

## One of the family

When we choose to live with a companion animal, we do so in the knowledge that their expected lifespan is considerably less than our own. Despite that knowledge, it does nothing to lessen the pain when the time comes to say goodbye to a much loved pet. Making the decision to euthanise a pet is the hardest decision any pet carer will ever have to make. Whilst the decision is yours and yours alone, the staff here at the Veterinary Practice will be able to help guide and support you through the entire process.

## Palliative Care

Palliative care aims to improve quality of life by relieving pain and associated distressing symptoms. It can be a huge undertaking for a pet carer however it is a rewarding period allowing you to spend some additional precious time with your pet. In many cases though palliative care will not be an option as it will not be in the best interest of your pet morally or ethically. Your vet will discuss all viable options with you.



## When the time comes....

Sadly not many pets die of natural causes and sleep away peacefully. When no more can be done to save suffering, relieve pain or when quantity takes over quality of life your vet may recommend euthanasia.

The Euthanasia process is painless whereby a fast acting drug is intravenously administered to your pet. The procedure is usually carried out at the veterinary practice, however some vets can offer a home euthanasia service. The veterinary staff will talk you through each step of the procedure and if you have any concerns whatsoever about the process or to find out about euthanasia at home please speak to your Vet.

## Grieving Process

The loss of a pet can have a profound effect on most pet carers and many describe the pain of grief to be as overwhelming if not

more so than they experienced over the loss of parent or spouse. There is no right or wrong way to grieve or cope, nor is there a particular length of time taken to adjust to life without your pet. You may experience some or all of the recognised stages associated with grieving – Shock, Denial, Bargaining, Guilt, Anger, Depression and Acceptance.



## Stages of grief

Those who are able to provide palliative care may experience anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief happens pre the death of a pet but does not mean that you will not grieve when your pet dies, but it does give you an indication of how you may feel. When a pet has received palliative care for some time pet carers also express a feeling of relief when their pets die, relief that their pet is no longer suffering or in pain.

Grieving is a natural process that cannot be rushed and there is no quick fix to help you feel better. No two people grieve the same and you should not compare yourself with how someone else grieved or appeared to cope. You may experience some or all of the recognised stages and they may repeat time and time again.

Guilt is a powerful emotion associated with pet loss. Feelings of guilt are often associated with the decision to euthanise. Pet carers should remember that the decision to euthanise was made in the best interest of the pet, a decision made from love and although it's natural to have feelings of guilt, try not to allow these feelings to overwhelm you.

It is natural to want to be angry or want to blame someone for your pain. This stage of grieving should be managed carefully, while accepting this is a normal stage of grief, it is important that you do not become trapped in anger or a blame culture, and finding a safe outlet to work through these emotions is important.

It is natural to feel depressed and although this tends to be the longest lasting stage of grief, these feelings will pass too. Although there is no time limit on how long someone should grieve, if you feel you are not progressing through the grieving process or are stuck in any stage of grief, be it anger, depression or guilt, you should seek additional support from a pet bereavement counsellor.

## Bonded/Surviving Pets

A bonded pet tends to cope better if they are afforded some time with the body of their companion. Seeing the body of their companion may give the surviving pet some sort of acceptance, or at least some explanation as to what happened to their companion. You may notice some changes in your pet e.g. loss of appetite, sleeping more, crying, seeking more (or less) attention, aggression or destructive behaviour. If you are concerned about a surviving pet don't hesitate to contact the veterinary surgery for advice or make an appointment for your pet to be seen by a vet.

## Aftercare for your pet

Most pet carers do not wish to think of the day their pet will die, let alone decide on aftercare arrangements, however it is important to know what options are available to pet carers -

### Individual Cremation

This is where a pet is cremated on its own and you will receive back the ashes of your pet. If your vet is making the arrangements your pets ashes will usually be ready for collection from the veterinary practice in 7-14 days.

Your vet may ask you to pay at the time of booking for pet cremation. If your pet is insured please check your policy as some allow a claim for cremation or burial expenses.

### Communal Cremation

This is where several pets are cremated together but you will not receive any ash back.

### Pet Cemetery Burial

There are several pet cemeteries throughout the UK. For your nearest pet cemetery contact us at Living with Pet Bereavement.

### Home Burial

If you own your property and wish to bury a family pet in your garden, you should ensure that the area you choose is free from any underground utility pipes/cables. You should dig a grave 3 ft deep as this will deter unwanted interest from foxes or other animals. The site can then be marked with a memorial for example a headstone or memorial rose bush. If you do not own your property you should seek permission from the owner, housing association or local authority first.

Other options – Woodland Burial, Taxidermy or Donation to Science, please contact us at Living with Pet Bereavement ([www.livingwithpetbereavement.com](http://www.livingwithpetbereavement.com)) for more information.

## Your pets' belongings

Over the years your pet may have accumulated quite a few personal belongings. For many, their pets personal belongings are a constant painful reminder that they are no longer here and you may wish to remove bowls, leads, toys etc. as soon as possible. Others take comfort from those items being left in situ.

If they are a painful reminder you may wish to make a memory box and keep the items special to you, but try not to make a decision in haste.

For items like food or treats you may wish to donate these items to a local animal charity.



## Self-help when grieving

When a much loved pet dies, a pet carer has to address three separate issues – initially the loss of their pet, then adjust to life without their pet, and finally to take back control of their life.

It's important for pet carers to look after their physical wellbeing whilst they are grieving and that in turn will help with their emotional wellbeing.

For those who feel they are not progressing through the grieving process you should seek additional support from a pet bereavement counsellor.

## What helps?

- Don't be afraid to ask for help from friends, family or a pet bereavement counsellor at Living with Pet Bereavement
- Establish a routine
- Ensure you are getting enough sleep
- Try to eat a healthy balanced diet
- Exercise/Walk everyday
- Be kind to yourself
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Speak to others who have experienced pet loss

Now available to purchase on Amazon  
'Surviving Pet Loss' by Dawn Murray



Living with Pet Bereavement  
[www.livingwithpetbereavement.com](http://www.livingwithpetbereavement.com)



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# When the time comes to say goodbye....



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