

October Events to Address Family Violence

At our October 13th fundraiser and October 14th follow-up conference, [Andrew Campbell](#), a pioneer in the emerging field of family violence, will explore the interrelationships among animal abuse, domestic violence and child maltreatment.

His [wholistic approach](#) reveals attention-grabbing connections, for example:

- Child maltreatment co-occurs in 60% of households with domestic violence
- Neighbors initiate 89% of animal abuse reports but only 8% of child maltreatment reports
- Animal abuse often comes to light [a year earlier](#) than child maltreatment
- Domestic violence victims typically report their abuse after 10 incidents but delay until 20 or more incidents if they fear their abuser will harm their pet

These insights suggest combining agencies that respond to these various manifestations of family violence into a single coordinated effort. This could significantly shorten the time to address child maltreatment while simultaneously reducing incidents of animal abuse and domestic violence.

In his new book, "[Not Without My Pet](#)", Andrew Campbell shares how his dog helped him survive a violent childhood and explores the relationship between animal and child abuse.

Mark your calendars for our October 13th annual breakfast fundraiser and October 14th half-day morning conference on Family Violence.

Narrative for podcast on Andrew Campbell blog

Andrew Campbell is an energized speaker who has done some pioneering work on the interrelationships among various forms of family violence, which is a term that describes all forms of violence in a household whether against children, elders, pets, or domestic partners.

This concept isn't new. The Link Coalition has been raising awareness of this for 30 or more years, though they tend to be somewhat more weighted towards animal issues.

What Andrew Campbell has brought to the table is energizing presentations, some fascinating research, the ability to integrate existing research to show the connections between various forms of family violence, and some serious marketing skills which have enabled him to reach large new audiences. In the year before Covid for example he did over 200 presentations in person across the country to a wide variety of groups including medical interns, local law enforcement, other first responders, domestic violence advocates and others.

In pulling together existing research he has cast a lot of light on the data that starts to help us make connections between forms of violence against family members, including the examples listed in the blog such as that child maltreatment co-occurs in 60% of households with domestic violence and that the lion's share of animal abuse reports come from neighbors and passersby. Typically those animal abuse reports are responded to without the awareness that in most of those households, domestic violence and child maltreatment are going on at the same time, so an opportunity is missed to address the other forms of abuse earlier. One particular statistic of

note is that domestic violence victims tend to delay reporting their situations if they have a pet, because often the offender keeps them under his control by threatening to kill or otherwise harm the animal.

In addition Campbell has contributed some new research. To me one of the most exciting ones is that he maps hotspots for domestic violence and animal control calls which show that there is about a year's lag time between when animal abuse is recorded versus domestic violence. Since we know from his research and others that child maltreatment and domestic violence co-occur about 60% of the time, the idea that we could often know about domestic violence and child abuse a year earlier obviously raises some great new possibilities of dealing with it by integrating the responses of animal control, domestic violence and child protection agencies.

A major stumbling block for realizing this potential is that domestic violence practitioners often strongly believe that a victim should have the ability to initiate the report of intimate partner violence, or IPV as it is currently being called, when they are ready, not because they are forced into it by for example a child maltreatment or an animal abuse investigation. This is not my field, but as I understand it, part of the thinking here is that the victim, usually a woman, has to be committed to escaping an abusive relationship before that break will actually stick. Women who leave these relationships usually take huge risks including economic hardships and the potential for the abuser to track them and their children down and escalate the violence.

As always however we should ask the question "What about the child?" If delaying the domestic violence response means that children will have to endure another year or two of paralyzing fear, crippling emotional abuse, and often physical and sexual abuse as well we asked whether the domestic violence victim should be the only person to decide when enough is enough. Do children also have rights in these situations and if so what laws or agencies will stand up for them? We might explore whether there are any policy or practice modifications that would give as much consideration as possible to the needs of the domestic violence victim but at the same time recognize the dilemma that this situation places children in. Perhaps we should have some legislation or practices that put a limit on how long children can be expected to endure such maltreatment. I think we always need to keep in mind that a child's timeframe is not the same as that of an adult. An extra year or two in these circumstances could often make the difference between being able to recover from the maltreatment and go on to lead a normal life or on the other hand being unable to escape permanent damage, with the usual results of drug and alcohol abuse, serious and persistent mental illness, inability to keep a job or a marriage, or a life in trouble with law enforcement, etc.

One pinch point here in terms of policy is the child protection criteria for what is called "failure to protect", which refers to a maltreatment report against a mother based on her failure to keep children away from dangerous individuals. This can potentially lead to a finding of maltreatment against the mother and even the loss of custody.

As an example, legislation recently introduced in Minnesota proposed to eliminate this failure to protect provision in cases of domestic violence. But again we would point out that mothers and child protection authorities should not be able to decide that children should continue to be victims of violence just because it has adverse effects on the mom.

In addition to these factors are the complexities of ever trying to consolidate public agencies, particularly daunting in this case because animal control and child protection agencies tend to be county or local departments. On top of this, domestic violence organizations are usually independent nonprofits.

So in all likelihood any integration of responses by agencies that deal with family violence would have to be by means other than putting them all together under one county or state agency. That said, a lot of progress could be made with the combination of enabling legislation and a shift in public and professional attitudes about family violence.

Back to Andrew Campbell then for a moment. He did a webinar for us last year during Covid that raised a lot of interesting issues that went beyond the pandemic. There is a link to this webinar in our blog in the phrase “a year earlier” or you can find it under events on our webpage. The title is “The impact of Covid-19 on child maltreatment”.

I commend his entire presentation to you. He covers points such as that pets, especially dogs, can significantly buffer the emotional damage from child abuse and domestic violence, giving the child a better chance of recovering as an adult. Secondly he points out that every impact of domestic violence gets much worse if there is also a history of animal abuse on the part of the offenders. So the frequency or violence of rape or other forms of abuse increases significantly just with the introduction of that one variable. He also points out that the fact that 80% of abuse reports for animal abuse come from neighbors or passersby while only 8% of child maltreatment reports come from those sources means that these are two different ways of reporting family violence largely don't overlap. As one result, being able to pick up on one or the other of them will significantly improve the chances of dealing with the whole situation.

In particular I recommend the section starting with minute 54 of his webinar where he goes over charts showing the hotspots in a particular community for animal control runs and domestic violence. This is where he shows that there is a very strong overlap and also a one-year time lag between the two kinds of reports.

So finally I recommend that you mark your calendars for October 13th and 14th, when Andrew Campbell will speak here in Minnesota. October 13th is our annual fundraiser which is a breakfast meeting that can be attended in person or virtually. And then on October 14th which is a Friday we will have a half-day conference which will feature Andrew Campbell and breakout sections on some related issues. I hope to see you there.

Rich Gehrman

Executive Director, Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota

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