



Consultation response: First 1,000 days

February 2017

1. RSPCA Cymru would like to respond on two particular points. Firstly, Section A looks at child safety in the home with 14 children, nine below two years of age, having died from dog bite incidents in the last ten years¹. Secondly, we would like to raise an emerging issue in Section B; which is the link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence in the home.

Section A: Children and dogs

2. Dogs and children can be great companions with the relationship helping children to develop kindness, understanding and respect for living things, as well as improving a child's social skills with people and encourage responsibility through caring for the dog. However, it is important for the safety and well-being of the dog and the child that parents ensure children learn how to stay safe and that they are also responsible for actively supervising interactions between the two.
3. Many pet dogs are considered to be part of the family, which children understand, but they might not understand that dogs are a different species. As they grow up children are likely to treat pet dogs like other children giving them hugs, cuddling them, picking them up but also telling them off. Children express their affection for their family and friends through very close facial contact, often kissing which can come across to the dog as threatening, and very different to normal dog social behaviour. Children, within the first 1,000 days, are still developing their movements and will explore, which can often lead to the child inadvertently standing on paws, tugging ears, hair or tail causing pain and distress to the dog. The general behaviour of children can also lead to misunderstandings between dogs and children as they are often crying, yelling, shrieking, crawling, running around and are unpredictable in their actions.
4. Around 114 children per year are admitted to hospitals within Wales for dog bites and strikes² and hospital based statistics show that in other countries, children are particularly vulnerable to bites and strikes. As an example, in England between March 2014 to April 2015³, children under the age of nine years old made up the greatest proportion of hospital admission episodes. There is therefore a need for meaningful dog bite prevention education and initiatives.
5. A recent Review conducted by Public Health Wales⁴ concluded that the most important piece of advice for members of the public is 'to never leave a baby or young child unsupervised with a dog, even for a moment, no matter how well you know that dog'.

¹ Figures obtained by the RSPCA and Communication Workers' Union.

² <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/922/news/33974/>

³ http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/888/cdr_dogbitessummary_final2.pdf

<http://content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB17615/prov-mont-hes-admi-outp-ae-April%202014%20to%20Februry%202015-toi-rep.pdf>

⁴ http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/888/cdr_dogbitessummary_final2.pdf

6. The RSPCA has produced a leaflet entitled “Growing up with a dog”⁵ to help new parents with babies integrate their pets with the new arrivals and ensure their pet’s welfare needs are still met. Further advice includes a set of two posters showing how children should and should not interact with dogs; produced by Veterinarian and animal behaviourist Dr Sophia Yin and “Dogs and children: a guide to staying safe”⁶ which teaches children how to read their dog’s reactions and body language and the six golden rules for keeping your child safe and your dog happy.



7. An RSPCA Cymru poll found that 75 percent of people in Wales agree that children should be taught about animal welfare from a young age and 54 percent believe that it should be taught within the national curriculum in Wales.⁷ By educating young people about the welfare needs of animals, we can help them to become better pet owners in the future and reduce the suffering of animals. Introducing safety around dog information as part of the curriculum could also reduce the number of dog bite incidents involving children.
8. A Review of Responsible Dog Ownership in Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Government and led by RSPCA Cymru, was submitted to the Government in March 2016 providing more detail on this issue, including advice for health advisors, and the wider issue of dog ownership. At present no reply has been received from the Government on the report.

⁵https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/company/children?utm_source=PR&utm_medium=Emb ed&utm_campaign=DogsAndChildren

⁶ <https://view.pagetiger.com/RSPCAKeepingkidssafe/issue1>

⁷ These figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 10656 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 7-12th April 2016. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative (politically) of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).

Section B: Animal cruelty and child abuse

9. RSPCA Cymru is a member of the Links Group which looks at the possible connections between cruelty to animals and child and domestic abuse with other charities including NSPCC and Women's Aid.
10. Although research and evidence of these links is mainly determined from studies in the USA, there is increasing interest from within the UK and highlights the effect of child abuse on the future well-being of pets owned by the child but also acts as an indicator for social services that if animal cruelty is taking place, there may be an increased likelihood that some other form of family violence is also occurring, and that any children in the house may be at an increased risk of abuse. The American Humane Society's report⁸ "Understanding the link between violence to animals and people" details the connections between children who commit animal cruelty who then go on to commit further crimes and the relationship between domestic abuse and harm caused to the family pet. The report states that a 2007 study found that women seeking refuge at a family violence shelter were nearly 11 times more likely to report that their partner had hurt/killed their pet.⁹
11. Further research by Bill C. Henry found that identified animal abusers were 5.3 times more likely than non-abusers to have a record of a least one violent crime.¹⁰ DeViney, Dickert and Lockwood found that where serious animal abuse has occurred in a household there may be an increased likelihood that some other form of family violence is also occurring and that children present may also be at increased risk of abuse.¹¹
12. Reports of animal cruelty may also be an indication that the pet is being used to coerce, control or intimidate women and children to remain in the home or to keep quiet about the abusive situation they are in. For example, the PetRetreat programme was created to reassure victims of domestic abuse that they could leave the abusive environment in the knowledge that their pet would be looked after and returned to them once they are in a safe, new environment. This link was included in reference to the Violence against Women, Domestic abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.¹²
13. With more research required to confirm the link, it has been suggested that extreme aggressive behaviour towards animals, as with a child, may also be an indication that the individual may go on to carry out further abuse on children or vulnerable adults later in life, and this sort of behaviour needs to be tackled early on.
14. RSPCA Cymru would like to see more research carried out in Wales working with criminologists and NGOs on the links between animal cruelty, domestic abuse and child abuse and where possible ensure that these incidents are noted by local authorities, social services, the police and others to allow early intervention and prevent suffering of children and animals happening in the first place. This paper is an introduction to this area of work and we would like to engage with the committee, looking at the links between animals and children in more depth.

⁸ <http://nationallinkcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Allies-Link-Monograph-2014.pdf>

⁹ Ascione et al., 2007; Volant, Johnson, Gullone & Coleman, 2008

¹⁰ Henry, Bill C. The Relationship between Animal Cruelty, Delinquency, and Attitudes toward the Treatment of Animals. *Society & Animals*, Vol 12, No. 3, 2004, 185-207

¹¹ DeViney, E. Dickert, J. and Lockwood, R. (1983) 'The care of pets within child abusing families', *International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems*, 4, pp. 321 - 9.

¹² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/3/notes>