

USING THE CTSARE TO ASSESS FOR ANIMAL-RELATED EXPERIENCES

Barbara W. Boat, Ph.D

It is useful to have a set of questions to guide the assessment of experiences with animals. The Childhood Trust Survey on Animal-Related Experiences (CTSARE) is a 10 item screening questionnaire for children, adolescents and adults that asks about experiences of ownership, attachment, loss, cruelty and fears related to pets and other animals (Boat, Loar and Phillips,2008; Boat, 2002). A longer version of the CTSARE has been adapted for use in several studies (Flynn, 1999; Baker, Boat, Grinvalsky, and Gericioti, 1998; Miller and Knutson, 1997) and is available in a chapter by Boat (1999).

The validity and reliability of CTSARE have not been established. This instrument is an interview guide and should be administered orally so the interviewer can use follow-up questions to obtain additional information as appropriate. The questions and their rationale for inclusion in the CTSARE are described below:

- **Questions 1 and 2** inquire about past and present ownership of pets. Data support that pets rarely survive more than two years in homes that are chaotic, have few resources and several risk factors for abuse or neglect (DeViney, Dickert and Lockwood, 1983). Frequently, the inhabitants of these homes list many pets and a high mortality and turnover rate. When asked what happened to all the pets he had listed, one teenager shrugged and said “I don’t know. Either grandma got rid of them or they’re dead.” When several pets have “just disappeared,” a caution flag should be raised that the family may be in need of help. Frequently the inability to care for pets adequately is an indicator of an inability or lack of resources to care for the rest of the family members.
- **Question 3** seeks information about whether the respondent has, or ever has had, a favorite pet as an indicator of attachment. Lack of any special relationship with a pet may signal a person who is divested from, or never formed, close relationships. Conversely, close attachment to a pet may make that person more vulnerable to loss and coercion if the pet is harmed or threatened with harm.
- **Question 4** asks about a difficult or stressful time when a pet was a source of comfort or support. Children, especially, often readily disclose situations where they felt vulnerable, sad or frightened when they are focused on their pet (Doyle, 2001).
- **Questions 5, 6, and 7** address issues of the pet having been hurt, worries about something bad happening to the pet and losing a pet. Responses to these questions can offer a window into the person’s past and current living environment and can assist in focusing the intervention.
- **Questions 8 and 9:** Seeing someone hurt an animal can have a significant impact on witnesses. Sometimes a child or adult is prevented from helping a sick or injured animal. This is a potentially devastating experience. It may be important to question others to get adequate information about the person him/herself, hurting animals or pets. Relatives, peers, neighbors, parents, or teachers with classroom pets may observe harsh treatment of an animal. Teachers, for example, may overhear a child talking

about seeing or committing cruel acts, or read about worrisome behaviors around animals in the writings of their students.

- **Question 10** underscores the need to know if the person has ever been badly frightened or hurt by a pet or other animal. The trauma of being chased, pinned or bitten by a dog can shape a life-long negative response to dogs. This question also can reveal a home or neighborhood where people may be at greater risk to be harmed by an animal. Examples include children having access to dogs that are chained outdoors or adults attacked by dogs that are running freely.

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