

Early intervention for children who act with cruelty to animals

Stages of Cruelty

Young Children

May act with cruelty to animals due to under developed cognitive skills or emotional intelligence.

Primary School Children

Acts of animal cruelty indicate that the child is experiencing significant psychological distress that require targeted specialist intervention.

Adolescent

Acts of animal cruelty indicate unresolved biological, psychological or social difficulties. The teenager is at risk of acts of human violence and poor mental health.

Mental Health Cruelty

Anxiety

Children may lash out, push, step on an animal when in a heightened anxious state. The child may have an animal phobia.

ASD

Children may not demonstrate compassion towards animals due to poor theory of mind (the ability to understand others emotions and intentions) or their difficulty regulating emotion.

Mood Disorder

Children who demonstrate mood swings (oscillating between heightened excitement, anger, distress) and lack of interest in others.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder

The child demonstrates a persistent pattern of anger, irritability, arguing, defiance or vindictiveness towards authority figures.

PTSD

Post traumatic play may include the child's re-enactment of their personal abuse or a dissociation response to animals (the child is disconnected from their thoughts and feelings).

Assessment screening targeted interventions

Developmental delays

The child has not yet developed the cognitive abilities to understand the animals needs.

Emotion dysregulation

The child struggles to self-soothe and easily becomes agitated, angry or distressed in response to new or challenging situation.

Family Violence and Child Abuse

Child physical, sexual abuse and neglect

May lead to child animal cruelty as the child re-enacts their own abuse on the animal.

Family violence

A high percentage (88%) of animals are abused as a form of family violence. Children witness the abuse of their pets by perpetrators. Children have been coerced by perpetrators to harm animals in some homes.

Attachment

Child cruelty to animals due to dis-organised interpersonal development. They may treat an animal as they have been treated, they may misinterpret the animals cues of distress, or they may find comfort in harming an animal.

Anti-social behaviour

Deviant animal cruelty is a symptom of conduct disorder included with fire- lighting, anti authoritarian, substance use, criminal activity, negative peer relationships



When a child has been abused contact:

Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry for Children (0508 FAMILY)

If an animal has been harmed contact the SPCA:

SPCA New Zealand Targeted Intervention Manager 027 700 3495

SPCA[®]