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## Animal Cruelty and Prevention



JEN REEDER

Christina Jackson can't understand how anyone could not fall in love with her 2-year-old mutt, Teddy. The frisky dog has a zest for life that's contagious.

"We love how affectionate and good natured he is at home," Jackson says. "He's always elated to see us and if you call him, he comes running with enthusiasm every time. When it's time for a walk, he gets so excited that he runs up and down the stairs twenty times because he cannot contain his joy."

But Teddy had a tough time before he came to live with Christina and her husband in Long Beach, Calif. His original owner died, so he went to live with her children, who did not want him. They left him in the backyard with aggressive pit bulls, where he was never washed or groomed, or taken for walks. Fortunately, he was eventually put up for adoption on Adopt-a-Pet.com, and came to live with the Jacksons.

"When we first got him, we had to shave him because of matting and severe skin sores," Jackson says. "He would inhale his food – literally! No chewing! – and then often choke as a result. He was fearful of Henry (their beagle) stealing his food. Poor boy! After a while, he felt secure enough to slow down and eat at a normal pace."

Teddy had been the victim of animal cruelty, the infliction of suffering or harm upon animals for purposes other than self-defense.

"It's such an emotional topic because it's terrible," says Gregg Takashima, DVM, president of AAHA and director of Parkway Veterinary Hospital in Portland, Ore. "But to affect change in society, we have to do it in an educated, thoughtful way."

In his 25 years of practice, most of the animals he's treated for some form of animal cruelty have not been harmed intentionally, but by owners who inadvertently neglected their pets because of lack of education. Many of these instances involved hoarding, when a person has so many pets in their home or yard that the animals are underfed, or left outside without adequate care, heat or shade.

Signs of neglect or abuse can vary, from an unkempt, thin and frightened animal to outright physical trauma, according to Takashima. He is careful to point out that though fear can be an indicator, it does not always mean that the animal is suffering from animal cruelty.

If someone sees chained and untended pets without food, water or protection from the elements, or an owner physically abuse an animal, they should contact the authorities rather than risk a dangerous confrontation. Concerned citizens should call the police, animal control, or the local humane society or for advice or to report the situation.

Not surprisingly, educating ourselves and our neighbors goes a long way toward preventing animal cruelty. Veterinarians can play a crucial role in spreading information as well.

"Sometimes they just don't know," Takashima says. "When it's freezing outside and people have water bowls outside for their dogs, those dogs are not going to get any water because it's going to freeze. We need to educate them ahead of time."

Setting a good example as a pet owner is helpful; talking to a veterinarian is an excellent place to start, as well as attending classes at local shelters, city parks or schools. On a larger scale, we can advocate for anti-cruelty laws and learn more at websites for the Humane Society ([www.humanesociety.org](http://www.humanesociety.org)) or the ASPCA ([www.asPCA.org](http://www.asPCA.org)).

Ultimately, humans have a responsibility to protect animals.

"Animals are so loyal – they trust whoever their owner is to the death," Dr. Takashima says. "It's up to us not to betray that trust."

*Jen Reeder writes about pet issues from her home office in Denver.*

### Additional Resources:

- The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) has a list of signs to help you recognize animal cruelty at their [website](#), including physical and environmental signs
- Read [AAHA's Animal Abuse Reporting Position Statement](#)
- Understand [The Link® Between Animal Abuse and Family Violence](#)

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