

Preparing for Your Pet's Euthanasia



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Do I want to be present when my pet is euthanized?

When it comes to euthanasia, there is no “one way” or “right way” of doing it. Each person has his or her own opinions and feelings about whether he or she can bear to be present. Some people feel bad if they are not with their pet bringing comfort in its last moments. Other people cannot bear to see their pet die and prefer to have their last memories of their pet as a living, breathing animal. It is not wrong of you to elect not to be present for the euthanasia.

Should I bring my child and what should I tell them?

Pets are often a significant element in the life of a child and often form closer bonds with the children of the family than they do the adults. The decision to bring children to the euthanasia depends on the age and the emotional maturity of the child. You will need to carefully consider whether *your child* can handle being present.

Consider the following questions:

- How will my child feel if they aren't given the option?
- Should I allow my child to decide if they want to be present?
- What are the consequences of allowing my child to be present?

If the children do attend the euthanasia, it is recommended that you bring someone with you who can take the children outside if the emotion becomes overwhelming. You, the parent, are often emotional enough, trying to say goodbye to your pet, without having the added distress of soothing your children. Keep in mind, distressed children may also distress your pet.

An alternative to having the children present for the euthanasia itself is to bring them to the clinic, have them say their goodbyes to their pet and then have them leave the room for the actual procedure. Once the pet has passed away, the children can then be brought back into the room to say their goodbyes and come to terms with the reality of the situation. This may give the children closure. If your child will not be present for the euthanasia, consider allowing them the opportunity to say goodbye at home.

Another useful way of providing children with closure is for them to assist with a small funeral for their pet. If local ordinances allow and you choose to bury the pet at home, let them help if they wish and let them say a few words in tribute to the pet and put some flowers on the grave. If you are having the pet cremated, you can hold a small memorial service in a special place.





What can I explain to the children about death?

There are many ways that you can have the discussion about death with your children. What you say to them really depends on what you believe to be true and also on the age of the children.

Some of the harder questions to answer are: “Does Rover have a soul?” “Will Rover go to heaven?” “Why did Rover have to die?” Again, how you answer these questions depends on what you believe personally to be true and how mature your child is.

It might be better for you to discuss the matter of death from a purely factual perspective. For example, “Rover was very sick and he has now passed away;” “His heart stopped beating and he will not be coming back to life” and so on. It is important to not use the phrase “put to sleep” as it can cause the child to fear sleeping. Emphasize the fact that the pet is no longer in pain or suffering. This may be of comfort to children and is the main reason why pet owners make the choice to euthanize. Some books that can be beneficial are:

BOOKS FOR TEENS:

Goodbye Friend, Healing Wisdom For Anyone Who Has Ever Lost a Pet by Gary Kowalski

Healing Your Grieving Heart ‘For Teens:’ 100 Practical Ideas by Dr. Alan Wolfelt

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN:

Saying Goodbye to Your Pet: Children Can Learn To Cope With Pet Loss by Marge Eaton Heegaard

What should I do with my pet’s body after euthanasia?

Knowing beforehand what you want to do with your pet will save you from having to make that decision afterwards while you are going through the grieving process. It is helpful to make these decisions ahead of time with your family. Pet cremation is one of the most common options available today. You can choose to have your pet’s ashes returned or not. If you choose to have the ashes returned, they are collected and placed in an urn or specially designed box for you. You then have the choice of keeping, burying, or scattering the ashes in a special place. If you choose to keep the ashes there are many beautiful urns available to memorialize your pet. Ask your veterinary clinic to see your urn options. If you are considering burying your pet, please know that most ordinances and regulations prohibit it.

TIPS TO HELP YOU COPE ON THE DAY OF EUTHANASIA

Take a friend with you

At this hard time, you may find that you cope better with a friend by your side. It is best to choose someone who is not as likely to be grieving as much as you. They can give you comfort and drive you to and from the veterinary clinic.

Try to schedule the euthanasia for a time when the clinic is quiet

If possible, schedule the appointment when the clinic is less busy. This will hopefully allow for more privacy during your time of grief. Don’t hesitate to ask your veterinary clinic when they are expected to be less busy.

Consider taking the day off

You need time to grieve and come to terms with your loss.