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Devon and Cornwall Police warn of the link between animal cruelty and pet abuse

Perpetrators of domestic violence often take out their anger on household pets, say police.

In one fifth of high risk domestic abuse assessments undertaken by Devon and Cornwall Police, animal cruelty is present.

Detective Chief Inspector Steve Parker, from Devon and Cornwall Police, said: "Family pets are unfortunately another victim in abusive relationships and are often used as a way of controlling the abused - often either hurt directly or threats are made to hurt them. If people see animal cruelty taking place it is important to report these incidents as it could be a sign of something much worse."

Bella, a victim who lives in Devon, experienced her partner mistreating their family pet:

"The abuse escalated slowly with his controlling behaviour getting worse over time," she said. "The situation came to a head when he started to beat up my dog up as a way of controlling me. It started with kicking and punching and one day I returned home from work, to find my dog strangled in the garden shed. This was the moment I found the strength to leave, as I knew that now my dog was dead he might switch the violence to my child."

Police and the RSPCA are urging anyone who is concerned about the treatment of animals to report any incidents.

Pet Retreat Manager Carolyn Southwell, from the RSPCA, explains: "The RSPCA understands the difficulty victims of domestic abuse face; they are often fearful of what could happen to their pet if they leave them behind, especially as refuges are unable to accommodate pets.

"We can offer advice and services to support victims and their pets if they decide to go into a refuge; once their lives are more stable they can be reunited with their pets."

To report an incident of animal abuse call Devon and Cornwall Police on 101 or the RSPCA on 0300 123 8278.

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Notes to editors:

The media are invited to attend a briefing event for Domestic Abuse Awareness Week (Monday 21 – Friday 25 November 2011) at Middlemoor, Devon and Cornwall Police headquarters on Wednesday 16 November at 10am.

Interviews will be available with:

- Detective Chief Inspector. Steve Parker, Devon and Cornwall Police
- Detective Inspector Andy Berry and Chairman of Northern Devon MARAC, Devon and Cornwall Police
- Steven Slater, Computer Forensic Manager, Devon and Cornwall Police
- Rachel Martin, ADVA Manager
- Carolyn Southwell, Pet Retreat Manager, RSPCA

DVD and audio copies of interviews with victims will be available for TV and radio broadcast.

For further information please contact:

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