

How to Recognize Cruelty Against Animals

Recognizing cruelty is simple, right? Not quite, say ASPCA® experts. Aggressive, timid or fearful behavior doesn't always tell the whole story. Animals may appear to be mean or frightened for reasons other than abuse.

"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 examine him and his surrounding environment."

Check out the ASPCA's list of signs that may alert you to potential animal cruelty:

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

"Without phone calls from concerned citizens who report cruelty in their neighborhoods, we wouldn't know about most instances of animal abuse."

— Annemarie Lucas
ASPCA Supervisory Special Investigator



Help us prevent animal cruelty. Learn to recognize the signs of abuse!

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

"Reporting suspected animal cruelty ensures that animals in jeopardy receive prompt and often life-saving care," says ASPCA Supervisory Special Investigator Annemarie Lucas. "By making a complaint to the police or humane society in your area—you can even do so anonymously—you help ensure that animals in need are rescued and that perpetrators of animal cruelty are brought to justice."

If you see signs of animal abuse, let others know! Go to www.fightcruelty.org to find out how to report cruelty in your area. ■