What Is Cross Reporting – One Page Summary

Cross reporting is a Connecticut law that connects child welfare and animal welfare systems. When professionals or community members observe animal cruelty, that information is shared with Animal Control and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) so safety concerns can be assessed early.

You do not need proof. Reasonable concern is enough. Reporting is about safety, not punishment.

Why It Matters

- *Animal cruelty is often linked to child abuse, neglect, or family violence*
- *Pets may be harmed or threatened to control family members*
- *Early reporting helps prevent escalation and protects both children and animals*

What Should I Do If I See Animal Cruelty?

1. *Call your local Animal Control Officer (ACO) for the town where the animal is located*
2. *Submit a DCF-736 form within 48 hours*
3. *In emergencies, call Animal Control or local police immediately*

When Is It an Emergency?

- *Active violence toward an animal*
- *Animals in extreme medical distress*
- *Animals trapped in hot vehicles*
- *No food, water, or shelter in dangerous weather*

Key Takeaways:

- *Cross reporting protects children, families, and animals*
- *Reporting is about safety and prevention, not punishment*
- *Reasonable suspicion does not require proof*
- *Animals are part of the family system*
- *Shared information leads to better outcomes*

Cross Reporting Practice Instructions

For Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) Staff

1. The Law

Connecticut law requires collaboration between child welfare and animal welfare systems.

Public Act 14-70 – An Act Concerning Cross Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty mandates that:

- DCF staff working with families in the community **must report suspected animal cruelty** when they have reasonable cause to believe an animal is being harmed, neglected, or treated cruelly.
- Animal Control Officers (ACOs) must report all animal cruelty investigations to the Department of Agriculture (DoAg), who then shares this information with DCF.

What does this mean in practice?

- A **verbal report** is made to the **local Animal Control Officer** for the town where the animal is located. (please see a list of ACOs per town, attached)
- A **written report (DCF-736)** is submitted to the Department of Agriculture **within 48 hours**
- **Consult your Cross Reporting Liaison** if you are unsure which local Animal Control Office covers your area or need assistance identifying the appropriate reporting channel.

2. Why It Is Important to Report

Animals are part of the family system. When animals are harmed or neglected, it may signal broader risks within the household.

Reporting suspected animal cruelty:

- Helps identify **early warning signs** of child abuse, neglect, or family violence
- Supports **prevention and early intervention**
- Promotes safety planning that considers **both children and pets**
- Strengthens coordination between DCF, Animal Control, and law enforcement

Timely reporting allows the appropriate professionals to assess risk and respond before harm escalates.

Engaging your DCF Cross Reporting Liaison early when you suspect that both child and animal safety may be intertwined, they can help you navigate parallel reporting and engagement with the local Animal Control Officers.

3. The LINK

Decades of research confirm a strong connection—known as **the LINK**—between animal cruelty and other forms of family violence.

Research shows that:

- Animal abuse frequently co-occurs with child abuse, neglect, and intimate partner violence
- Pets may be threatened or harmed to control or silence family members
- Children who witness or engage in animal cruelty are at higher risk for trauma and later violent behavior
- Animal cruelty is often an early indicator of escalating harm in the home

Observing how animals are treated provides valuable insight into family dynamics, patterns of control, and overall household safety.

DCF Cross Reporting Liaisons can provide additional training and resource materials illustrating how to identify the LINK in your fieldwork.

4. Reporting Process for DCF Social Workers

When a DCF social worker has **reasonable cause to suspect animal cruelty**, the following steps should be taken:

Step 1: Contact Local Animal Control

- Make a **verbal report** to the Animal Control Officer serving the town where the animal is located.
- Verbal reports allow for timely welfare checks and emergency response when needed.
- Notify your DCF Cross Reporting Liaison after making a verbal report to ensure alignment and documentation for tracking cross reports.

Step 2: Submit a Written Report

- Complete and submit the **DCF-736 form** to the Department of Agriculture **within 48 hours**.
- Include detailed observations, timelines, and relevant contextual information. Sharing more detail supports stronger investigations and better outcomes.
- Share a copy of your submitted DCF-736 with your DCF Cross Reporting Liaison so they can help monitor case progress, address procedural questions, or facilitate interagency communication if needed.

Step 3: Documentation and Follow-Up

- Document the report in case records, including date, time, and agency contacted.
- Maintain communication when animal welfare concerns intersect with child safety planning.

- Plan follow-up discussions with your Liaison when ongoing collaboration with Animal Control might be necessary for discussion around the safety of children and animals and possible coordination of joint home visits.

5. What to Look for When You Are Out in the Field

Signs of animal cruelty may be observed during home visits, investigations, or ongoing casework. These indicators often parallel signs of child maltreatment.

a) Physical Indicators

- Visible injuries, open or untreated wounds
- Extreme thinness, dehydration, or poor body condition
- Embedded or overly tight collars causing injury
- Limping or inability to stand or walk
- Heavy discharge from eyes or nose
- Severe matting, overgrown nails, or filthy coat
- Extreme fear, cowering, shutdown, or aggression

b) Environmental Indicators

- Living areas contaminated with feces, urine, garbage, or hazards
- Lack of food, water, shelter, or veterinary care
- Animals chained, crated, or confined for long periods
- Overcrowding with multiple animals in cages or kennels
- Animals left outside in extreme weather without protection

c) Contextual Red Flags

- Inconsistent or implausible explanations for injuries
- Minimization of animal suffering
- Children expressing fear for pets or describing harm to animals

If unsure about the conditions of an animal's living environment or treatment, consult with your DCF Cross Reporting Liaison to further discuss and coordinate a plan of action.

6. What to Do in Emergency Situations

If an animal appears to be in **immediate danger**, act right away. Animal Control Officers have authority under emergency (exigent) circumstances to intervene, take custody of animals, and coordinate veterinary care.

Emergencies may include:

- Active violence toward animals
- Animals in extreme medical distress
- Animals trapped in hot vehicles
- Exposure to life-threatening weather
- Caregiver incapacity that places animals at imminent risk

Immediate actions:

- Contact **local Animal Control** immediately
- Contact **law enforcement** when there is immediate danger to people or animals

Follow emergency protocol first but inform your DCF Cross Reporting Liaison afterward so the situation can be properly documented and included in cross-agency discussions and monthly liaison meetings.

7. Working With Local Animal Control Officers (ACOs)

Animal Control services in Connecticut are organized at the municipal or regional level and may be operated under police departments or town administration. ACOs conduct welfare checks, investigate complaints, and communicate relevant findings back to DCF. Collaboration supports shared safety goals.

Effective collaboration includes:

- Providing **clear, detailed referrals** with specific observations
- Including timelines, unit numbers, access details, and behavioral concerns
- Contacting the ACO directly when possible, in addition to required reporting
- Recognizing that ACO authority and procedures may vary by town

If you are unsure of your local Animal Control Office for the town of the family you are working with, engage your DCF Cross Reporting Liaison to help obtain the information. They can also assist with reaching out to the local Animal Control Officers to strengthen communication.

<u>Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)</u>

1. **Do I need proof to report animal cruelty?**

No. You only need **reasonable cause to suspect** that an animal is being harmed, neglected, or treated cruelly.

2. **Will reporting get someone in trouble automatically?**

Not necessarily. Reporting allows Animal Control to assess the situation and determine the appropriate response, which may include education, support, or intervention.

3. **What happens after a report is made?**

Animal Control evaluates the information, conducts a welfare check if appropriate, and takes action based on what is observed. When concerns overlap with child safety, information is shared with DCF.

4. **What if I am worried about both children and animals?**

Report both concerns. Animal welfare and child safety are closely connected, and sharing information helps agencies respond more effectively.

5. **Can anyone report animal cruelty?**

Yes. Community members, professionals, and mandated reporters can contact local Animal Control to report concerns.

6. **Why are animals' part of child safety work?**

How animals are treated in a home often reflects family stress, neglect, or violence. Protecting animals helps protect children.

Cross Reporting Liaison Role

The Cross Reporting Liaison serves as an essential connection between the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Animal Control, ensuring effective communication and collaboration to protect both children and animals.

Liaisons will help promote awareness, respond to questions, and strengthen partnerships across agencies.

Key Responsibilities:

1. **Establish Regional Presence:**
   Begin by introducing yourself as your office's primary contact for all Cross Reporting efforts within your office.
2. **Maintain and Share Resources:**
   Serve as the distributor of educational and resource materials provided to you. Make sure all DCF staff have access to the materials and understand their purpose.
3. **Support and Guidance:**
   Be available to assist other social workers who have questions about the Cross Reporting process or best practices.

4. **Participate in Monthly Collaboration Calls:**
   Attend a monthly one-hour meeting with the Central Office Team to share updates, highlight challenges, and discuss progress within your office or region.
5. **Case Collaboration:**
   Discuss and help coordinate specific cases between DCF social workers and Animal Control Officers as needed to ensure proper communication and action.
6. **Provide Education and Outreach:**
   Offer education and awareness to your regional staff about Cross Reporting, emphasizing the connection between animal cruelty and child abuse. Attend staff meeting to continue to educate staff on Cross Reporting laws and procedures.