Why Do People Abuse Animals?

There are many different reasons why people abuse animals.

Animal cruelty covers a wide range of *actions* or *lack of actions*.

It is often broken down into two main categories: **active and passive** or *commission and omission*.

Active Cruelty (Commission) implies malicious intent, where a person has deliberately and intentionally caused harm to an animal, and is sometimes referred to as NAI (Non-Accidental Injury). Acts of intentional cruelty are often some of the most disturbing and should be considered signs of serious psychological problems. This type of behavior is often associated with sociopathic behavior and should be taken very seriously.

Animal abuse in violent homes can take many forms and can occur for many reasons. Many times a parent or domestic partner who is abusive may kill, or threaten to kill, the household pets to intimidate family members so they remain silent about current or previous or abuse, psychologically torturing the victims by flexing power.

Neglect is an example of **passive cruelty** (Omission).

Passive Cruelty is typified by cases of neglect, where the crime is a lack of action rather than the action itself. Severe animal neglect can cause incredible pain and suffering to an animal.

Examples of neglect are starvation, dehydration, parasite infestations, allowing a collar to grow into an animal's skin, inadequate shelter in extreme weather conditions, and failure to seek veterinary care when an animal needs medical attention.

In many cases of neglect where an investigator feels that the cruelty occurred as a result of ignorance, they may attempt to educate the pet owner and then revisit the situation to check for improvements. In more severe cases however, exigent circumstances may require that the animal is removed from the site immediately and taken in for urgent medical care.

The most common type of animal cruelty is neglect or abandonment. Cases that involve situations where an animal is left without food, water or shelter, or when proper veterinary care was not obtained. In many of these cases, the underlying reason can sometimes be explained by the caretaker's ignorance.

This is why many animal control officers and humane law enforcement officers will first attempt to educate the neglectful caretaker, rather than immediately citing them or arresting them.

While ignorance can be blamed in some of these situations, an additional cause that seems to be a major contributor to neglect and abandonment cases is that the pet owner simply does not care. Even people with only the most basic knowledge of animal care can see that an animal has degenerated to the point where it is only skin and bones.

Many times, animals are purchased as pets, and simply forgotten about. Animals in this situation however do not merely gather dust. They are slowly starved or dehydrated to death, literally bled dry due to parasite infestations, or slowly garroted by their own collars.

Purina developed The Body Condition System to help pet owners (and investigators) judge if their pet's appearance is normal or not. The images on the right are numbered to correspond with the descriptions below.

1. EMACIATED: Ribs, backbones, pelvic bones, etc. all prominent from a distance. No visible body fat, obvious loss of muscle mass.

2. VERY THIN: Ribs, backbones, pelvic bones easily visible. No palpable fat. Minimal loss of muscle mass.

3. THIN: Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat. Top of backbone visible. Pelvic bones becoming prominent. Obvious waist and abdominal tuck.

4. UNDERWEIGHT: Ribs easily palpable with no visible fat covering. Waist easily noted, viewed from above. Abdominal tuck evident.

5. IDEAL: Ribs palpable without excess fat covering. Waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above. Abdomen tucked up when viewed from side.

6. OVERWEIGHT: Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist is discernable viewed from above but is not prominent. Abdominal tuck apparent.

7. HEAVY: Ribs palpable with difficulty, heavy fat cover. Noticeable fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent or barely visible. Abdominal tuck may be absent.

8. OBESE: Ribs not palpable under very heavy fat cover, or palpable only with significant pressure. Heavy fat deposits over backbone and base of tail. No waist or abdominal tuck. Obvious abdominal distension may be present.

9. GROSSLY OBESE: Massive fat deposits on chest, spine, and base of tail. Waist and abdominal tuck absent. Fat deposits on neck and legs. Obvious abdominal distension.