



**Zillmere Veterinary Surgery**

## **Coping with the loss of a pet**

In this day & age, our pets are playing an increasingly important role as companions. Not only are they a source of comfort and interaction but they act as a bridge towards the wider community. The benefits of pet ownership are immeasurable however there will come a time when we all have to say goodbye.

It is easy to underestimate the grief that a friend (or even yourself) may feel when losing a pet. Our pets give us so much and are so important to us during the time we have with them that it is not only natural but normal and necessary for us to grieve at their passing. You may feel very isolated because people around you may not understand the depth of your grief. Losing a pet can trigger emotions such as denial, anger, depression (as well as many more) but these should not be thought of as stages to pass through or boxes to check. It is important to allow yourself these feelings. You may feel these emotions in any order, or not at all, and the road to acceptance can be a long one.

**Sometimes a simple ceremony, a memory book, a special tree planting can help to give you a sense of closure.**

It can be overwhelming when you bring your pet for euthanasia. You may feel under pressure to be strong or to not stay too long, but please know that we understand how difficult a time this is and we will try to do everything we can to make the process as peaceful as possible. You are more than welcome to stay with your pet during the injection, and for as long as you need afterwards. If you are more comfortable saying good-bye and leaving before the injection then that's OK too. Be assured that your pet will be treated with kindness and dignity. One other thing to consider is how you want your pet's remains handled. . . .we can take care of that for you or you might want to consider using a pet cremation service which results in the return of the ashes.

Sometimes families of aged or ill pets have trouble deciding that it's the right time to make decisions regarding euthanasia. There is no "right" answer; the decision should be based on quality of life and there is no one more qualified to assess that than you. Unfortunately knowing that you are doing the right thing does not make a decision any easier.

Dr K. Koks,  
Veterinarian,  
Zillmere Vet Surgery

# The Decision to Say Goodbye

for your use as a guide only

The Argus Institute suggests the following to help gain an understanding of your pet's current quality of life. For further information visit:

[http://csuvth.colostate.edu/diagnostic\\_and\\_support/argus/quality\\_of\\_life\\_measuring.aspx](http://csuvth.colostate.edu/diagnostic_and_support/argus/quality_of_life_measuring.aspx)

## Create a List of Your Pet's Unique Qualities

Your pet is a very special individual with their own likes and dislikes. It can be a good idea to create a list of activities that your pet enjoys. These are a few general ideas to help you get started:

- Chasing a ball
- Playing with other pets
- Greeting you at the door
- Playing with toys
- Going for walks
- Usual habits like scratching on a post and rubbing your legs or barking at a neighbor
- Enjoying food

As your pet progresses, and their enjoyment and interest in these activities fades, mark them off the list. Decide early at what point you feel too much quality will have been lost from your pet's day-to-day life.

## Keep a Good Day/Bad Day Calendar

Take a quiet moment to calmly evaluate what you think makes for a good day or a bad day for your pet. Each evening, recall the day and decide if it was a good or bad day, marking a calendar with a happy face or a sad face. Think about how many bad days in a row might mean your pet's quality of life has been compromised.

## Keep a Journal

Keep a daily record of events in your and your pet's life. This will help you look back on changes that have occurred and how your pet's life has been affected by age or illness.

Alternatively, the following questions can help you gain a general understanding of your pet's well being. Please compare the number of YES responses to the number of NO responses as a general guide.

My pet wants to play	Yes	No
He/she responds to my presence	Yes	No
He/she is enjoying life	Yes	No
My pet has more good days than bad days	Yes	No
He/she is alert; not dull or depressed	Yes	No
My pet eats his/her usual amount of food	Yes	No
My pet keeps him/herself clean	Yes	No
My pet drinks sufficiently	Yes	No
My pet is urinating a normal amount	Yes	No
My pet is able to move normally	Yes	No
My pet is as active as he/she has always been	Yes	No

In the following, please compare the number of NO responses to the number of YES responses

He/she shows signs of discomfort	Yes	No
My pet is unsettled	Yes	No
My pet pants, even at rest	Yes	No
My pet shakes or trembles	Yes	No
My pet has a bad smell and/or a skin irritation	Yes	No
His/her hair is greasy, matted, or rough looking	Yes	No
My pet lays in one place all day	Yes	No

My pet vomits or acts as if he / she is nauseous	Yes	No
He/she urinates or defecates on self	Yes	No
He/she is losing weight and /or dehydrated	Yes	No
He/she no longer shows affection even when petted or rubbed	Yes	No

Finally, please talk to your Veterinarian. They will be able to guide you in the decision with relation to physical conditions, but you will know best your pet's day-to-day quality of life, and ultimately the decision is yours.



## Preparation, Payment and Paperwork:

Booking your pet in for euthanasia can be a very emotional time. You are not always thinking clearly, so it may help to pre-consider your options for taking care of your beloved pet after euthanasia:

- Individual cremation – We will make all the necessary arrangements to start the process and then the lovely, caring staff at Pets In Peace will work with you to arrange a service that suits your family and budget. More information can be found at [www.petsinpeace.com.au](http://www.petsinpeace.com.au)
- Pet cemetery – A pet cemetery may be something you would like to consider. Their experienced staff can arrange a special send off to honour your pet's life. More information can be found at [www.petcemetery.com.au](http://www.petcemetery.com.au)
- You may choose to leave your pet with us after the euthanasia procedure. We will treat your pet with care and dignity while they are prepared for burial

It is best to consider asking us for an appointment at a time when it is likely to be quiet. On arrival, we will ask you, or someone you have elected on your behalf to sign a consent form. You may wish to make your payment prior, or at the beginning of the appointment, as this is the last thing we want you to have to worry about after your pet has passed.

For your canine companion:

1. Who weighs less than 25 kg; there is a \$155 fee if you wish for us to take care of him/her afterwards. Otherwise the euthanasia fee is \$105.
2. Who weighs 25 kg or more; there is a \$175 fee if you wish for us to take care of him/her afterwards. Otherwise the euthanasia fee is \$120.

For your feline companion:

If you would like us to take care of your cat after euthanasia, the fee is \$140. Otherwise, the euthanasia fee is \$85.

In some cases, it is possible to arrange for euthanasia in your home. Costs of home euthanasia vary depending on your location, the size of your pet and whether you require aftercare services. Please talk to Dr Karen or Dr Louise, or call us on 07 3865 2020 to discuss.

## What to Expect

Euthanasia (meaning *good death*) in the veterinary profession is when we end the pain and/or suffering of an animal by inducing a quick and painless death, at the request of the pet's family.

In order to deliver the euthanasia solution we must first place a small catheter into your pet's vein. Some pets may need a sedative prior to this, to allow them to relax. If you prefer, we can take your pet into the treatment room and place the catheter and then return them to you in the consult room.

Once the catheter is placed and secured, you can either stand or sit and cuddle your pet as you wish. We will then give two injections – the first containing anaesthetic which will cause unconsciousness, after which they will appear to be sleeping.

From this point your pet will no longer be aware of your presence or feel any pain or anxiety. Some owners prefer to leave at this stage, allowing themselves to remember their beautiful sleeping pet being pain free and peaceful.

If your choice is to stay, you will witness the second injection containing the euthanasia solution. This will cause your pet to stop breathing and their heart will stop beating. This can take between 30 seconds and two minutes. It is very common for owners to be surprised at how fast their pet passes away.

Sometimes, as their muscles relax, pets will lose control of their bladder and bowels, or twitch. They will not close their eyes and may have a few involuntary deep breaths as their oxygen levels drop. This can be emotionally confronting to witness, however please remember that they are no longer conscious or able to feel pain.

The vet will then listen to your pet's heart and let you know they have passed away, covering their body with a blanket. You can remain with them as long as you and your family would like. If you wish, we can provide a memento of a small lock of hair or paw

print from your pet. You can take their collar and name tags or leave them with him or her.

Your pet's body will then be respectfully prepared for aftercare. The catheter will be removed and a small bandage placed on their leg. If you are taking your pet home they will be placed in a biodegradable calico burial bag. Alternatively, you may wish to take your pet home wrapped in one of their blankets.

*If you are leaving your pet's body with us we will provide the same respectful care for them when preparing them for burial. Some families like to send their pet's favourite toy or a special blanket to be buried with them.*



# Grief

Many of us refer to our pets as our fur-babies as they are so much a part of our family life. That is why, when it is time for them to leave us, it can be a difficult thing to deal with. Grief is a normal process we go through following death and all people grieve differently. It can place you in a state of emotional turmoil where your moods and thoughts change rapidly. This can be alarming and painful as people can also experience physical symptoms as part of their grief such as difficulty sleeping, stomach upsets, loss of energy, as well as many more.

Children communicate their grief differently as they may not have the ability to name or express their feelings like an adult. This may be overwhelming for them. Their behaviour can change as a result with separation anxiety, crying, withdrawal, bedwetting, disinterest in food, or disruptive behaviours at school. It is important to give children the opportunity to express their grief in their own way. An honest explanation of what happened to their pet, and patience in answering their questions may help them grieve.

Although the following are identifiable parts of grieving, you may not experience them all, or in this order.

## **Shock**

A feeling of bewilderment that the situation is 'unreal' especially if the death of your pet is sudden or unexpected.

## **Denial**

Denial is thought of as a defensive mechanism that we use to try and protect ourselves from emotional trauma. Thoughts such as 'it is not true', 'I heard it wrong', or 'it can't be as bad as that' are common.

## **Anger**

You may direct this at the veterinary clinic (why can't you save him?), at yourself (why didn't I bring him here earlier?), or at a friend or family member (didn't you notice he was sick?)

## **Bargaining**

You may wish to bargain with your pet – 'If you live I'll get you a friend to play with', or 'you can sleep on the bed if you just get better'.

## **Sadness**

Losing a pet can be one of the saddest experiences one can have. The mourning of your loss can manifest in behavioural and emotional changes, including:

- Depression
- Isolation
- Tiredness
- Confusion
- Withdrawal

## **Resolution**

Generally, resolution is the final part of the grieving process. It involves adjustment and re-establishment after which you can focus on remembering the good times, and precious memories you shared.

You may consider acquiring a new pet but know that it is not a replacement of your deceased pet, but instead accept that it will be a new beginning with another pet.

Grief is a complex and ever changing range of emotions. Even though a person may seem to be improving and coping, they may have recurring feelings of anger, guilt, sadness etc. The ways the members of your family deal with the loss of your pet may be very different. Speaking to a close friend, family member, colleague, or trusted advisor can also help. There are many resources available for grief support online, or, alternatively, Lifeline has trained volunteer counselors available to talk to on 13 11 14.

## **You may wish to honour your pet's memory**

- Hold a memorial service at a pet cemetery, in your backyard, or a place that was special for you both
- Create a living memorial by planting a tree, bush or flower bed in your garden
- Create a scrapbook or collage with photos and other reminders of your pet
- Write a poem about your pet or write a letter to him/her
- Volunteer at an animal shelter to help others in need
- Offer a memorial scholarship at a veterinary school

These and other suggestions can be found at [www.vetmed.ucdavis.eduvmth](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.eduvmth)

## The Last Battle

If it should be that I grow frail and weak  
And pain should keep me from my sleep,  
Then will you do what must be done,  
For this -- the last battle -- can't be won.

You will be sad I understand  
But don't let grief then stay your hand.  
For on this day, more than the rest,  
Your love and friendship must stand the test.

We have had so many happy years,  
What is to come can hold no fears.  
You wouldn't want me to suffer so;  
when the time comes, please, let me go.

Take me to where to my needs they'll tend,  
Only, stay with me till the end  
And hold me firm and speak to me,  
Until my eyes no longer see.

I know in time you will agree  
It is a kindness you do to me.  
Although my tail its last has waved,  
From pain and suffering I have been saved.

Don't grieve that it must be you  
Who has to decide this thing to do;  
We've been so close -- we two -- these years,  
Don't let your heart hold any tears.

-- Unknown



## Zillmere Veterinary Surgery

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