

Signs that an animal might be abused

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 timid or frightened for many 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 our list of signs that may alert you an animal needs help:

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

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 possibly with too many other animals

"Reporting suspected animal cruelty ensures that animals in jeopardy receive prompt and often lifesaving care," says ASPCA Special Agent Joann Sandano. "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."