

Coping with the loss of your pet

Companionship

Pets are very important to us and the relationships we make with them are very special. At Avonvale we are all pet owners ourselves and we understand the many different ways that animals contribute to our lives. The rewards they bring in the form of companionship are enormous. Often our pets form a link with events and people in our lives that create strong emotional bonds between human and animal. Sometimes it is not until faced with the loss of our pets that we appreciate the role they have played in our lives and may be shocked at the level of grief we experience.

Euthanasia – A Big Decision

Given the relative life spans of ourselves and companion animals it is a fact that pet owners will experience the death of a pet at some time. We would all like to think (if we can bring ourselves to think of it at all) that our pets will pass away peacefully in their sleep and although this does happen, for most pet owners there comes a time of difficult decision making. We are responsible for our pets during their lifetime and we are also responsible during the time of illness and death. It is natural to feel guilty when considering euthanasia. We may feel angry that an animal cannot be saved or blame ourselves. It is also natural to question whether we are making the right decision. It is important to discuss your concerns with your vet who will be able to advise you and guide you towards the correct decision for the comfort of the animal. This should reassure you that the decision you have made, whatever the reason for euthanasia, has been the most appropriate one.

Discussing euthanasia is always a difficult and emotional time, where possible it helps to consider the event ahead of time and decide what you would like for your pet.

Our vets usually euthanase pets at the surgery and we will suggest appointment times when the centre will be relatively quiet. This allows you time to say your farewells to your pet. Although it may seem that home is the natural place to be for this, some pets will find the vet's presence there very stressful – even more so than being at the surgery

The procedure is performed by your vet with a nurse in attendance and is calm and quick. The nurse will shave a patch on the foreleg and hold it so that the vet can administer the injection. There is no pain for your pet apart from the slight discomfort of an injection. The drug anaesthetises the animal within seconds and your pet will pass away shortly afterwards. The choice is yours whether to remain with your pet or to wait in another room, there is no right way or wrong way and your decision will be respected.

You have the choice of taking your pet home for burial or leaving him or her with Avonvale to arrange cremation. It is not unusual for owners to request a lock of fur or a pawprint as a keepsake in memory of their pet. Please don't hesitate to ask the nurse if you would like this.

Some people prefer their pets to be euthanased at home. This may be requested by phoning your surgery as early in the morning as possible. Your vet will confirm a time later that day to attend. A separate visit fee will be charged.

Sudden Loss

Of course it is not always possible to prepare for the death of a pet. Accidents or acute illness happen when we least expect them and our vets and staff are very aware of the shock and distress they cause. Relieving the suffering of animals is our prime concern but where possible, we will allow you to gather other family members and give you time alone with your pet.

We will need to ask your wishes with regard to the burial or cremation of your pet but accept that it is difficult to make an informed choice when in such a distressing situation. Staff will be as accommodating as possible to the emotional

situation you are in. If you have other questions or change your mind when you get home then please do not hesitate to contact the surgery as soon as possible.

Payment

You will not be expected to settle your account then and there but will be sent an invoice within two weeks. Some people prefer to settle their account at the time so that they don't receive an unhappy reminder later. This is perfectly acceptable and is your choice.

Cremation

Avonvale works with two local pet cremation services, Lawnhill and EW Cremations. Each has a meadow of remembrance where pets' ashes are scattered after communal cremation. There is no extra charge for this service.

Some people prefer to have their pet cremated individually and their ashes returned so that they may scatter them in a favourite spot or keep them at home. Both Lawnhill and EW Cremations offer engraved caskets and a range of memorial options at separate cost. Avonvale staff will be able to give you further details upon request. Again the choice is entirely yours.

The nurse will take note of your request at the time and if your pet's ashes are to be returned we will contact you when they arrive at the surgery. In this instance your contact details will be given to Lawnhill or EW Cremations who will invoice you separately for this service.

Grief

No matter how well prepared we think we are it is always a shock and we mourn the death of our pets just as we do a human friend or member of our family. The depth of emotion felt is often unexpected and is difficult to fully express to others who have not shared the companionship of a pet. Each of us experiences grief in a unique way. Often it is hard to accept that our companion has gone and the house feels very empty. This sense of loneliness may last longer than you expect but it is helpful to realise that your reaction is a normal response and these emotions can be considered a tribute to what your pet has meant to you. Avonvale staff have all experienced this when losing their own pets and of course have known yours too, however briefly. So do not be afraid of sharing your feelings with them or with other friends who have shared a similar experience.

You are welcome to bring in photo of your pet for our memorial books in each waiting room

Helping Children to Understand

Losing a family pet may be one of the first experiences of death a child has, and it is important not to make assumptions about how they may react. Younger children have difficulty in grasping the permanency of death and may ask questions about when your pet is coming back. Older children are curious about many aspects surrounding death such as euthanasia and burial. The death of a pet may be especially upsetting when there have been other losses in a child's life. Children should be told the truth about their pet in honest simple language that they will fully understand. Straightforward words such as 'died' are more appropriate than 'put to sleep', which a child may misunderstand. If possible children should be prepared if their pet is terminally ill or that euthanasia is being considered so that they can ask questions, and say their farewells. If your child wishes to be present at the time of euthanasia or see their pet's body afterwards please discuss this with your vet who will be able to offer advice. Don't be afraid to allow your own sadness to show and encourage children to talk about their feelings. Often drawing pictures of the pet can help children express their emotions.

Helping other pets to cope

Pets who have been close companions for many years sometimes exhibit behaviour related to grief or loneliness; often this is linked to our own sadness. Our leaflet '**Coping with a Grieving Pet**' offers advice and suggestions for how to support your pets.

The Future

After a while you may feel ready to fill the gap left by the loss of your pet by introducing a new animal to the household. Only you will be able to decide when the right time is for you, there is no right and wrong period. A new pet will not replace the one that has been lost so investing love in a new animal will not betray the old, but will bring a new personality and loving companion to your home.

Avonvale staff will be happy to help you consider new pets and give advice on introducing a new animal to your family especially if you have other pets already.

We hope this leaflet has answered some of the questions regarding euthanasia and the death of a pet. Please don't hesitate to talk to Avonvale staff about any aspects or concerns you may have. Bereavement advice and support is also available through the:

Pet Bereavement Support Line

0800 096 6606

pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk



**For more information
Please contact your Avonvale Vet**

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