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LOYAL COMPANION

GRAND IMAGE

MOUNTAINVIEW ANIMAL HOSPITAL

905-702-8822

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A PERSONAL NOTE FROM US

If you have received this package from us then you have either just lost your pet or are faced with that possibility. We recognise and are sorry for the pain you are feeling. Whether pet loss is unexpected or planned, it can be one of the most difficult experiences of a person's life. This sorrowful time is often further complicated by the many decisions that need to be made about how your pet will experience the end of his or her life, the type of aftercare you wish for your pet and how you and your family will cope with the grief and sorrow of saying goodbye. As your pet's veterinary care provider, we have valued our role in helping you provide your pet with the best quality of life as possible. Now, as we near the end of your pet's life, we hope to support you in providing a dignified and peaceful passing for him or her. We are available to sit and talk to you and your family about any aspect of this process. We also recognise that this is a very personal time and so we have put together this package for you to take home, read, consider and discuss with your family if you wish. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. Although there is little we can do to lessen your sadness, we hope our support and counselling can make the decision process a little less painful.

MAKING THE DECISION

Everyone privately hopes that their pet will have a peaceful passing at home while sleeping, unfortunately this rarely occurs, forcing us to make the traumatic decision of when and how to have our pets euthanised. This decision should not be taken lightly. Ultimately, euthanasia should only be seen as the final tool to mercifully prevent or end a pet's suffering.

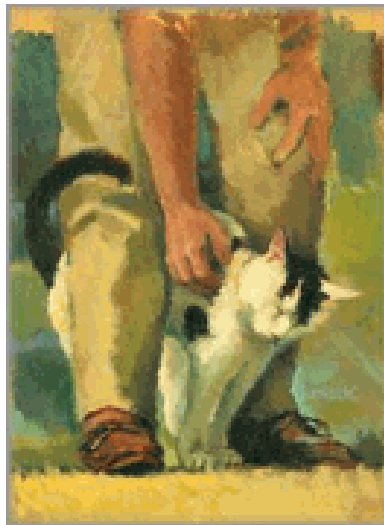
One of the greatest challenges of pet ownership is deciphering the signs of suffering. Our pets are so brave and loyal that they will often hide the signs of pain and discomfort. Although only you can ultimately make this decision, we as your pet's health care team are here to give you some guidance. In some cases, there may even be something we can do, other than euthanasia, to help your pet with his or her pain. Please do not hesitate to talk to us about the changes you are experiencing with your pet and about how we can best manage them.

When making your decision we suggest you consider the following questions. We hope that answering these questions for yourself will guide your thoughts through the decision-making process.

- What is the current quality of my pet's life?
- Is my pet having more bad days than good days? It might help to mark the good and bad days on a calendar; you could even divide the days into morning and evenings. If the bad days outweigh the good, it might be time to consider euthanasia.
- Is my pet eating and drinking well? Is my pet losing weight?
- Is he or she playful and affectionate toward me or is he/she withdrawn most of the time? Is my pet hiding?
- Does my pet still enjoy the activities he or she used to, or does he/she seem tired all the time?
- Is my pet in apparent pain? Have I talked to my veterinarian about pain treatment options?
- Can he or she go up and down the stairs, get up from a lying position, go outside or get to the litter box for toileting?
- Does my pet have difficulty breathing or panting even while at rest?
- Is my pet able to keep itself clean after soiling? Is the coat greasy, matted or rough-looking?
- Have I talked to my veterinarian about the changes I see in my pet? Perhaps there are other treatment options to help improve my pet's quality of life.
- Is there anything I can do to make my pet more comfortable?
- Do I understand all I need to know about my pet's condition?

- If a behaviour problem has led me to this decision, have I sought the expertise of my veterinarian or a veterinary behaviour consultant?
- Will I want to be present during the euthanasia or will I say good-bye to my pet before the euthanasia because it is too painful for me to stay with him or her and assist?
- If I have children, do I want them to be present during the euthanasia or should they say good-bye at home?
- Do I want to be alone, or should I ask a family member or friend to be present?
- Do I want any special burial arrangements made? Can I legally bury my pet at home?
- Would I rather have my pet cremated? Do I want his or her ashes returned to me?
- Do I want to keep any of my pet's belongings as keepsake for comfort or will I find these to be painful reminders of my loss?
- Can I take any time away from my normal schedule to grieve?
- Do I need time to recover from this loss before considering another pet?

Modified from: Coping with Pet Loss, Bioniche Animal Health Canada Inc.



Celebrating the Bond
by Scott Mack

THE EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia is defined as the induction of painless death. In veterinary medicine, it is accomplished by an injection of a concentrated dose of barbiturate (type of anaesthetic drug). As we give the medication to your pet, he or she will painlessly, quickly and peacefully fall asleep. As we continue to inject more medication, a deeper sleep or coma occurs, the breathing stops and then the heart. The whole process usually takes less than a minute.

Although this explanation makes euthanasia sound very easy and clinical, it is not. We do not exercise this option lightly. However, if we are keenly aware of the balance between extending an animal's life and prolonging its suffering, then we can understand that euthanasia can be the ultimate tool to mercifully prevent or end a pet's suffering.

Although ultimately, we are here to alleviate your pet's suffering, as compassionate individuals we hope also to support you through this process. In this effort, whenever possible, we will try to book your pet's euthanasia appointment at a less busy time of the day. This will allow you more privacy and time with the doctor; this is not a time to be rushed. Once you arrive at the hospital, the receptionist will escort you to an examination room where she can speak with you privately. Most people find it easier to discuss their wishes for their pet's aftercare before the euthanasia, so our receptionist will discuss, record and take payment for these services beforehand. Some people even prefer to come in or call ahead with their instructions a few days in advance, when they feel a little calmer.

Not everyone is comfortable staying with their pet during the euthanasia. Those pets whose owners decide not to stay with them are taken into our care and are euthanised right away; they are treated with the same level of care and respect as those whose owners stay. If you choose to stay with your pet during the euthanasia, the receptionist will leave you and your pet in the examination room where a nurse or veterinarian will join you.

If you have a large dog, a blanket will be placed on the floor so you and the doctor can sit together with your pet. Smaller dogs and cats get a blanket on the exam table or some people prefer to sit with their pet wrapped in the blanket on their lap.

Some people prefer to come alone, while others bring the whole family. This is your time; please feel free to talk to us about your needs.

The next step may vary a little depending on you and your pet or the doctor's preference. Often, an injection of sedation will be given to your pet to relax him or her and induce sleep. The amount of time it takes for your pet to fall asleep from the sedation can vary depending on your pet's level of stimulation and health; five to twenty minutes is the average. It may even be wise to have you give some calming oral medication at home before coming. Please feel free to ask us for this when you call to discuss your pet's euthanasia. A nurse may take your pet for a few moments to place an intravenous catheter; once your pet has been brought back to you, a small bandage will be on the leg where the catheter has been placed. Or the veterinarian may bring an assistant into the examination room with her to help with the euthanasia.

Once you are ready, a doctor will perform the euthanasia. The doctor will inject a medication to cause your pet to pass away. This medication works more quickly than the initial sedation, most pets pass within a minute or two. As your pet's body relaxes, he or she may pass gas, urinate or defecate. Occasionally, there may be minor muscle movements, like a little twitch in the lip or a gasp. These are rare but normal processes that can occur as the body finds the deep relaxation of death. Also be aware that our pets do not close their eyes when they die; rest assured this does not look scary.

If at any time you change your mind and can no longer remain with your pet, we will understand if you leave. If you need some time alone with your pet afterwards, please do not hesitate to take that time.

Once you have left, rest assured that we will continue to care for your pet in death as compassionately and respectfully as we did in life.

YOUR CHOICES FOR YOUR PET'S AFTERCARE

Our love for our pets does not end with their death and so what happens to them afterwards is often still very important to us. How we remember them, memorialise them and care for their remains is very individual. Unfortunately, this is a very emotional and confusing time, making any decisions difficult and painful. We understand how hard this is. We have designed this section to guide you through your choices, we hope this is helpful. Please call us if you have any questions.

Burial

Here in the city of Georgetown burying our pets on our property is not permitted. Some people with properties outside of town or cottages choose to bury their pets there. Keep in mind that during the winter months the ground is frozen, making this choice less possible.

Cremation

We selected Gateway Pet Memorial Services for the important task of caring for your pet's aftercare because they will treat your pet's body with the dignity and respect he or she deserves. Gateway is a licensed pet crematorium and is a member of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Pet Cemeteries.

Communal Cremation

This is the most common choice people select for their pet's aftercare. In a communal cremation, your pet is cremated together with other pets and the cremated remains are placed in a plot at Sandy Ridge Pet Cemetery.

Private Cremation

This option is for those who wish to have the ashes of their pet returned to them. Some people keep the ashes at home on a mantle in the usual way; others bury the urn, or open it to sprinkle the ashes at their pet's favourite place.

There are six standard urns to choose from; they are pictured below. However, there are many other types of specialty urns available. If you wish to consider other urns, please ask to see a catalogue or visit Gateway Pet Memorial Services' web site at www.gatewaypetmemorial.com.

Standard Urns

1. Handcrafted Tan Ceramic Urn
2. Handcrafted Blue Ceramic Urn
3. Tan Decorative Metal Urn
4. Blue Decorative Metal Urn
5. Handcrafted Cedar Urn
6. Scattering Tube



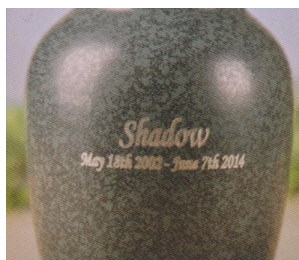
All the urns are available in several sizes. Gateway will choose the right sized urn for your pet.

Personalizing the Urn

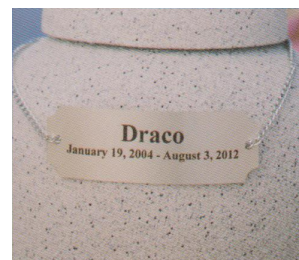
The Metal or Cedar Urns can be engraved, or a Name Plate can be added to the Ceramic Urns. Please ask us about the extra cost for this service.



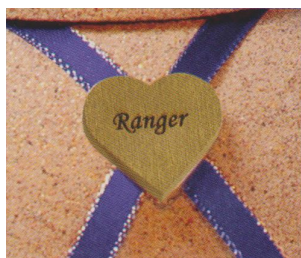
Engraved Name on Metal Urns



Extra Engraving on Metal Urns



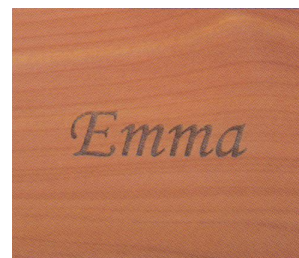
Engraved Plaque with Chain



Etched Gold Heart with Ribbon



Brass Plate



Etching on Wooden Urns

Memorial Paw Impression

Memorial Clay Paw Print - Complimentary

We will make an impression of your pet's paw in clay here at the clinic. If you wish, we can even carve his or her name in the clay. Many people like this beautiful keepsake. If you wish a paw impression, it is our gift to you and your family, with our condolences.



Precious Paws

Precious Paw Prints are available for purchase. These painted clay paw impressions are made at Gateway Pet Memorial Services. Once your pet's paw impression has been made in the clay, it is highlighted with black paint. Please ask our receptionist for the price of this colourful memento.



Lasting Paws

Lasting Paws are hand painted, kiln fired, ceramic paw impressions. Please ask our receptionist for the price of this beautiful memento.



Lasting Paws Contour

Lasting Paws Contour are hand painted, kiln fired, 3D, ceramic paw impressions. Please ask our receptionist for the price of this beautiful memento.



ADULTS AND GRIEVING

Although historically the grief of pet loss has often been minimized and its severity dismissed, the newer understanding of biology and psychology has created a greater respect for the true depth of the pain we feel when we lose a pet. In fact, it is now recognized that the grief associated with the loss of a pet can be as severe, if not worse, than the grief we experience with the loss of a human. Our pets come to symbolize many things to each of us. They can represent a child, an ideal mate, a parent, a playmate, a sibling and can even be a reflection of ourselves. They are often the most faithful, patient and loving companions in our lives. Studies have shown that pets reduce our stress, help the sick heal faster, give the elderly and handicapped new purpose in life and teach us to relate more fully to the world around us. It is no wonder that they seem to work miracles in our lives, and that we would miss them so much when they are gone.

Every individual will experience the loss of their pet differently. Some people will seek the support of friends, family, clergy, their veterinarian, or a counsellor, while others prefer to grieve the loss of their pet privately. Regardless of how you mourn, counsellors recognize five general stages of grief; we thought it may be helpful to list them.

- I. Denial – Denial is the first response of many pet owners when confronted with their pet's terminal condition or sudden death. This stage is meant to protect the mind against a sharp emotional blow.
- II. Bargaining/Negotiation – In this stage a person would attempt to bargain with the doctor, nature, or a higher power for the miraculous recovery of their pet.
- III. Anger – The helplessness of the situation will often manifest itself as anger. People will often seek to blame, either themselves or others, for their pet's illness or death. This can be a very aggressive stage of grief.
- IV. Grief/Depression – This is the stage of true heartbreak. The grieving person has let go of the previous stages and has realized that only emptiness remains. It is in this stage that people need the most support of friends and family.
- V. Resolution/Acceptance – As time passes, the grief resolves and the sadness fades into the happy memories that were shared with that beloved pet. It is in this stage that people often consider sharing their lives with another pet again.

Some people will experience these stages very distinctly and one at a time, while others will feel them in groups or even all at once. For people with a lot of support, it can take a relatively short period of time to move through these stages, while others with less emotional support may take years to heal or even become stuck in one or more stages.

Despite the current movement to recognise the significance of the human/animal bond and how deeply pet loss can impact a person's emotional wellbeing, there are still many people who find themselves grieving alone. It is still often difficult to find the compassionate and loving support that is readily available when a human dies. Those who have not enjoyed the blessing of a pet's companionship will not appreciate the depth of the grief that the loss of a pet can create. First, realize that you do not have to justify your feelings to anyone and you do not need anyone's approval to mourn the loss of your pet. Second, you are not alone, and your feelings are normal.

It is not unusual for people who have lost a pet to feel completely overwhelmed by grief. This is why there are increasing numbers of pet loss support groups, telephone hot lines and pet loss grief counsellors available. We have listed a few of these resources on pages 12 and 13. It is important to be able to talk with someone who will understand how significant grieving and saying 'good-bye' in a meaningful way is to the person experiencing the loss.

GRIEVING AND THE ELDERLY

For elderly people, losing a pet can be even more traumatic than in other stages of life. The grief they experience is often compounded by other losses they have survived, such as long time friends, siblings, spouses or neighbours. Many older adults have also suffered the loss of mobility or the ability to participate in customary activities because of illness or disabilities. In some cases, family members may have moved away and travelling to visit them may be difficult. These life changes can contribute to a sense of isolation and loneliness that makes the companionship of a pet even more meaningful. The pet becomes the one they talk to, care for, sleep with, get up with each day and share unconditional love. The loss of their beloved pet can be overwhelming. To exacerbate the loss, many older adults feel they can never get another pet even once they have completed their grieving. They feel their age and health preclude them from getting another puppy or kitten.

During the time of grieving, it is particularly important that they receive the support of other compassionate individuals who can share their deep sense of loss. Attending a pet loss support group may be one option. It may also be helpful to honour their lost companion by sharing their memories by writing stories or making a scrap book. Volunteering at local pet shelters or fostering an animal that needs temporary care can provide that missing human/animal bond without the long-term commitment.



CHILDREN AND GRIEVING

For many children, the loss of a pet may be their first experience with death. Although this will be a very difficult time for them, the sorrow of pet loss cannot erase all the positive moments and life lessons they have gained from this relationship. Pets teach children to be patient, kind and gentle; they teach them to care for others, to be responsible and to love unconditionally. Now in their death, a pet can teach a child how to say good-bye, deal with death and other significant changes or losses that they will experience in the future. With a parent's guidance, children can learn to cope with a very painful and frightening experience in a positive and healthy manner.

Depending on the age of the children, different levels of understanding, reactions and acceptance will occur. Here are some generally accepted benchmarks to guide your expectations. Remember, each child may respond differently depending on his or her emotional maturity.

Children's Perceptions of Death and Age

Infants to 1 year of age: They do not have a true understanding of death.

- Even though the infant will not understand the situation, he or she may sense tension and sadness in the family,
- When possible try to remove the infant from an extremely distressing environment.
- Try to get child care help from friends and family to allow yourself a chance to grieve and allow your emotions to be expressed.
- Lots of extra affection will likely help both of you during this time.

Children 2 – 4 years of age: They do not have a clear understanding of death or of what they are feeling emotionally. They will not recognize the permanence of death.

- Give lots of reassurance through hugs and help explain the situation using tools such as books or storytelling.
- Recognize that the emotions they are feeling may be new to them and they will look to you for how to react to these emotions.
- Encourage the child to express his or her emotions through play such as pictures, pretend funeral services or play with toy animals.
- The child may act out with undesirable behaviour such as tantrums or sleep disturbances. Try to be patient and understand what specifically is bothering the child.
- Explain death simply and honestly – use phrases such as your pet is dead which means he or she will not eat, breathe or move again. Although these words sound blunt, clarity is important for children. Remember, the gentle tone of voice and open body language of a loving parent can be used to soften the harshness of the words. Expand upon this based on the child's questions.

- Reassure the child that he or she is in no way responsible for the illness or death in anything he or she did or thought, as young children often blame themselves.
- Do not use terms like the pet was 'put to sleep' or the pet 'has gone far away', as this may invoke fears of going to sleep or others 'going away' as on a vacation.
- Do not say that others who have died wanted the pet for companionship in heaven as the child may become angry with the deceased person or fearful that he or she will be taken too.
- Allow time for your child to be sad and mourn in his or her own way.
- Your child may surprise you by reacting with very little emotion. This is normal due to the problems children have with understanding the permanence of death at this age.

Children 5 – 10 years of age: They do have an understanding about death but are unclear about what causes death or that it happens to all living creatures. They often feel it can be avoided. Usually, around 9 – 10 years of age, children begin to understand that death is not reversible and comes to all living things.

- Involve your child in as many decisions as possible regarding the aftercare and memorials for the pet.
- Give your child lots of opportunity to express his or her emotions and ask questions about death.
- Encourage your child to plan memorials for the pet as this is especially important for this age group.
- Be especially sensitive that certain times of the day may be more difficult if he or she shared special activities with the pet at that time (e.g. walking the dog after school or feeding the cat before breakfast).

Children 11 – 16 years of age: They understand the permanence of death and may feel a sense of powerlessness. They feel the pet was their own yet they may perceive that the decision making surrounding the death is being taken over by their parents – this will be very distressing to this age group.

- Allow your teenager to participate in as many decisions about the aftercare and memorials for the pet as possible.
- Try to avoid arguing with your teenager about his or her views of the pet's death. Be supportive without criticizing and perhaps offer to discuss his or her opinions at a later, less emotionally charged time.
- Enlist the help of your veterinarian if your teenager has outstanding medical questions surrounding the pet's illness (or accident) and death.
- Older teenagers may grieve in a way very similar to adults.

No one knows a child better than his or her parents; and yet many parents are at a loss of how to support their children through their grief, often because they are grieving too. Here are a few other suggestions to help children understand and manage their sorrow. As parents, you may find comfort in these activities too.

- Find a quiet place to talk to your children without distractions.
- When you tell your child that your pet has died be honest and use simple language. Making up stories to protect them can feel like a breach of trust and leave them more unsettled than the truth itself.
- Share your beliefs, hopes and faith about the soul or spirit of pets.
- Encourage the expression of feelings. Try drawing pictures, writing stories and talking openly about the pet.
- Remember the five stages of grief; they apply to children as well. If your child becomes stuck in his or her grief, talk to your family doctor about the type of help available or refer to the pet loss support groups listed below.
- A funeral, memorial service, burial, or placement of the ashes may help provide closure for the children, as well as the adults.
- Children often gain a lot of satisfaction from drawing pictures, creating photo albums, or writing stories about their pet.
- Children can decorate a memory box in which they can keep their pet's first tooth, pictures, a clipping of fur, the collar, etc..
- Celebrate the pet's life by planting a tree, shrub or flowers in the garden.
- Make a donation in the pet's name and let your child choose the charity.

There are some wonderful books available to read with your children about pet loss. You may find them extremely helpful. A few of them are listed on the following page.



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GRIEF SUPPORT MATERIAL

Pet Loss Support Groups

Pet Compassion Careline

Master's and Ph.D. level grief counselors available 24/7
1-855-845-8214

Ontario Veterinary College Pet Trust, Pet Loss Support

University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, N1G 2W1

<https://ovc.uoguelph.ca/pettrust/petlossresources>

- They have resources for both children and adults

Publications on Pet Loss

Children's books

"The Tenth Good Thing About Barney" by Judith Viorst, Atheneum, New York, 1971.

"I'll Always Love You" by Hans Wilhelm, Crown, New York, 1985."

"When Friendship Lives Beyond the Stars" by Dr. Amy Sugar, Pawsitive Resources, P.O. Box 61, Midhurst, ON L0L 1X0

www.pawsitiveresources.com

info@pawsitiveresources.com

'When Children Grieve: For Adults To Help Children Deal With Death, Divorce, Pet Loss, Moving And Other Losses' by John W. James and Russell Friedman, Diane Publishing Company, 2001.

Adult literature

'Chicken's Soup For The Pet Lover's Soul' by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Marty Becker DVM, and Carol Kline, Health Communications Inc., Deerfield Beach, Florida.

'The Loss Of A Pet' by Wallace Sife, PhD.

Specialty Urns and Keepsakes

Gateway Pet Memorial Services Inc.
3 – 180 Southgate Drive
Guelph, Ontario
N1G 4P5
Telephone: 1-800-227-6915
www.gatewaypetmemorial.com

Memories in Glass
515 Main Street, Unit # 2
Glen Williams, Ontario
L7G 3S9
Telephone: 416-407-2108
www.skytreesmith.com

Post a Memorial on Our Website

For many people grief is a very personal and private time, while others find solace in sharing their feelings and memories with others. If you would like all of us to join you in remembering your pet, we can post a picture and a short memorial that you have written about your lost loved one on our website. Just contact our receptionist, who would be pleased to help you, or go to our website www.mountainviewanimalhospital.ca under Pet Centre/Pet Memorials and use the form to create your memorial posting.

