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Foster Children and Cruelty to Animals

Written By Charley Joyce, LICSW - Reprinted with permission from FosterParentCollege.com *Connections*

Innocent or Problematic?

Cruelty to animals is a childhood behavior that deserves attention from parents and professionals involved in the care of children. The initial step in assessing the seriousness of a child's abuse of animals involves reviewing the intent, frequency, and pattern of the child's behavior.

At times, children will innocently mistreat an animal. For example, a young child may pull a cat's tail, but not understand that it is hurtful to the cat. The cat would generally react to the child, startling the child and causing the child to feel a sense of regret for hurting the cat. Ideally, a parent would also explain to the child that this is hurtful to the cat, reinforcing the idea that animals need to be treated with care.

If the mistreatment was an innocent act by the child the behavior will usually be extinguished by the cat's response, reinforced by the parent's explanation.

Unfortunately, if a child consistently hurts animals, seeks animals to hurt, and does not respond to parental interventions, a problem could exist.

Why Would a Foster Child be Cruel to Animals?

We know that children are in foster care often as a result of abuse and neglect. Being abused physically or sexually, or being neglected, can cause a complex mixture of hurt and angry feelings in the child who has been victimized.

These feelings can become overwhelming for the child and can be acted out through a combination of internalized and externalized behavior. As a result, a child who has been abused and is angry might displace the anger onto a vulnerable animal. The cruelty can become a way to release internalized aggression that they cannot express in appropriate ways. There might also be an emotional gratification in being able to be in complete control and dominance of an animal's safety, pain and life.

Another possible explanation is the psychological process of reenactment, in which a victim reenacts her abuse. For example, I once consulted in regard to a girl who at a young age was forced to be sexual with dogs. Even after her removal from the home

where she was sexually abused she continued to engage in this behavior with dogs.

What can be done to help children who are cruel to animals?

Intentional childhood cruelty to animals can be linked to a lack of development of a conscience. It is essential that youth who display intentional cruelty to animals receive psychological assessment and treatment.

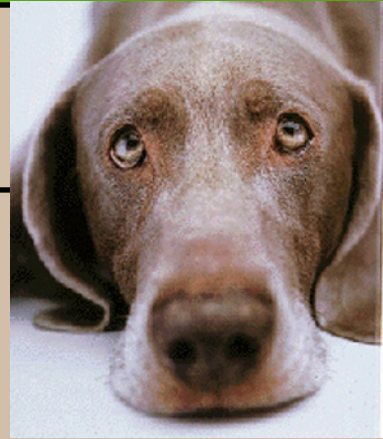
A comprehensive treatment model should include:

- Establishing clear boundaries for the child's contact with animals. Adult supervision is recommended whenever the child has contact with animals. In extreme cases, animals may need to be removed to a setting where the child does not have access to them.
- Within the limits of confidentiality, providing information to authorities in other settings where the child might have contact with animals, such as day care, relatives' homes, schools, etc.
- Reinforcing appropriate contact with animals.
- Providing therapy if the child is a victim of abuse and/or neglect.
- Teaching skills for effective anger recognition and expression.
- Therapy that focuses on developing empathy.
- The child's parents must be involved in the child's therapy.

In closing, I want to return to the scenario of the girl I mentioned earlier who was sexual with dogs. That youth experienced a comprehensive treatment approach such as the one described above. She responded well to treatment and responded extremely well to the foster family's care and structure. When I discontinued my involvement, her sexualized behavior with dogs was behind her and her foster family was considering adoption.

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Who's Who At IFAPA?

For 38 years, the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association has been serving foster, adoptive and kinship parents in Iowa. We will continue to be there to empower, advocate and support you! Here's a listing of all IFAPA staff and how we can help you!

Name and Position	Responsibilities at IFAPA	Contact Information
Lynhon Stout <i>Executive Director</i>	Oversees all IFAPA programs and serves on many committees advocating for foster and adoptive parents.	800-277-8145 ext. 6 515-289-4567 ext. 6 lstout@ifapa.org
Phyllis Pierce <i>Director of Operations</i>	Oversees IFAPA program operations, completes IFAPA's financials, coordinates Adoption Respite and Friends of Children in Foster Care programs.	800-277-8145 ext. 4 515-289-4567 ext. 4 ppierce@ifapa.org
Jesica Culp <i>Training Coordinator</i>	Coordinates training opportunities for foster and adoptive families by planning training schedule and IFAPA's conference, and researching new training topics.	800-277-8145 ext. 2 515-289-4567 ext. 2 jculp@ifapa.org
Crystal Thomason <i>Communications Coordinator</i>	Maintains the IFAPA website, coordinates and designs all of IFAPA's publications - including the Weekly Word and News & Views and assists with event planning.	800-277-8145 ext. 5 515-289-4567 ext. 5 cthomason@ifapa.org
Stephanie Miles <i>Project Coordinator</i>	Registers parents for upcoming trainings and events, coordinates training locations, planning events and sends out welcome packets to new families.	800-277-8145 ext. 1 515-289-4567 ext. 1 smiles@ifapa.org
Nancy Magnall <i>Resource Information Specialist</i>	Provides families with support regarding educational advocacy, learning disabilities and HIV/AIDS, leads local support group, trains for IFAPA and supervises Peer Liaisons.	877-467-4100 319-352-3600 (Waverly) magnall_ifapa@msn.com
Angela Stark <i>Resource Information Specialist</i>	Provides families with support regarding adoption subsidy, adoption tax credit, allegations of abuse, kinship/relative care and supervises Peer Liaisons.	877-788-7255 515-261-7255 (Dsm) starkifapa@aol.com
Dave Brace Kim Edwards Linda Dodson Vickie Janssen Julie Mather Christie McGuire Dianna Seedorff Julie Seemann John Smith Kelly Upton Hector Villarreal <i>IFAPA Peer Liaisons</i>	Provide peer support to foster and adoptive parents in their assigned area of the state, contact newly licensed foster homes and be available as ongoing source of information and support to all foster and adoptive parents.	Visit IFAPA's website for contact information for IFAPA's Peer Liaisons www.ifapa.org

NOTICE FROM DHS

Your DHS workers are asking you to assist in successfully "closing the books" on FY11 budget year by submitting invoices/claims for any foster care respite, day care, clothing allowance or other special issuances for which you are entitled payment **no later than July 15, 2011**. DHS wants to avoid payments having to be made out of next year's budget for this year's services if at all possible. If you have questions, talk with your placement worker, IFAPA Peer Liaison or your Iowa KidsNet Support Staff.

GREAT SUMMER CLASSES!

Date & Time	Name of Training	Location
July 9, 2011 9am-4:30pm	Trauma Informed Care (6 hours credit)	Cedar Rapids Kirkwood College
July 16, 2011 9:30am-4:45pm	Preventative Practices II: Minimizing the Risk of Child Abuse Allegations (6 hours credit)	Bettendorf Bettendorf Library
July 16, 2011 9am-12:15pm	Caring for Children with HIV (3 hours credit)	Council Bluffs IWCC
July 16, 2011 1:30pm-4:45pm	Understanding and Responding to the Sexual Behaviors of Children... (3 hours credit)	Council Bluffs IWCC
July 16, 2011 9am-4:30pm	Transitioning Resources: A Toolbox for Transitioning (6 hours credit) <i>Teens are also welcome to attend with a parent.</i>	Mason City NIACC
July 23, 2011 9am-4:30pm	Responding to Cultural Differences - What's a Parent to Do? (6 hours credit)	Ankeny DMACC
July 23, 2011 1pm-4:15pm	Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children - Child Sexual Abuse Prevention (3 hours credit)	Waterloo Waterloo Library
Aug. 6, 2011 1pm-4:15pm	"Can You Hear Me Now?" - How to Manage Behaviors in Your Home (3 hours credit)	Ankeny IFAPA Training Center
Aug. 6, 2011 9am-4:30pm	Teen Anger: How to Regulate Your Home Atmosphere (6 hours credit) <i>Teens are also welcome to attend with a parent.</i>	Cedar Rapids Kirkwood College
Aug. 6, 2011 9am-4:30pm	Trauma Informed Care (6 hours credit)	Sioux City NW AEA
Aug. 13, 2011 9am-4:30pm	Preventative Practices II: Minimizing the Risk of Child Abuse Allegations (6 hours of credit)	Ames Country Inn & Suites
Aug. 13, 2011 9am-4:30pm	Trauma Informed Care (6 hours credit)	Cedar Falls Clarion Hotel
Aug. 13, 2011 1pm-4:15pm	"Can You Hear Me Now?" - How to Manage Behaviors in Your Home (3 hours credit)	Davenport Clarion Hotel

REGISTRATION:

TO REGISTER VIA PHONE - Call 800-277-8145 ext. 1 or 515-289-4567 ext. 1

TO REGISTER FOR A CLASS VIA OUR WEBSITE - To sign-up for class through our website, complete our online registration form at www.ifapa.org. IFAPA will follow-up within two business days to confirm your enrollment.