

## **ASPCA - Reporting Neglect or Abuse**

April is Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month and the first step to preventing cruelty is learning how to recognize it.

### **First of all, what constitutes animal cruelty?**

According to the ASPCA, recognizing signs of abuse isn't always so simple. Many people interpret an animal's aggression, fear or timidity as a surefire clue that the animal has suffered cruelty—but looking solely at a pet's behavior doesn't tell the whole story.

“It's almost impossible to make conclusions based on a pet's behavior alone,” says the ASPCA Animal Behavior Center's Kristen Collins, CPDT. “The best way to tell whether a pet is being or has been abused is to observe his body and the surrounding environment.” ASPCA Special Agent Kristi Adams says, “The clues to look for when investigating a scene are whether the animal is being provided with adequate food, water and shelter, and whether he or she appears injured or sick.”

Here is the ASPCA's list of signs that may alert you an animal needs help:

### **Physical Signs**

- Collar so tight that it has caused a neck wound or has become embedded in the pet's neck
- Open wounds, signs of multiple healed wounds or an ongoing injury or illness that isn't being treated
- Untreated skin conditions that have caused loss of hair, scaly skin, bumps or rashes
- Extreme thinness or emaciation—bones may be visible
- Fur infested with fleas, ticks or other parasites
- Patches of bumpy, scaly skin rashes
- Signs of inadequate grooming, such as extreme matting of fur, overgrown nails and dirty coat
- Weakness, limping or the inability to stand or walk normally
- Heavy discharge from eyes or nose
- An owner striking or otherwise physically abusing an animal
- Visible signs of confusion or extreme drowsiness

### **Environmental Signs**

- Pets are tied up alone outside for long periods of time without adequate food or water, or with food or water that is unsanitary
- Pets are kept outside in inclement weather without access to adequate shelter
- Pets are kept in an area littered with feces, garbage, broken glass or other objects that could harm them

- Animals are housed in kennels or cages (very often crowded in with other animals) that are too small to allow them to stand, turn around and make normal movements possibly with too many other animals

### **What constitutes animal neglect?**

There are two general categories of animal neglect: **simple neglect** and **gross, willful, cruel or malicious neglect**. Simple neglect (failure to provide basic needs) is not always considered a criminal act, and can often be resolved by the intervention of local animal care and control or humane agencies, which may be able to offer resources and educate offenders on how to provide proper care for their animals. However, a growing number of states make a distinction between simply failing to take adequate care of animals and intentionally or knowingly withholding sustenance. Accordingly, “willful” neglect is considered a more serious, often prosecutable offense.

Neglect can also be an indicator of “animal hoarding,” the accumulation of large numbers of animals in extremely unsanitary conditions, often resulting in the death of many animals and potentially serious health consequences for the people who are living with them. In many cases, individuals charged with animal abuse and neglect in hoarding situations have been found to have children or dependent adults living in the same conditions as the animals who are suffering.

### **Tips for Reporting Animal Cruelty or Neglect in McDonough County**

In McDonough County, contact the McDonough County Animal Control Officer, 837-2989, and/or the McDonough County Sheriff at 309-833-2323

It’s important to provide the Animal Control Officer or Law Enforcement Officer with a concise, written, factual statement of what you observed, giving dates and times whenever possible.

If possible:

- 1) Keep a diary of the incidents you observe including dates, times, observations, and anyone else with you during these incidents (for corroboration).
- 2) Photograph or video tape the location, the animals in question and the surrounding area. However, please do not put yourself in danger! Do not enter another person’s property without permission, and exercise great caution around unfamiliar animals who may be frightened or in pain.
- 3) If you can, provide law enforcement with the names and contact information of other people who have firsthand information about the abusive situation.

Remember, when you report animal cruelty, it’s a good idea to keep a careful record of exactly whom you contacted, the date of the contacts, copies of any documents you provided to law enforcement or animal control, and the content and outcome of your discussion. This will make following up much easier.

If you do not receive a response from the officer assigned to your case within a reasonable length of time, make a polite follow-up call to inquire about the progress of the investigation. As a last resort, and only if you are reasonably certain that no action has been taken on your complaint, you may wish to contact a supervisory officer or a local or state government official to request action.

Please keep in mind that most law enforcement agencies operate with limited personnel and resources. Most of these agencies are doing their best to conduct timely and efficient investigations. Being respectful of the challenges they face. Giving them the benefit of the doubt when appropriate will likely get you much further than premature complaints to their superiors.

### **Follow Up if Necessary**

If you don't receive a response from the officer assigned to your case within a reasonable length of time, don't be afraid to present your information to his or her supervisor and, if necessary, to local government officials, such as the county commissioner, and ask them to act.

If you have witnessed the cruel act yourself, you can go to your local police commissioner and ask to swear out a warrant to summon the accused person to court. Remember that expert witnesses are sometimes necessary in animal cruelty cases. A veterinarian, for example, can sign a statement that it is his or her "expert opinion" that a dog suffers when hit with a chain, is deprived of food, etc. Expert opinions will very often make or break a case, so if you happen to know a sympathetic veterinarian, you may wish to seek his or her assistance and tell the officer that you have expert support lined up for your case.

Compiled from the ASPCA website: [www.aspca.org](http://www.aspca.org).