Crimes of violence are not isolated events. They are often preceded by acts of cruelty toward animals or other innocent beings. This may indicate the potential for escalating aggression. It is important to recognize these signs as a warning of future aggressive behavior and violence.

Violent criminals view their victims as objects. Severity and intimacy of injury inflicted (e.g., stabbing, mutilating, strangling) are more significant than remote actions such as shooting or poisoning. RANDALL LOCKWOOD, PH.D.

Criminologists view the intensity of vicious behavior — regardless of the victim’s identity — as a precursor to future violence. The FBI red flags animal abuse when profiling homicidal suspects and identifies it as a stage along the animal-to-human violence continuum. “People begin to fantasize about these violent actions... The next phase is usually acting out against animals,” Alan Brantley of the FBI’s Investigative Support Unit.

“Written or verbal threats are strongly indicative of potential for escalated violence. Displaying the animal’s body can [suggest] use of such violence to gain feelings of power, control and domination — or to intimidate others.” RANDALL LOCKWOOD, Ph.D.

Studies of child and spousal battery show abusers commonly menace, torment or kill family companion animals. Judges, prosecutors, police officers, social workers and cruelty investigators need to parley reports on animal abuse, domestic violence and other possible crimes in order to appraise an offender’s overall threat to family and society.

Animal cruelty is an overt clue to a troubled family. A child may harm vulnerable creatures to mimic an abusive family member. Or, struggling for control in a turbulent household, he victimizes animals to vent his anger and anxiety.


88% of New Jersey families with physical abuse in the household claimed animals were abused as well. Study of NJ families on state aid due to physical abuse.

40% of persons convicted of child abuse admitted they abused animals and 30% of persons convicted of rape confessed to prior animal abuse. Findings at 2006 Animal Law Enforcement Academy workshop in San Diego.

12 independent studies show 18% - 48% of battered women delay leaving abusive situations out of fear for the safety of their animals. Ascione, 2007.

Young males behind America’s rash of high-profile shootings tortured animals before aiming at students, teachers or parents. Most had no prior offenses. In particular, young males with a history of parental neglect or abuse may vent feelings of powerlessness and rage upon animals. LUKE WOODHAM, 16, mortally stabbed his mother and shot 9 students. Earlier, he’d bludgeoned his dog Sparkle, flooded her throat with lighter fluid, and set her neck on fire. Columbine shooter Eric Harris, 18, smashed mice with a crowbar and set them on fire. Washington D.C. serial killer Lee Boyd Malvo killed stray cats with a slingshot. Kip Kinkle, 17, bomed squirrels and burned a live cat before he shot 25 classmates and murdered his parents in Oregon. Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, both 13, brutalized dogs before killing 5 people in an Arkansas school rampage.

Adolescent pranks that victimize animals are a precursor to aggressive crimes. Young males behind America’s rash of high-profile shootings tortured animals before aiming at students, teachers or parents. Most had no prior offenses. In particular, young males with a history of parental neglect or abuse may vent feelings of powerlessness and rage upon animals. LUKE WOODHAM, 16, mortally stabbed his mother and shot 9 students. Earlier, he’d bludgeoned his dog Sparkle, flooded her throat with lighter fluid, and set her neck on fire. Columbine shooter Eric Harris, 18, smashed mice with a crowbar and set them on fire. Washington D.C. serial killer Lee Boyd Malvo killed stray cats with a slingshot. Kip Kinkle, 17, bomed squirrels and burned a live cat before he shot 25 classmates and murdered his parents in Oregon. Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, both 13, brutalized dogs before killing 5 people in an Arkansas school rampage.

Parents and educators should view animal abuse as a key indicator of a seriously troubled youth. Top signs of a disturbed child: ABUSE OF ANIMALS, suicide threats/attempt, self-mutilation... Ken Trump, Nat’l School Safety & Security Service.
Psychopathic criminals are “the kids who never learned it’s wrong to poke out a puppy’s eyes.” Robert Ressler, founder of the FBI’s behavioral sciences unit.

25% of aggressive criminals confessed to 5 or more acts of animal torture, compared to under 6% for nonaggressive criminals. Of noncriminals interviewed for the report, none had participated in or observed animal abuse as children. Childhood Cruelty Toward Animals Among Criminals and Noncriminals.


Men and teenage boys commit a high percentage of intentional animal cruelty.

Hunging is the most common method that women use to commit animal cruelty.

Shooting is the most common form of intentional cruelty.

Men and teenage boys commit a high percentage of intentional animal cruelty.

In connection with family violence, men are more often the abusers of animals. Humane Society of the United States

**REPORTS FROM POLICE CASE FILES**

- Dennis Rader, notorious for the Bind-Torture-Kill murders in Wichita, Kansas, confessed to strangling cats and dogs prior to his sadistic spree.

- Washington D.C. convicted serial killer Lee Boyd Malvo stalked and killed cats with a slingshot. “This was probably the most serious problem...in a strikingly obedient child,” his court psychologist testified. Malvo once had a pet cat but grew to hate animals, psychologist Cornell said, because his mother would beat Malvo when the cat would sleep in Malvo’s bed and soil the sheets. “If he saw a stray cat he would become angry and shoot the stray cat. He hit some of the cats, and probably killed some of the cats,” Cornell said. Lee Boyd Malvo (D.C. Area Sniper and Serial Killer) Killed & Tortured Cats as a Child. MATTHEW BARAKAT, Associated Press Writer

- Columbine High School shooter Eric Harris, 18, smashed the heads of mice with a crowbar and set them on fire.

- Russell Weston Jr., tortured and killed 12 cats: burned and cut off their tails, paws, ears; poured toxic chemicals in their eyes to blind them; forced them to ingest poison, hung them from trees (the noose loose enough to create a slow and painful death.) Later killed 2 officers at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC.

- Jeffrey Dahmer impaled frogs, staked cats to trees and decapitated dogs. Later he dissected boys and kept their body parts in the refrigerator. Murdered 17 men.

- Kip Kinkle shot 25 classmates and others in Springfield, Oregon. He killed his father and mother. Said he once blew up a cow. Set a live cat on fire and dragged the creature down main street of town. Classmates rated him as “Most Likely to Start WWIII.”

- Albert De Salvo, the “Boston Strangler,” placed a dog and cat in a crate with a partition between them. After starvation the animals for days, he removed the partition to watch them kill each other. Later, as an adult, he raped and strangled 13 women. He often posed bodies in a shocking manner after their murders.

- Richard Allen Davis set numbers on cats and dogs. He killed all of Polly Klaus’ animals before abducting and murdering Polly Klaus, aged 12, from her bedroom.

- 11-year-old Andrew Golden and 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson tortured and killed dogs. On March 24, 1998, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, Golden and Johnson shot and killed 4 students and a 1 teacher during a fire drill at their school.

- 16-year-old Luke Woodham mortally stabbed his mother, killed 2 classmates and shot 7 others. During his prosecution, he confessed to bludgeoning his dog Sparkle with baseball bats and pouring liquid fuel down her throat and to set fire to her neck. “I made my first kill today,” he wrote in his court-subpoenaed journal. “It was a loved one...I’ll never forget the howl she made. It sounded almost human.” In June 1998, Woodham was found guilty of 3 murders and 7 counts of aggravated assault. He was sentenced to 3 life sentences and an additional 20 years for each assault.

- Theodore Robert Bundy, executed in 1989 for at least 50 murders, was forced to watch his grandfather torture animals. Bundy later heaped graves with animal bones.

- Gary Ridgway, the Green River killer, suffocated a cat as a child years before Washington State prostitutes began to go missing.

- Michael Cartier, at age 4, dislocated the legs of rabbits and hurled a kitten through a closed window. He later shot Kristin Lardner 3 times in the head and shot himself.

- Henry Lee Lucas killed numerous animals and had sex with their corpses. He killed his mother, common law wife, and an unknown number of people.

- Edward Kemper cut up 2 cats. He killed his grandparents, mother, 7 other women.

- Randy Speck threw a bird into a ventilator fan. Killed 8 women.

- Albert De Salvo, the “Boston Strangler,” cut up 2 cats. He killed his grandparents, mother, 7 other women.

- Charlotte Corday, at age 9, strangled a neighbor’s cat. At 13, he bludgeoned 4-year-old Derrick Robie to death. Smith lured the boy into the woods, choked him, sodomized him with a stick, and fatally beat him with a rock.

- Tom Dillion murdered people’s pets. He shot and killed Jamie Paxton, aged 21; Claude Hawkins, aged 49; Donald Welling, aged 35; Kevin Loring, aged 30; and Gary Bradely, aged 44.

- Eric Smith, at age 9, strangled a neighbor’s cat. At 13, he bludgeoned 4-year-old Derrick Robie to death. Smith lured the boy into the woods, choked him, sodomized him with a stick, and fatally beat him with a rock.

- Richard William Leonard’s grandmother forced him to mutilate cats and kittens when he was a child. He later killed Stephen Dempsey with a bow and arrow. He also killed Ezzedine Bahmad by slashing his throat.

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- David Berkowitz, “Son of Sam,” poisoned his mother’s paraekut out of jealousy. He later shot 13 young men and women. 6 people died and at least 2 suffered permanent disabilities.

- Arthur Shawcross repeatedly threw a kitten into a lake until the kitten drowned from exhaustion. Killed a young girl. After 15-1/2 years in prison, killed 11 more women.

- Michael Perry decapitated a neighbor’s dog. Later, he killed his parents, infant nephew and 2 neighbors.

- Jason Massey’s killing resume began with cats and dogs; at 20 he decapitated and dismembered a 13-year-old girl and fatally shot a 14-year-old boy. He claims to have killed 37 cats, 29 dogs and 6 cows.

- Patrick Sherrill stole neighborhood pets, tethered them with baling wire and encouraged his dog to mutilate them. He killed 14 co-workers and himself in 1986.

- Keith Hunter Jesperson, “Happy Face Killer,” bashed gopher heads and beat, strangled and shot stray cats and dogs. He is known to have strangled 8 women. He said: “You’re actually squeezing the life out of these animals...Choking a human being or a cat — It’s the same feeling...I’m the very end result of what happens when somebody kills an animal at an early age.”

- Carroll Edward Cole, executed in 1985 for an alleged 35 murders, confessed that his first act of violence was to strangle a puppy under the porch of his house.

- Robert Alton Harris murdered two 16-year-old boys, doused a neighbor with lighter fluid and tossed matches at him. In his initial run-in with police was accused of killing neighborhood cats.