men of bloodthirsty nature where animals are concerned display a natural propensity toward cruelty" (Montaigne, 1953).

Until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was relatively little awareness that animals suffered and needed protection because of this suffering. This new sensibility was linked to the growth of towns and industry which left animals increasingly marginal to the production process. Gradually society allowed animals to enter the house as pets, which created the foundation for the view that some animals at least were worthy of moral consideration (Thomas, 1983). The English artist, William Hogarth (1697–1764) was the first artist to both condemn animal cruelty and theorize on its human consequences. His *Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751) was produced as a means of focusing attention on the high incidence of crime and violence in his day. The four drawings trace the evolution of cruelty to animals as a child, to the beating of a disabled horse as a young man, to the killing of a woman, and finally to the death of the protagonist himself. As Hogarth declared in 1738, "I am a professional enemy to persecution of all kinds, whether against man or beast" (Lindsay, 1979).

The link between animal abuse and human violence has been made more recently by Margaret Mead (1964) when she suggested that childhood cruelty to animals may be a precursor to anti-social violence as an adult. Hellman and Blackman (1966) postulated that childhood cruelty to animals, when combined with enuresis and fire-setting, were indeed effective predictors of later violent and criminal behaviors in adulthood. They found that of 31 prisoners charged with aggressive crimes against people, three-fourths ($N = 23$) had a history of all or part of the triad. The authors argued that the aggressive behaviors of their subjects were a hostile reaction to parental abuse or neglect. Tapia (1971) found additional links between animal abuse, child abuse, and anti-social behavior. Of 18 young boys who were identified with histories of cruelty to animals, one-third had also set fires, and parental abuse was the most common etiological factor. Felthous (1980), in another study, found that Hellman and Blackman's behavioral triad did have predictive value for later criminal behavior. He found extreme physical brutality from parents common, but he felt that parental deprivation rather than parental aggressiveness may be more specifically related to animal cruelty.

Kellert and Felthous (1983) also found in their study of 152 criminals and non-criminals in Kansas and Connecticut an inordinately high frequency of childhood animal cruelties among the most violent criminals. They reported that 25 percent of the most aggressive criminals had five or more specific incidents of cruelty to animals, compared to less than six percent of moderate and non-aggressive criminals, and no occurrence among non-criminals. Moreover, the family backgrounds of the aggressive criminals were especially violent. Three-fourths of all aggressive criminals reported excessive and repeated abuse as children, compared to only 31 percent for non-aggressive criminals and 10 percent among non-criminals. Interestingly, 75 percent of non-criminals who experienced parental abuse also reported incidents of animal cruelty.

These studies identified extreme parental cruelty as the most common background element among those who abuse animals. As Erich Fromm has noted in his study, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), persons who are sadistic tend themselves to be victims of terroristic punishment. By this is meant punishment that is not limited in intensity, is not related to any specific misbehavior, is arbitrary and is fed by the punisher's own sadism. Thus, the sadistic animal abuser was, himself, a victim of extreme physical abuse.

While most children are usually sensitive to the misuse of pets,

for some abused or disturbed children, pets represent someone they can gain some power and control over. As Schowalter (1983) has said, "No matter how put upon or demeaned one feels, it is still often possible to kick the dog." Cruelty to animals thus represents a displacement of aggression from humans to animals. Rollo May (1972) suggests that when a child is not loved adequately by a mother or father, there develops a "penchant for revenge on the world, a need to destroy the world for others inasmuch as it was not good for him." Severely abused children, lacking in the ability to empathize with the sufferings of animals, take out their frustrations and hostility on animals with little sense of remorse. Their abuse of animals is an effort to compensate for feelings of powerlessness and inferiority.

A weakness of the previous studies of childhood cruelty to animals is that they did not consider the patterns of pet ownership among their subjects. These studies did not distinguish if the abused animal was the child's own animal or if the child had ever had a companion animal and what the nature of that relationship might have been. Other than a passing comment by Brittain (1970) in his study of the sadistic murderer, little mention has been made of the child and his relationship to animals prior to the incident of cruelty. Brittain wrote, "There is sometimes a history of extreme cruelty to animals. Paradoxically they can also be very fond of animals. Such cruelty is particularly significant when it relates to cats, dogs, birds and farm animals, though it can also be directed toward lower forms of animal life, and the only animal which seems to be safe is the one belonging to the sadist himself." It is with these ideas in mind that we studied adult prison populations along with abused adolescents institutionalized for delinquency and emotional disturbances to determine their patterns of pet ownership and their feelings toward their pets.

In our study of 81 violent offenders imprisoned in Minnesota, 86 percent had had a pet sometime in their life that they considered special to them. Overall, 95 percent of the respondents valued pets for companionship, love, affection, protection and pleasure. Violent offenders were more likely to have a dog in their home while growing up. The control group had more animals as pets other than dogs or cats, but the offender group had more "atypical" pets such as a baby tiger, cougar, and wolf pup. When we asked what has happened to the special pet, over 60 percent of both groups lost their

pets through death or theft; however, there were more pets that died of gunshots in the inmate group. In addition, the offender group tended to be more angry at the death of the pet. Strikingly, among the violent offenders, 80 percent wanted a dog or cat *now* as compared to 39 percent of the control group. This suggests something about the deprivation of the prison environment as well as the possibility of therapeutic intervention with pets among prison populations. Like the Kellert and Felthous study (1983), this study also found that most violent offenders had histories of extreme abuse as children (ten Bense, Ward, Kruttschnitt, Quigley and Anderson, 1984).

We also surveyed 206 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 living in two separate juvenile institutions and 32 youth living in an adolescent psychiatric ward in regard to their experiences with pets. We compared them to a control group of 269 youths from two urban public high schools. Of the 238 abused institutionalized youths we surveyed, 91 percent (N = 218) said that they had had a special pet and of these youths 99 percent said they either loved or liked their pet very much. Among our comparison group 90 percent (N = 242) had had a special pet and 97 percent said they either loved or liked their pet very much. This suggests that companion animals do indeed have a prominent place in the emotional lives of abused as well as non-abused children. It is also a corrective to those who suggest that pet ownership in itself will prevent emotional or behavioral disturbances in children. Merely having a special pet played no part in whether or not a child was eventually institutionalized (Robin, ten Bense, Quigley and Anderson, 1983, 1984).

In considering the issue of abuse of animals, the authors found that the pets of the institutionalized group suffered more abuse; however, the abuser was usually someone other than the child. In a few instances, youths had to intervene against their parents to protect their pets. As one youth wrote, 'He jumped on the bed and my mom beat him and I started yelling at her because she was hurting my dog.' Another child wrote, 'My dad and sister would hit and kick my cat sometimes because he would get mad when they teased him. I got mad and told them not to hurt him because he's helpless' (Robin, ten Bense, Quigley and Anderson, 1983, 1984).

Of those youths who indicated that they mistreated their pets, sadness and remorse were the most common responses. For example, one child said, 'I remember once I was punished for letting the dog

out and so I hit him for that. I felt real bad after that and comforted it a lot." All of those who mistreated their pets, except for one youth, indicated that they loved or liked their pets very much and felt bad about hurting their pets. Only one youth said he did not care that he hurt his pet. There was no self-reported evidence of sadism toward pets.

There were several instances of pets being harmed or killed as punishment to a child. According to Summit (1983), threatening to harm a child's pet is a common technique of child abusers to keep the child quiet about the abuse. In a recent child sexual abuse case discovered in a Los Angeles day care center, the adults involved allegedly silenced the children by butchering small animals in front of the children and threatening to do the same to their parents if they revealed the abuse. Mental health practitioners should routinely ask young people if anyone has ever hurt or threatened to hurt their animal.

Lenore Walker (1983) has suggested in her study on domestic violence that the best predictor of future violence was a history of past violent behavior. In her definition she included witnessing violent acts toward pets in the childhood home. At this point, without further studies, it is unclear what role, if any, violence toward pets plays in the emotional and behavioral disturbances of adolescents. Nonetheless, the abused institutionalized population experienced more violent pet loss than did the comparison group. They showed no evidence of callousness toward the sufferings of their pets and seemed to be troubled by the mistreatment of their pets.

CONCLUSION

Pets clearly play an important role in the lives of children. The relationship is characterized by deep feelings of love and care. It is enhanced by children's empathy toward the feelings of animals and their intuitive sense of having a common status with animals. As Freud (1953) wrote, "Children show no trace of arrogance which urges adult civilized men to draw a hard-and-fast line between their own nature and that of all other animals. Children have no scruples over allowing animals to rank as their full equals. Uninhibited as they are in the avowal of their bodily needs, they no doubt feel themselves more akin to animals than to their elders, who may well be a puzzle to them."

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