

Is it Time to Say Goodbye?

*A Guide For Considering
a Difficult Decision for Your Pet*

By Timothy J. O'Brien, M.S.

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A Guide For Considering a Difficult Decision fr Your Pet

This is dedicated to:

*Every person who found the courage to make the ultimate
act of love for their dear pet.*

*To Dr. Scott Dugas D.V.M., Killearn Animal Hospital,
who planted the seed for this book.*

*Dr. Mary Pilgram, Communication Department, Washburn University
whose research confirms the need for this book.*

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Statement of Purpose:

Because of advanced age and failing functions, a terminal disease or untimely accident, I, as my pet's primary human companion, recognize that the time to begin considering the final decision for my pet has arrived.

- I do this with an open mind, loving heart, and although pangs of guilt might assail me, with a clear conscience.
- I am committed to keeping my pet's best interests in mind.
- I want my pet to be with me as long as they have a quality of life that is humane.
- I do not want my pet to be in pain or to suffer unnecessarily.

Signed on ____/____/____

A FREE downloadable PDF version of this book is available at
www.petlossgriefguide.com/time

Please share this book and link with your Veterinarian, anyone who you know who is in need, or anyone who works in a pet-related field such as shelters, hospitals, etc.

Thank you,



Timothy J. O'Brien, M.S.
Director of The Institute for Stress Management
& Performance Improvement

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About the Author

Timothy J. O'Brien, M.S. is the Director of The Institute for Stress Management & Performance Improvement, in Tallahassee, Florida. He is also a Fellow of the American Institute of Stress and a Life Member of the International Society for Performance Improvement.

He has presented at both the State & National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) Conventions and has authored articles for their magazines, including the cover story for the NFDA's official magazine, *The Director* (vol. 82 -1).

Tim is the author of the popular continuing education course, "Grief Management: The Role of the Funeral Service Practitioner." For fourteen years, he wrote a column for Knight Ridder Tribune News Service, has published more than four hundred print articles, and given presentations on grief, compassion fatigue, stress and performance improvement.

A Word from the Author

Because of my previous work with grief – both human and pet loss – it was suggested that I write this book to help those who are in the process of considering the difficult decision of having to say goodbye to a beloved pet-member of their family.

Free Distribution of "*Is It Time To Say Goodbye?*" is made possible by the Amazon.com best seller, "*You Will Always Be a Part of Me. . .*" *A Guide and Journal for Grieving the Loss of Your Pet* by Timothy J. O'Brien, M.S.



This Pet Loss Grief Support Program is a unique print, audio, and Internet based Guide and Journal that provides specific, effective methods and tools for dealing with the stressful effects of grief.

www.petlossgriefguide.com

Preface

Your Grief Support work ("You Will Always Be a Part of Me. . .") fills a much needed gap in pet ownership. And, this work ("Is It Time To Say Goodbye?") on how to determine when/whether to engage your Vet to help your pet pass on into their next dimension is at least equally valuable.

My experience is that most of us have no basis for making such a decision, nor the emotions to deal with the inevitable guilt (of playing God with your dear friend.) Was it the right decision? Was it the right time? Did I do right or wrong by my friend? To me, this is the most important project you've undertaken. Its implications for pet owners (and, frankly, Vets and their staff) alone make it valuable.

We not only can do this for our pets; we simply must. It's our honor to have their unconditional love in our lives, which is something that even humans cannot replicate. It's our responsibility to give them unconditional love as we allow them to pass on when they let us know it's time.

And they always let us know when it's time. Our problem is that we often aren't aware or focused enough, to be able to read it. That's where a relationship with your Vet can pay big dividends.

Tim, I appreciate your thinking and philosophies, and I enjoy and value your writing. And I love that you want to help people deal with their troubles. Nothing is more meaningful than that.

Best,

Chuck Mitchell

Nationally Certified Therapy Animal Evaluator (and registered Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Animal Therapy team with his partner, "Rikki")

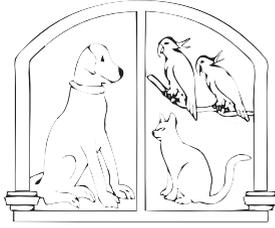
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Companions For Therapy

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?



*“To everything, there is a season, and a time
for every purpose under Heaven. A time to be
born and a time to die...”*

Eccl. 3: 1&2

Introduction

Most pets come into our lives as kittens, puppies, or some other cute and ready to be loved animal. They are so young and so into the moment that the idea of their eventual passing is the furthest thought from our mind.

No one wants to think about a time without their pet. However, time passes, and baked into the recipe of Life is the fact that your beloved pets do not live as long as you, their human companion.

Modern Veterinary Science as practiced by the highly skilled Veterinarians that care for your pet helps to allow most pets to have a long, healthy and active life. Eventually though, old age, sickness or accidents bring a time when thinking about the final days of your pet becomes both necessary and the humane duty of every compassionate and loving human companion.

The purpose of this book is to help you think through the considerations involved in making an informed decision about the life of your pet when the time comes. It will help you as you consider the many parts and pieces of making a choice based on the best information available to you.

As you go through this book, do not feel alone. Support is available to you from your Veterinarian, local and national support groups, extended family, and close trusted friends that have gone through this process before. No doubt, thinking about a time without your pet is both sad and a bit frightening to most, and you might feel like you are in a vacuum, alone and bewildered by the magnitude of the decision you are considering. This is completely natural and to be expected. It is also a time that you can endure and eventually recover from.

Look at this decision process as a journey, and this book as a map to help guide you along the path to a decision. You will find questions to answer, ideas to consider, persons to consult and ultimately, a decision to make: is it, or is it not the time to say goodbye?

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

In this book you will find areas to answer questions that might arise as you read. There will also be places to complete sentences to help you sort out your thoughts. A major part of this will be an assessment to make of your pet's current condition and a place to graph that condition over time to give you a visual picture of how your pet is doing.

This is your book. It is okay to write on the pages and in the margins or wherever you'd like to write notes or ideas. In fact, I encourage you to do so. You could also consider keeping a notebook with you as you read to list decisions or keep track of important pages.

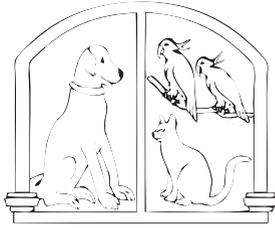
The intent is to present the wide array of considerations that go into making a final decision about your pet. The hope is to present these considerations in a sensitive, caring and compassionate way.

I DO understand the depth of love and the bond that you and your pet share. If something you read sounds insensitive to you, it is not my intention to be cold or uncaring. I want to give you a supportive way to deal with both the emotions and the objective facts surrounding the decision before you.

Let's begin our journey together.



Timothy J. O'Brien, M.S.
Director of The Institute for Stress Management
& Performance Improvement



*“Until one has loved an animal,
a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.”*

- Anatole France

How to Use this Guide: The Parts, Pieces and Process

How and under what circumstances did you receive your copy of this book?

- Did you find it yourself because you feel it is time to start thinking about your pet’s final days? Yes No
- Did a friend give it to you? Yes No
 - What did they say when they gave it to you? _____

- Did your Veterinarian give it to you, suggesting that you begin to think about saying goodbye? Yes No
 - Did your Veterinarian think the time was close? Yes No
- Did you ask your Veterinarian or a trusted friend their opinion about your pet’s condition and they thought you should read this? Yes No

How you received this book, and whether or not getting it surprised you, will impact your mental state as you work through it. If you keep in mind that you want to do what is best for your pet, regardless of how it impacts you, then going through this book will be easier, because you will know that you are doing it with your pet’s best interests in mind.

How are YOU doing right now?

Often, as the time to consider the final decision for your pet approaches, the only one thought about is the pet, but you have to be the one to make the decision.

So, I ask, how are YOU doing? Are you sad, scared, confused, angry, frustrated or any of the other wide range of emotions we feel when confronted with a decision we wish we didn't have to make?

It is healthier to admit and deal with your feelings than to suppress or deny them.

If thinking about your pet's condition and the decision before you causes you serious difficulty, consider talking with a trained counselor or a therapist who specializes in Pet Loss Grief. **It is a sign of intelligence, not weakness, to seek professional help when you need extra support or guidance.** Your Veterinarian, a Clergy Person, Hospice, or a local Funeral Director who also holds services for pets, should be able to help you find someone.

No one else can make the final decision for you; that is your duty and obligation as your pet's primary human companion. However, even if you feel you can handle the decision without professional help, I still suggest that you consider asking your Veterinarian to help you as you consider the decision. Your Vet can answer all medically related questions plus give you insights from their experiences with other families who have had to make the decision. Also, trusted friends or family members who have been through the process before can share, support, and console you during this time.

There are also some valuable resources on the Internet to help you think through your decision. Check **www.petlossgriefguide.com** for a list of resources. Also, **www.aplb.org** has readings about many aspects of making the decision, including a section addressing children and pet loss. You can also find several monitored chat rooms on this site. The Internet is a powerful tool; however, it can also be a source of conflicting information. Be selective and discerning before acting on Internet information. Check out any information you gather with your Veterinarian and trusted friends who have faced this decision before.

Considering and making the final decision for your pet is a heart-rending process but there is no need to be alone as you make it. Consider a Grief Support Program to help you through both the process of making the decision and after your pet is gone.

How is your pet doing right now?

Depending on your answer to the first question, "How did you get your copy of this book?" the answer to this question might be, "I thought my pet was okay, but since I was handed this book, I really don't know." Or, "My pet's had a great long life but is now in pain that can't be relieved. I think it is time to say goodbye, but I want to be sure."

There are obviously many possibilities between those two extremes. Helping you sort out facts from emotions when answering that question is the purpose of this book.

Starting on page 23, we will develop a "Quality of Life Assessment Graph," (QOLAG - pronounced KWŌ'-lag). It will help give you a visual representation of your pet's current condition that can be discussed with your Vet and trusted friends who have gone through this process. The ultimate goal is to answer the question, "Is it time to say goodbye?"

Guilt and the Process of Making "The Decision"

Guilt, in many ways, is natural. Initially, it usually enters our minds as questions and statements. Are you asking yourself any of the following questions and/or thinking about any of the following statements?

- Have I done everything I can possibly do? Yes No
- Am I playing God to even think about this decision? Yes No
- What if I'm wrong? Yes No
- My friend's pet recovered when they thought it was the end. What about my pet, how can I know that making a decision now isn't a mistake?
 Yes No
- I'm considering costs and don't think I should, but I really can't afford any more expenses. Yes No
- I should have gotten that extra treatment. Yes No

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

- I know I missed that one vaccination, but I didn't think it would matter.
 Yes No
- I caused this; it is my fault! Yes No
- I feel guilty because I'm being selfish and don't want to think about life without my pet. Yes No

The string of questions and statements surrounding guilt is virtually endless. Some feelings of guilt might have a basis in fact. Work to come to terms with those, then set them aside and focus on what is most compassionate and humane for your pet.

Many feelings of guilt won't have any real basis, but our sadness over our pet's condition and second-guessing about our actions, or lack of, preoccupy our thoughts. Talking with your Veterinarian about the cause of your pet's condition should help you sort out any situations where you may have had an impact versus those that were inevitable.

One condition, extreme old age, is actually a gift that you and your Veterinarian, working together, gave to your pet. Eventually, all natural systems and functions finally just wear out. So, in the case of old age, you did do something. You gave your pet a life span which, if converted to human years, would be the envy of us all.

If some of the questions or statements above touched a raw nerve, think them through. Discuss them with your Vet. Talk about them with your trusted friends or, in more serious cases, with a counselor or therapist.

Say what you feel you did or didn't do, then work to look at your statements and feelings objectively. This is difficult when you're emotional, but getting a clear understanding of the situation is important for releasing some of the strong emotions involved with making a final decision concerning your pet.

If there were actual times when you could have done something differently and didn't, and it negatively impacted your pet, consider two things:

1. Telling your pet you are sorry and asking for forgiveness, (which I believe you will see is immediately given.)
2. Work to leave the situation in the past. We are humans, and have all made mistakes, and will continue to make mistakes in the future. Admitting mistakes, asking for forgiveness where possible, and resolving not to

repeat the same behavior in the future is the healthy way to move on.

One special form of guilt, that is often mentioned by people who have gone through this decision making process, is the feeling of “playing God.” As Jerry Osteryoung, Ph.D., Jim Moran Professor of Entrepreneurship (Emeritus), College of Business, Florida State University noted, **“The hardest thing with my dogs was to decide if it was better to let them go, or to continue the medical treatment, knowing they were still in a lot of pain.”**

This idea about “playing God” has two sides to it and brings up an interesting dichotomy.

Side A:

When considering the procedure, some human companions feel that even contemplating the decision puts them in the position of “playing God.” Their belief is that making this decision is unnatural, unfair and perhaps even cruel.

Side B:

However, let’s think about the implications of humans making major decisions FOR, and on behalf of, their pets. Let’s walk through the logic of the “playing God” argument backwards. Through your pet’s life, have you:

- Taken your pet to the Vet regularly? Yes No
- Gotten all or most of the recommended vaccinations? Yes No
- Fed your pet a healthy diet and provided exercise? Yes No
- Taken your pet to the Vet to cure a disease or to be cared for after an accident? Yes No

Are any of the actions in “B” natural? They are common, normal, and expected of a loving and humane human companion, but would they occur on their own if you, the human friend, had not intervened? No.

You, together with your Vet, have blessed your pet with a state of health, vitality and age that probably would not have occurred without your loving and considerate care. So, now, as your pet nears the end of their earthly stay,

should you withdraw from or abdicate the final act of compassion? Should you suddenly stop acting in your pet's best interests?

You do not act in the role of God when, with a heavy but open heart, full of love and compassion, not wanting to see your pet suffer in needless pain, you decide, "yes," it IS time to say goodbye.

Veterinarians (and Their Staff) are People, Too!

The third person who completes the triangle of love and caring (with you and your pet) is your Veterinarian (and their staff). They are miracle workers in our eyes. They heal, strengthen, and renew. They are pillars of strength in times of deep worry and concern. They are trained scientists who can diagnose and treat in exactly the right way at exactly the right time. When we lose hope, they work to calm, console, and support.

Do you know what else Veterinarians and their staff are? It's something that is often overlooked or forgotten. They are people, too. They are people who have pets. They are people dedicated to the health and welfare of pets. They are people who love your pet, and all the pets that they see and treat. That is why they are Veterinarians or work in a Vet's office.

Experience in practice has also made many Veterinarians counselors by necessity. As many Vets have admitted to Dr. Mary Pilgram¹, Assistant Professor of Communication at Washburn University, they weren't trained in Veterinary School to console clients, but because of the grief associated with the injury or loss of a pet, they are often called upon to be front line suppliers of social support. Very few shy away from doing everything they can to help during your moments of need.

Many times, and with many pets, your Veterinarian has known them as long as you have. When they are injured or contract a disease, your Vet does their best to be the scientist they were trained to be. They want your pet healed, healthy and happy again, just like you do.

Your Vet has developed a relationship with your pet and is surely saddened to see your pet's time on earth is over or nearly over. Even if they don't show sadness, it hurts them, too.

So, if while discussing the decision about saying goodbye or during the procedure you feel as if your Vet is being cold or distant, remember all the times when they were strong when you needed them to be. Veterinarians are professionals and want to project a stabilizing image to you. Now is the most important time for them to be strong for you. And, also please remember at times like these, your Veterinarian and their staff are people, too.

Special Situations

Just Moved - Old Problems - 2nd Opinions

- What if you have just moved to a new city and don't have a Vet yet?
- What if you had a problem with a Vet in the past and you're wary about what you're being asked to do now?
- What if you want a second opinion because of the situation?

Whenever you have doubts, hesitations, or strong reservations, in any situation, take more time, work to get more information, and seek the advice of trusted friends or colleagues. If you're new in town, ask at work, at church or neighbors about their Vet. If you feel a second opinion will help you - get it. It is not an uncommon thing to do.

The Three Grievs of Considering the Final Decision

As the human companion responsible for your pet's welfare, you will likely experience three different types of grief as you consider saying goodbye, and after your pet is gone.

While reading, keep in mind this definition: **Grief is a strong stress response to a major loss in our lives.** We normally associate grief with the loss to death of a human or a pet. However, **grief is the legitimate, natural response to any significant loss.** The loss of a human or pet is the most severe grief because it deals with the finality of death.

Using a Grief Support Program (such as ***"You Will Always Be a Part of Me..."***) can help you both during the decision making process and after your pet is gone.

Anticipatory Grief

This is the apprehensive stress response to the anticipation of losing your pet. Your pet is still with you, but you know that the time for them to leave this earthly realm is thought to be close. This response is one of disjointed thoughts, a racing mind, and probably questioning if you've done all you could. It is also sometimes a reluctance to let go, punctuated with thoughts of impending loss and loneliness.

If you begin to experience anticipatory grief, it is critical that you pay close attention to everything your Vet says, does, or suggests. This is a time for accurately remembering your discussions. It is a time to ask for clarification if you are unsure about anything. It is also a good time to consider taking notes so you will be able to remember, recall, and relay to others any critical information. Then, if someone asks you what your Vet said, you will be able to answer accurately and with confidence.

Disenfranchised Grief

This is a feeling of despair felt when others simply don't or can't understand why you're so upset about your pet's condition or your sadness over the loss of your pet. This is where "It's only a pet, get over it," etc., can easily lead to a sense of isolation and estrangement, even from family members and close friends who have never experienced the depth and importance of the true human-pet bond.

There are three primary ways most people will respond to your pet-oriented grief:

- **Empathize**, because they have been through the trial of losing a pet. These are probably the best people for you to look to for advice, support and comfort.
- **Sympathize**, because, although they've never been through the loss of a pet or they are not a "pet person," they do not like seeing a friend in mental and emotional pain. These are sensitive people who don't exactly understand what you are going through, but will support you as well as they can.
- **Chastise or belittle you**, because they feel that your emotional reaction

is exaggerated, an attempt to get attention, or an indication that you are a weak person. These will be the people who say, "Get over it, it is just an animal," or similar ignorant and insensitive remarks. Spend no time with this type of person unless it is necessary. Also, as I often suggest, "Have no more confidence in the judgment than you do in the judge." Don't allow their ignorant comments to impact you. YOU know that your love for your pet is real. They can't. They've never experienced it. Seek the support of those who understand and will empathize or sympathize with you.

The Grief of Actual Loss

This is classic grief in the form of stress and sadness felt from the actual loss of your pet. This is the grief of having to deal with the finality of death. Each of us grieves differently. It is important for you to give yourself both permission and time to grieve.

Grief is what we feel, the emotions of loss. Mourning is how we express our grief, the outer displays of grief. Bereavement is the process, the inter-workings of the emotions (grief) and expressions (mourning) of your loss.

*"I wish this was an easier process but for me, grieving is just hard.
**In many ways dealing with the death of a pet is sometimes harder for me
than dealing with the death of a person**
in that I had to make the decision to put my pet to sleep."*

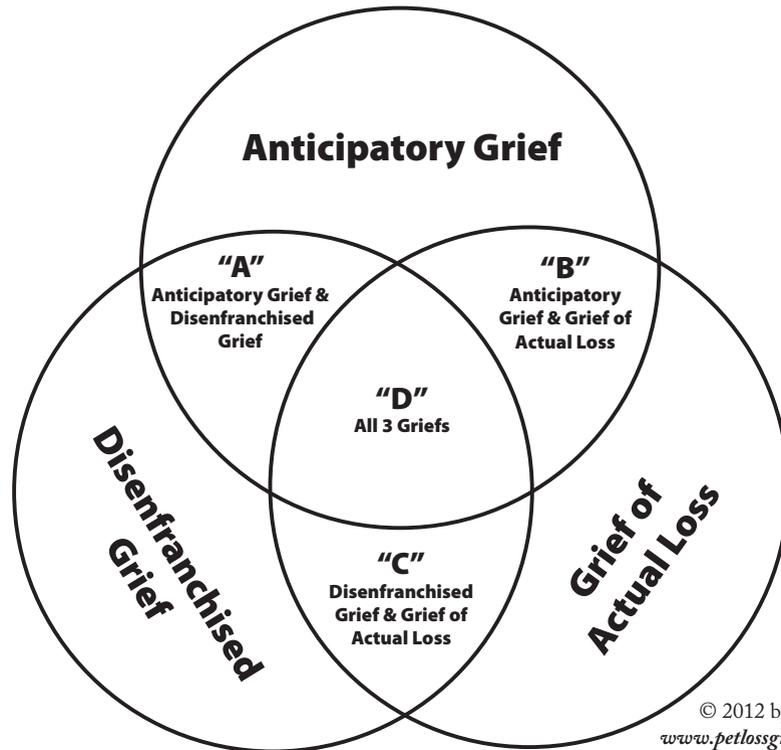
Jerry Osteryoung, Ph.D.

Dr. Osteryoung raises a point often echoed by human companions, that dealing with the death of a pet, at times, is more difficult for them than dealing with the loss of a human.

Can that be true? Yes, I believe that it can be, and here is why.

As a human companion responsible for the health, welfare and decision making for your pet, it is entirely possible for you to experience grief in the three different ways we just went over. And when experienced all at once or in close temporal proximity, their impact can be overwhelming.

Here is a visual example. The three overlapping circles form a Venn diagram. Each circle represents one of the types of grief that you will likely experience at some point: **anticipatory**, **disenfranchised** and **the grief of actual loss**.



The areas where two types overlap are places where you experience grief in two different ways. The space in the middle would be a situation where you would experience grief from all three sources.

When we lose a pet or someone close to us, we experience the grief of actual loss. If they had been ill or declining for a prolonged period, you might experience some anticipatory grief when considering their condition and how life might be after they are gone. This is the area marked "B" on the diagram where anticipatory grief and the grief of the actual loss collide.

However, with the loss of a human, there is seldom any disenfranchised grief. Other people understand why you're grieving the loss of your human friend. This is very different than when you grieve a pet friend. Some people, in their ignorance of the value and depth of the human-pet bond, ridicule, demean, and characterize those grieving the loss of their beloved pet as weak or mentally unstable. These are the areas marked "A" and "C" on the diagram where

disenfranchised grief interacts with the grief of the actual loss and anticipatory grief and disenfranchised grief interact.

Also, except in rare cases, people don't have to decide to end another human's life as one has to sometimes do for a pet friend.

So, when faced with having to make the decision of saying goodbye, coupled with insensitivity from others and bearing the weight of the actual loss of your pet, it is not a stretch of logic to believe that the impact of all three types of grief can be more severe than the emotions felt when losing a human friend. This is area "D" in the center of the diagram where all three grief responses compound and interact.

Now it is time to move on to the actual process of considering the decision.

When gathering information to help you make an informed decision:

- 1. Have a way of evaluating how much value to give to each piece of information you get.** I suggest that you place greatest value on the ideas/suggestions/opinions of your Vet, as they are intimately familiar with your pet.
- 2. Next, consider the opinions and ideas of close trusted friends and others who have gone through this process before.** Pay attention to the words, facial expressions, and body language of those who have gone through this process before; these cues are invaluable.
- 3. Finally, use the Internet with caution.**
 - Be careful about allowing what you read in chat rooms or on posted comments to influence you more than the people you know personally.
 - If something you find on-line raises a new question or causes doubt about something you'd already heard and thought you knew, certainly consider it but ask those you trust, including your Vet, for their opinion on the particular question or doubt. Don't automatically assume what you read on-line is accurate.

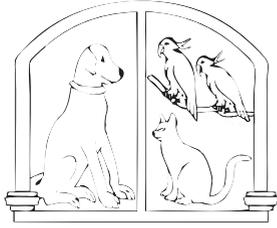
Before we begin going through the decision making process, let's work to be organized and systematic as we progress, and commit to begin the process with an open mind with no pre-determined outcome already decided upon. This process is not intended to influence your decision in any way. Hopefully, at the end of the process, a clear decision will be indicated: either it is or is not the time to say goodbye to your pet. If your course of action is obvious, it might help you feel at peace with your decision.

What is the current state of my pet's health?

The most frequently used sentence when speaking about the health of a pet is, "What is their quality of life?" And, the most often used criteria for assessing that quality is the question, "Is your pet having more good days than bad days?" Obviously this is an important question, but it is complex to answer correctly. Simply answering "yes" or "no" masks the many aspects that the question implies. Your pet's health has many facets.

- How is your pet's attitude compared to what has been normal throughout their life?
 - Is your pet more aggressive or more subdued? _____
- Have your pet's bowel or bladder habits changed? Yes No
- Is your pet eating normally? Yes No
 - Or, has their appetite changed? Yes No
- Is your pet having trouble keeping food down? Yes No

As you can see from these questions, when attempting to determine your pet's current state of health and well-being, a simple "yes" or "no," would reveal very little critical information.



“Love is a fabric that never fades, no matter how often it is washed in the waters of adversity and grief.”

- Anon

The Quality of Life Assessment Graph (QOLAG [KWŌ'-lag])

Since assessing or rating health has many parts, we're going to use a systematic way of looking at your pet's current condition. And, we're going to do it multiple times.

There are "quality of life" measures and scales that use multiple criteria for looking at your pet's health, but they only suggest that you do it once. What if the day you use these systems is one of your pet's really good days, or really bad days? What if on that day you were feeling either very optimistic or depressed? Both of these scenarios could impact your assessment and possibly lead to a premature decision.

This tool has two easy-to-use parts. The graphed results will give you a quick visual representation of how your pet is doing.

Part 1

If you have begun to consider if it is time to say goodbye, and have not yet spoken to your Veterinarian, a visit to their office is the place to begin.

- Make an appointment.
- Take your pet in and discuss your concerns.
- After your discussion, you can decide, based on your Vet's professional opinion, if now is the time to use the QOLAG to assess your pet's current condition.

- Even if your Vet feels that your pet's overall condition is acceptable and your pet's quality of life is still good but you have concerns, you could plot your pet's condition over a longer period using the QOLAG by using a monthly time interval between ratings, instead of a shorter one (weekly or daily).

Part 2

If your Vet broached the subject of saying goodbye to your pet, ask how long they believe your pet has before a final decision must be made. Based on this response, determine which time interval is most appropriate when using the QOLAG (monthly, weekly, or daily).

If your Vet believes there is nothing left medically to do for your pet, or the options available are beyond your mental, emotional, or financial abilities to bear, you should prepare yourself for making this difficult decision as soon as is practical. When your pet's condition is obviously compromised or deteriorating, a single immediate assessment, in consultation with your Vet, may be the loving, compassionate, and humane decision for your pet.

In this case, skip over the QOLAG section of this book and go directly to the Pre-Post Planning section on page 45.

Some Preliminary Questions

- How old is your pet? _____
- What is the average life expectancy of your pet's species and breed? _____
- Is your pet currently sick/injured or in noticeable pain? Yes No
 - If "Yes," have you spoken with your Vet about your pet's condition? Yes No
 - If "No," have you made the appointment to take your pet to the Vet? Yes No
 - If "No," why not? Are there time constraints, emotional factors, or cost considerations? What are they? _____

If you have hesitated in contacting your Vet, consider the health and well-being of your pet. You don't want your pet to suffer. Make the appointment with your Vet today to get an accurate medical assessment of your pet's condition.

- Has your Vet spoken to you about your pet's condition? Yes No
 - If "Yes", what is your Vet's assessment and prognosis? _____

- If you were given a prognosis, how long does your pet have, according to your Vet? _____
 - What has your Vet suggested? _____

 - Did your Vet give you this book? Yes No
- Has your Vet or a trusted friend who has gone through this loss, suggested to you it is time to say goodbye to your pet to end their pain or suffering?
 Yes No
 - If "Yes," what was your first reaction to the suggestion? _____

 - How do you feel about the suggestion now? _____

 - Do you agree? Yes No
 - If no, why not? What specifically makes you feel this is NOT the time? _____

Keeping your pet's welfare in mind, discuss these issues with your Vet and with trusted friends. As the person closest to your pet, you may have considerations they have missed.

However, also be open to their saying your reasoning is based more on hope than on seeing the truth about your pet. No one wants to make the decision to say goodbye to their pet. But while it is a loss, it is also the ultimate decision of love.

This is where you will likely experience conflict between your emotions and your ability to accurately observe your pet's true condition. However, since your pet is your companion and you are with them more than anyone else,

you really are the one who knows your pet best. So, it is important, as an act of love and humane kindness that you do your best, with the help of your Vet and trusted friends, to seriously consider if it is time to say goodbye.

The QOLAG was developed to help you make accurate observations which, in consultation with your Vet, will help in your decision-making process.

Recognizing Symptoms

And Caring for an Aging Pet

At some point a pet that has enjoyed a long life will begin to display some behaviors that “just don’t seem right.”

It could be a change in their walk, a change in their eating habits, tenderness to touch, or sensitivities that they had not previously shown.

Whenever, and as soon as you begin to notice any changes in your pet’s behavior, make a few notes and then call your Vet’s office and explain your observations and concerns. They will advise you on what to do next. Probably a visit for a check up so they can attempt to catch any problems in their early stages which will give the greatest chance for a cure or pain relief.

If you ever notice a major or sudden change in behavior or ability by your pet, take your pet into the Vet as soon as is practical for you.

Eventually, the time to say goodbye will draw closer, and your care requirements for your pet will likely increase significantly.

Ask your Vet and any friends or associates that you know who had to care for an aging pet, about the added requirements for caring for your pet companion.

Getting the insights, suggestions and support of those who have already gone through the process of caring for their aging pet should help you as you care for yours.

As your pet loses mobility or control over its functions, begin to seriously consider using the QOLAG questions and graph on the following pages to help you determine when it is time to say goodbye.

Quality of Life Considerations

As mentioned earlier, the most commonly cited criteria for assessing if it is time or not to say goodbye are quality of life considerations.

But what is quality of life? How can it be broken down into the major parts of your pet's life so as to realistically assess their quality of life?

How do you answer the “quality of life” question?

First, you observe and rate various aspects of your pet's normal life and routines over time. Then, you evaluate those observations and ratings to see what they can tell you. That is exactly what we will do now with the two-part QOLAG tool.

1. First, you rate your pet's current condition on a series of questions called the Likert Scales. (You will be familiar with them when you see them. You might just have not known what they were called.)
2. Then, you will plot the results on a simple X, Y graph. After several days or weeks of observation, you will connect the dots. This will result in a visual trend line that should give you a clearer indication of your pet's condition.

How often should I rate my pet's condition?

How often you rate your pet's condition depends on how much time is thought to be left for your pet to have a life free of pain and suffering.

1. If you are just starting to suspect that your pet's time with you is getting short, or your Vet has advised you to start thinking about a time when your pet will no longer be with you, then you could probably rate your pet once per month. Assess your pet at the same time of the day, and the same day of the month if possible. This should help you eliminate a few extraneous variables. If your pet's condition suddenly changes, you could shift to a weekly or daily rating.
2. If your Vet has told you that your pet's time is probably within the next month or so, then start with a weekly rating. Again, if your pet's condition

changes, or your Vet tells you that the time is probably sooner rather than later, you could switch to a daily rating.

3. If your Vet says your pet's time is drawing very near and you should start thinking seriously about saying goodbye, then use a daily rating.
4. If your pet is injured, diseased or in obvious pain and suffering, have the courage to ask your Vet, and even close trusted friends who know you and your pet, "Is it time?" If they say, "Yes, I believe it is," they are NOT making the decision for you. They are giving the professional or personal humane and caring answer that you asked them for. The final decision is yours. You might make it in consultation with others, but as the primary human companion of your pet, who looks to you for their welfare and wellbeing, the ultimate decision and timing are yours.

Why do I rate my pet more than once?

Multiple ratings will give you a more accurate picture of your pet's health. One rating is a slice of life at one point in time. Multiple rating points on a graph begin to create a picture of your pet's overall condition. You are considering a very serious decision. You want to collect as much accurate information as you can so your decision will be balanced, well-informed, compassionate and timely.

What do I do with the rating score I will get?

Each time you rate your pet's condition, enter the final score on the graph on page 38. Each rating is one entry. Once you have two points on your graph, you can connect them. As you add more rating scores and connect them, a "my pet's health" trend line will appear. As described above, the shape and direction of this line should be informative.

After you have several ratings on your graph and you have connected the dots, share the graph with your Vet and see if they agree with both your assessment and the way you obtained your results. If your Vet gave or directed you to this book, they will already be familiar with the graph and will probably be very ready to discuss its implications with you.

Also, you might want to show the graph to a trusted friend who has been through this experience before, and ask them if they feel you're being accurate in your assessment. Are you missing something important? Does it look like

your emotions are making you more optimistic than a more objective person would be?

Be sure to pick someone whose opinion you trust, someone who is both an understanding and compassionate observer. Then if they say, probably in a very loving and supportive way, that they don't think you're being as accurate as you think you might be, don't get defensive or angry. You asked for an honest opinion. Since the welfare of your beloved pet is most important, you want to be as accurate as possible in your ratings.

Pet Hospice and Palliative Care

Keeping your pet comfortable

Just as humans at the very end stages of their life turn to Hospice Care, increasingly, Pet or Animal Hospice Care is becoming available for pet companions.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (www.AVMA.org) has established "Guidelines for Veterinary Hospice Care" for Veterinarians to follow when they provide this service.

The International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (www.iaahpc.org) is an organization that provides education and support to both "pet parents" and to Veterinarians. Their mission is to help to provide "comfort oriented care to companion animals as they approach the end of life."

Hospice and Palliative Care are now options for most human companions for their pet friends.

You can discuss this type and level of care with your Vet. Discuss whether or not this type of care is appropriate for your pet, and at what time and under what circumstances would this type of care be used. Also be sure that you are clear on the costs involved with Hospice and Palliative Care.

A Special Situation for Considering Hospice Care

There are some people whose beliefs prevent them from considering euthanasia to end their pet's life under any circumstances. In these cases, Hospice and Palliative Care are viable and compassionate options to consider until their pet makes the transition.

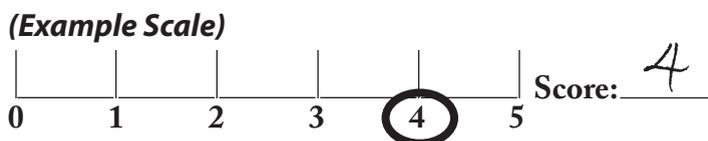
The Quality of Life Assessment Questions

There are 6 questions for you to score.



1. Each question is rated from 0 - 5, with 0 being the lowest or worst possible outcome and 5 being the highest or best possible outcome.
2. For each question, rate your pet's CURRENT condition (at the time of the rating, not what it was or what you hope it will be) by circling the appropriate number on the Likert Scale.
3. Circle only ONE of the numbers shown on the Likert Scale. DON'T fill in half numbers.
4. Place that number on the blank line to the right of the question/scale by the word "Score."
5. You may find some of these questions emotionally difficult. **Make yourself answer each question. Try to look at your pet as they truly are at the time of the rating. This is important.**
6. When you have answered all six questions, total the scores for each one and enter this number on the line labeled "Total Score." Enter this number on the graph. We will discuss the graph more after we've looked at the 6 questions.

***** Since there will be multiple rating days, consider either making copies of the questions if you are reading a printed copy of this, or go to www.petlossgriefguide.com/qolag and print out as many copies as you think you'll need. They are free. You will need one graph per time interval (monthly, weekly, daily), so you can use the one provided in this book, make a copy of it, or print one at the link above. *****



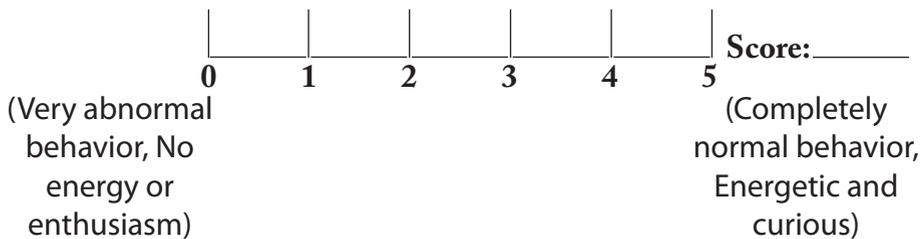
The Six Questions:

Date for this rating: ____/____/____ Time: _____

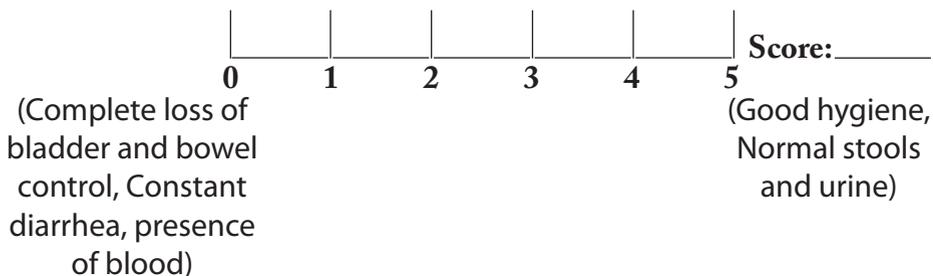
Place this date and time in the appropriate spots on the X axis [the one across the bottom] of the graph found on page 38.

With all of the emotions and concerns surrounding the health and condition of your pet, these questions might be challenging. However, if you keep your pet's best interests in mind, you will be able to rate each question accurately.

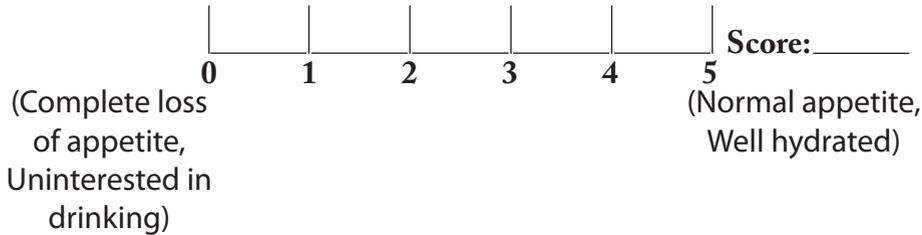
- 1. Attitude & Energy** - Has your pet's behavior been normal? Or, has your pet been more aggressive or passive? Is your pet in obvious pain, biting or clawing uncharacteristically? Is your pet as enthusiastic as usual? Is your pet still interested in normal treats, toys and activities? Is your pet still curious?



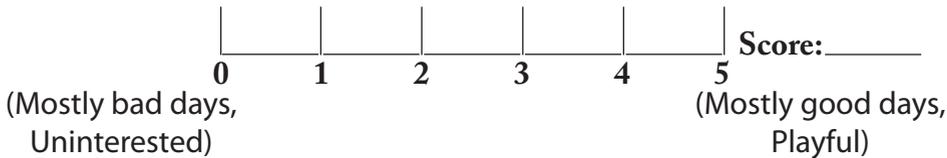
- 2. Control: Bowel & Bladder Habits** – How is your pet's hygiene? Is your pet as "house trained" as usual, or have there been accidents? If there have been accidents, has their frequency increased? Has your pet basically lost all control? Have you noticed any changes, any blood, or discoloration? Is your pet normal for frequency, regularity, consistency, and output?



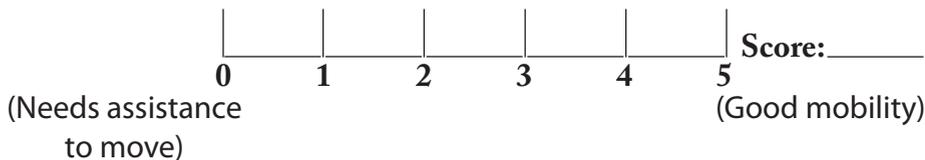
3. Diet, Eating, & Hydration - Is your pet's appetite the same as usual? Is your pet eating normal quantities of food? Does your pet still enjoy the same foods or has your pet become a "picky eater?" Is your pet drinking enough water? Have you seen any changes in your pet's eating and drinking habits?



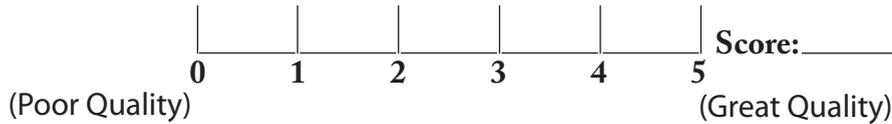
4. Activity & Positive Manner - Is your pet enjoying a normal routine? Have you noticed your pet becoming less involved and less interested? Is your pet still wagging their tail or purring as usual? Is your pet still being playful with you and their favorite toys? These would be the activities that you might classify as cute or even a little silly, those behaviors which are evidence of your pet just being joyful. Good days vs. bad days? This is the classic question and involves your overall feeling of how your pet is doing. Is your pet the same as always? Is your pet slowly declining because of advancing age or the progression of a disease? Has your pet begun to have many more bad days with only the occasional "little bit better" day?



5. Joints and Mobility - Can your pet still get around on their own, or do you have to assist your pet's mobility? Can your pet still use all of their limbs?



6. Overall Quality of Life - As the person who knows your pet the best, how do you feel their overall quality of life today compares with how they were a year ago?



Total Score for this rating period: _____

This number should be the sum of the six rating scores. Check your math twice; this is an important number. The maximum score possible is 30 (6 x 5).

To print additional copies of this question/answer form, please visit:
www.petlossgriefguide.com/qolag

Once you are sure your total is correct, there is one final question to answer before you place the score on the Graph.

- Did you do your best to give fair and accurate ratings of your pet's current health/condition? Yes No

If you can answer "yes, I did my best," good. Now plot the total score on the graph (on page 38), going up Y-axis until you find the number that corresponds to your score. (The Y-axis is the one on the left side labeled "Quality of Life Score.") Now place a dot on the corresponding line above the appropriate rating date on the X-axis (the one across the bottom). *****See the example graph on page 35.*****

If you answer "no," then think about what is holding you back from rating your pet honestly. If you feel you need help with this rating, either ask another family member, trusted friend, counselor, or your Vet or to help you. It is important to be as accurate as possible in your ratings.

Personal Notes:

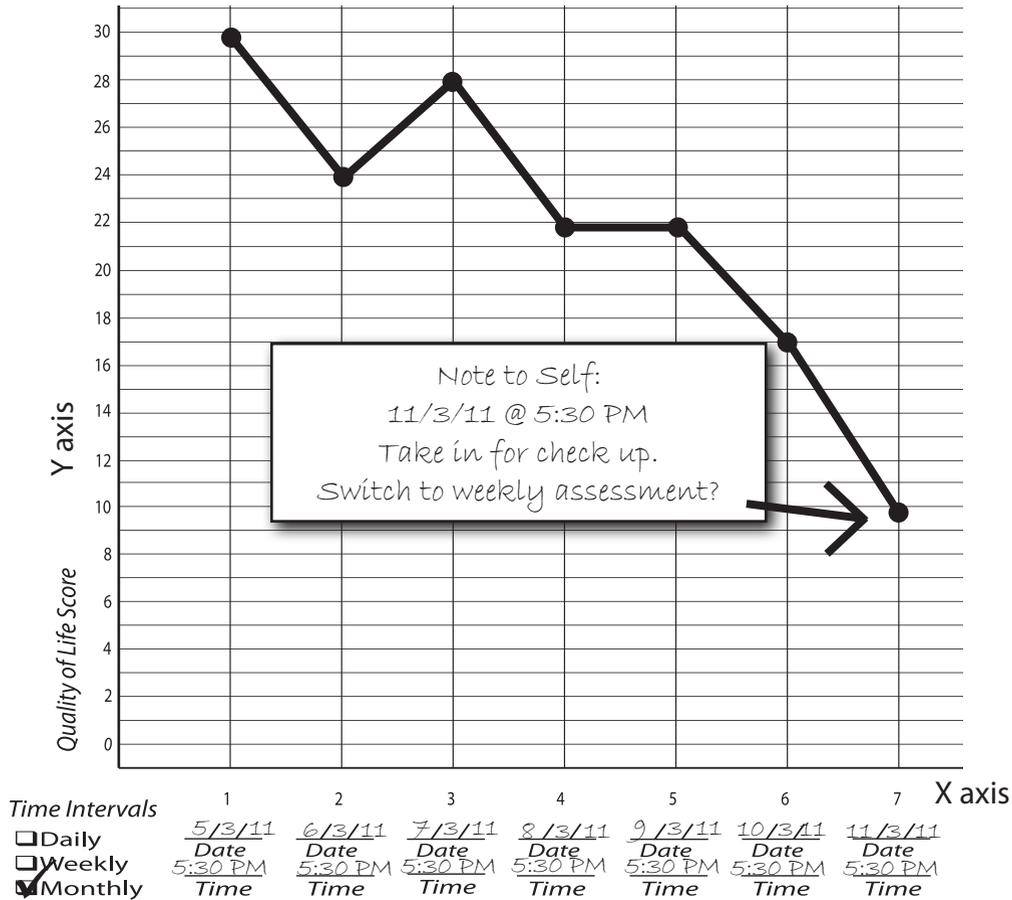
Notes about the Graph

1. The tall left side of the graph, the Y-axis (vertical), is where you will find the number that corresponds to your assessment rating each time you answer the Six Quality of Life Questions.
2. If your total score is even, you will see the number in the left column. If your number is odd, you will mark the line between the two even numbers.
3. Be sure to fill in the date/time along the X-axis (horizontal) each time you do an assessment. Then, travel up the scale to the appropriate rating number for that assessment and place your dot.
4. Try to make each assessment at the same time of day and the same day of the month when doing monthly ratings, or the same day of the week and same time of the day, when doing weekly ratings. For daily ratings, make them at the same time each day if possible.
5. After you have completed and plotted two assessments, connect the dots with a straight line.
6. The line that begins to form will be your pet's "trend line." We'll discuss what its shape might mean shortly.
7. Decide on the appropriate initial interval between ratings in consultation with your Vet. Then, based on what your trend line suggests, you can adjust the interval appropriately.
8. It is suggested that if you switch from monthly to weekly, or weekly to daily, that you start your plots on a fresh, new chart. A new chart can be printed by visiting www.petlossgriefguide.com/qolag

Personal Notes:

The Quality of Life Assessment Graph (Example)

(Chart Size Altered for Example Purposes)



- In this example, the initial time frame is monthly.
- The first four months show an up and down picture of the pet’s health. It then levels off for a month, taking a fairly steep decline in the months to follow.
- At this point, the pet’s human friend decides it is time to consult with the Vet.
- The user also notes that it might be good to switch to weekly assessments. This would give a more accurate picture of the pet’s health, because the time between assessments is shorter.

QOLAG Questions & Answers

Now that you have a score plotted on the QOLAG, let's answer some questions you'll likely have about the graph.

What do the individual dots on the graph represent?

As you know already, each time you rate your pet's health using the Six Quality of Life Questions, you should plot the total score for each rating session on the graph relative to the date of your rating.

- This total score represents your pet's health/condition according to your observations on that day.
- By itself, it is not necessarily very informative.
- However, each point, in relation to the other points you place on the graph, will begin to reveal important information to you and your Vet.

What does the line created by connecting the dots on the graph mean?

After you have made two ratings and plotted them on the graph (each entry is called a "data point"), you can draw a straight line from the first dot to the second dot, from the second dot to the third dot, etc., connecting each entry on the Graph.

The line created will be a "trend line." It SUGGESTS or INDICATES; it doesn't tell. The more ratings you do, the more dots you will have on the graph giving your trend line a shape: trending up, trending flat across, no discernible trend (your line goes up and down, perhaps expressing a pattern, but not a trend), or trending down.

- Discuss the trend line and how you created it with your Vet.
- If it is trending up, your pet is probably still doing pretty well.
- If it is staying flat over time, it might indicate that your pet is "holding their own" at the present time.

- If it is going up and down, this might indicate the good days vs. the bad days of your pet's condition and you should discuss possible causes and potential treatments with your Vet.
- If your line is trending down, especially if the slope down is steep, this would indicate a deterioration of your pet's condition. Consult with your Vet about shortening the rating interval or if it is possibly time to say goodbye.

Isn't this a lot of work? What can a graph really tell me?

Since your pet is very important to you and your pet depends on you for love, comfort and staying healthy, you want any critical decision to be made with accurate information and with great care. Rating and plotting your pet's condition on the graph might take some time and effort, but if done properly, the graph can be a valuable analytical tool to guide you and your Vet as you navigate the final days of your pet's life on earth.

The graph is a tool for looking at your pet's health/condition over time. Because you will have rated your pet's condition multiple times, the score sheets and the dots on the graph also help you in another way. You don't have to remember how your pet was doing a week or month ago; you have a written record showing you exactly how you felt your pet was doing.

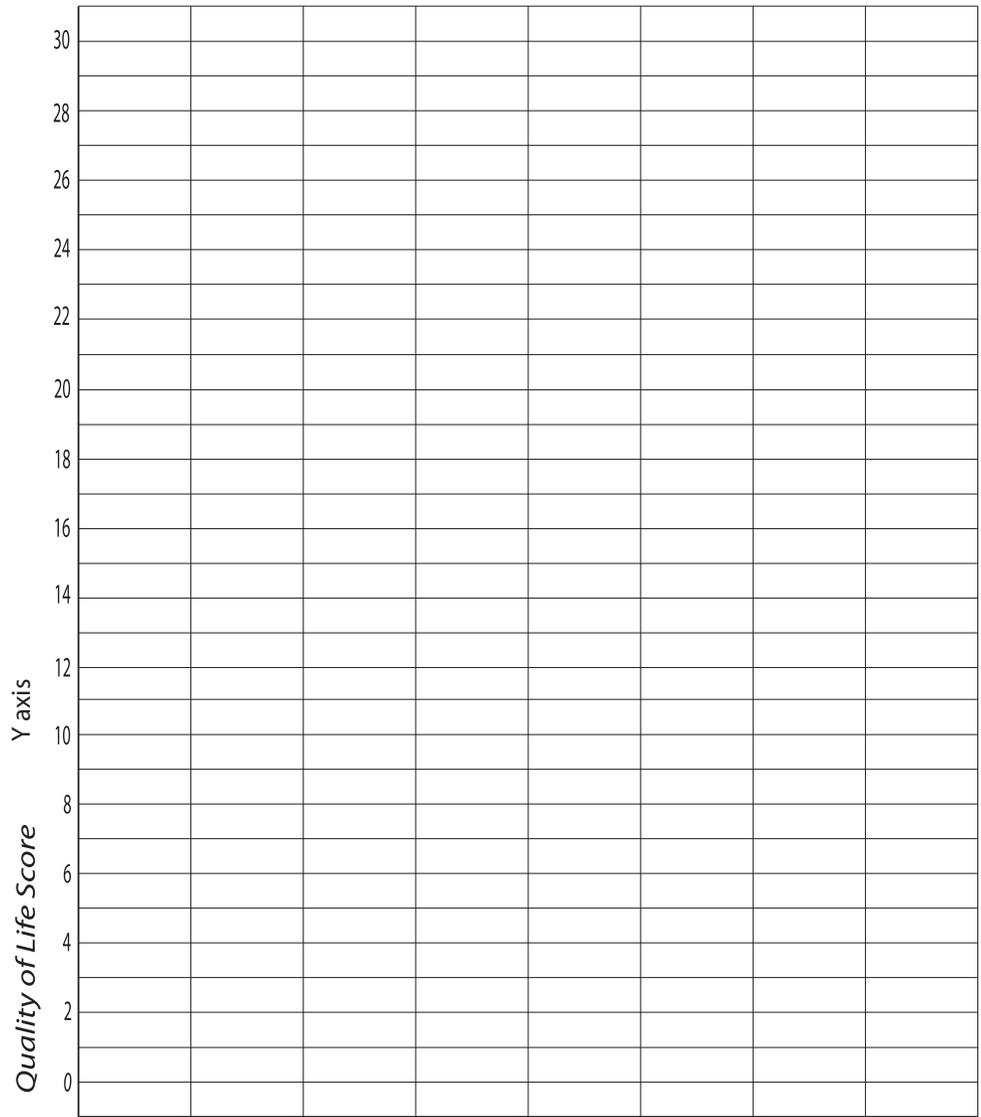
The graph is something to discuss with your Vet, trusted friends and any other person that you want or should include in the decision making process.

Is there a "final score" that tells me it is time to say goodbye?

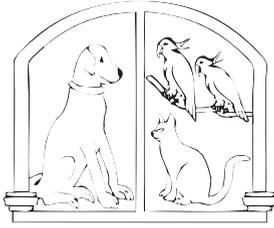
No, there is no final total score, shape of the trend line, or score below which the final decision to say goodbye is made for you. For reference, a total score of 30 (the max) would indicate your pet is in their prime. A very low score (0-10) indicates that your pet has several serious challenges.

Wanting to increase the chances of making a proper, well-informed decision while minimizing the chances of making a premature one is the reasoning behind multiple ratings of your pet. Then, when looking at the shape of the trend line on the graph, you can use it as one tool to help you decide the proper course of action.

The Quality of Life Assessment Graph



<i>Time Intervals</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	X axis
<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<u> / / </u>							
<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<u> Date </u>							
<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<u> Time </u>							



*“For death is no more than a turning
of us over from time to eternity.”*

- William Penn

Making the Decision; Is It Time?

The Chart Results

You’ve made and plotted several ratings assessments on the QOLAG. You’ve done your best to be as accurate as possible. You’ve plotted the final scores on your graph. You’ve connected all of the data points and it shows you a trend line.

Does the QOLAG trend line indicate anything definitive to you or is more time necessary to get a clear picture? Has your Vet indicated that your pet has more time?

When discussing your pet’s trend line with your Vet, ask if there are any remaining treatment alternatives or options available for your pet and their likely outcomes.

The Costs Involved

Discuss the costs associated with any of the treatments and options presented. The costs involved with treating your pet should not be ignored. First, can you afford the treatments discussed? Going into debt is a serious decision. If the costs would negatively impact you and your family, should you incur the debt? This is a difficult subject for some. Many are very sensitive about it and don’t want to think about it.

Have you weighed the Vet’s professional opinion of likely outcomes and the amount of quality life that any further interventions or treatments would give your pet? Would any heroic efforts to prolong your pet’s life improve their quality

of life for long enough compared to the costs involved? Would that quality of life be pain and suffering-free, or just a lower level of pain and suffering than your pet currently has?

The Decisions Needed

Ask others you trust how they handled this aspect of making the decision about their pet. They can't decide for you if you should incur further costs – no one can, not even your Vet. However, they can say what they did, or might do, and maybe suggest alternate ways of viewing this aspect of the decision. It might be helpful to ask yourself, "If I saw a pet owned by someone else that was in the same condition as my pet, based on what I know and can observe, would I say it was time for that owner to say goodbye?" It helps to put the shoe on the other foot for a moment to try to gain perspective, independent of the emotions.

One point to be careful about when considering costs is to not become cynical or wonder about your Vet's motives for suggesting what they do. Dr. Mary Pilgram², with the Communication Department at Washburn University, found that Veterinarians experience what are called "dialectic tensions." These are situations where a Vet might have conflicting feelings about what is best for your pet and what might be best for you. Believe that your Vet has your pet's best interests in mind and heart when making suggestions and talking with you. Your pet is actually their patient; they receive the treatment. You, the pet's human companion, are their client; you pay the bills. At times like these, it is good to again remember, "Veterinarians and their staff are people too."

A Tentative Decision

After your discussions with your Vet and any others who might have a stake in the decision, and considering all of the information you have available to you, **make a tentative decision about your pet. Write down your decision and your reasoning for it. If there is time, let the decision rest for 24 hours. What is your decision? Is it time to say goodbye?** Yes No

- Come back after 24 hours and read both your tentative decision and your reasoning.
 - If, after waiting, you believe that now is NOT the time to proceed, write out specifically, in detail, why you have changed your mind and set a date for going through the process again. _____

 - If you still agree with your reasoning that now IS the time to proceed, then consider the decision made, realizing that although difficult, it is the kindest and most humane final act of love that you can do for your pet.

This will probably be a very emotional moment for you. It might be a good idea for you to share the fact that you've made the decision with someone you trust and who knows and loves both you and your pet. Having some support at this time is good.

If you have made the final decision, it is time to begin preparations

There are probably more considerations associated with this decision than you might think. The next section of this guide will cover most of the important details involved. If you start to feel overwhelmed by all the questions, take a break, or get someone who loves both you and your pet to help you. Following are the most common questions people in your position have. Although some of the questions may not apply to your specific situation, please consider each one carefully.

Why should you make procedural decisions now, rather than as you move through the process?

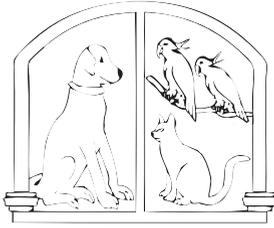
That is a valid question and I think there are equally valid reasons why it is a good idea to plan and make decisions up front:

1. As you move closer to the actual time for the procedure and immediately after, your levels of stress and emotions are likely to rise. ***By making important decisions and handling critical matters beforehand, you will not face the need to make decisions under stress and strong emotion.***
2. By handling matters now, you lower the risk of missing something important when finding yourself required to make a snap decision.
3. Making decisions up front allows for time to rethink some of them and perhaps change a particular arrangement.
4. Giving yourself advance time to think and make decisions should lead to less second-guessing and less guilt later. Decisions made at the time of need are often based more on emotion than logical thought.

Pre & post-procedure considerations

There are choices to make both prior to and after the procedure. By examining both sets of considerations now, you will make the process go more smoothly and less stressfully for both you and your pet.

In the following pages, we take a look at a list of decisions that need to be made and the reasoning behind doing them up front. Consider allowing family members and others who will be impacted most by the loss of your pet to help you make some of these important choices and decisions.



“If there is a heaven, it’s certain our animals are to be there. Their lives become so interwoven with our own, it would take more than an archangel to detangle them.”

- Pam Brown

Pre & Post-Procedure Questions and Decisions

1. Contact your Vet to schedule the procedure.

2. Ask if there is a time of day when the Vet won’t be as rushed.

3. Consider yourself too.

- Would you prefer not to be part of the process in any way?
 Yes No
 - If so, let your Vet know.
- If you choose to be there on the day of the procedure, would you prefer to have it done early in the day so you won’t be anticipating it all day? Yes No
- Or, do you want to spend the last day with your pet doing something special or saying goodbye? Yes No

4. Everyone is different.

- What a friend did, or might suggest, may or may not feel right for you. Find what feels best for you and your pet and go with it.

5. If you have never been through the procedure before, (we will discuss it later in this book on page 61), ask your Vet or staff member:

- “What should I expect?” _____

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

- "How will it be done?" _____

- "Can I get a copy of the consent forms I have to sign?" (Read and sign them before the day of the procedure.) Yes No
- Ask any questions you have on your mind. _____

- Then, ask if there is anything else you should know.
 Yes No

6. Call and verify the appointment.

- Get answers to any final questions the day before the appointment to insure all will go as smoothly as possible.
- Date called: _____ / _____ / _____
- Date and time of the procedure: _____ / _____ / _____
- Day to confirm procedure and ask last minute questions:
_____ / _____ / _____
- Vet's number: (_____) - _____ - _____
- Final questions: _____

Notifications

Notify family members and others who are close to your pet of the date. This will allow them, if only mentally because of physical distance, to say goodbye to your pet and offer you support.

People to Contact: _____

Deciding the Location

Do you want the procedure to be done in your Vet's office or at home?

Many people will offer strong opinions about location, and whether or not you should be present for your pet's final moments.

- Again, what do you feel most comfortable with?
- What do you think would be best for your pet?

Others can't make these decisions for you.

Having the Procedure Done at Home

- Does your Vet make home visits? Yes No
 - If so, then you may make this choice using your Vet.
 - If your Vet does not make home visits for the procedure:
 - Do you want to ask for a referral to a Vet that does?
 Yes No
 - Would you feel comfortable using a new Vet for this?
 Yes No

If you decide to have the procedure performed in your home:

1. Do you think that your pet will be as comfortable with the Vet coming to your home, or will your pet possibly be more aggressive, protective, or know all the good places to hide making the situation more difficult?
 Yes No
2. If you are a multi-pet home, will locking the other pets in another room, or making them stay outside without their companion be a problem?
 Yes No
3. If you have the procedure done in your home, will the memory of the event make it difficult for you to be in and continue to use the room where the procedure was performed? Yes No

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

- If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes," do you still want to have the procedure done in your home? Yes No
4. Once the decision is made to have the procedure done at home, nearly everything else will follow as it would if you were having the procedure done in your Vet's office.

Having the Procedure Done at Your Vet's Office

- If you decide to have the procedure done at your Vet's office, do you want to be present during the procedure? Yes No
 - If you want to be in the room, ask if your Vet allows this. Yes No
 - If your Vet does, ask if there are any special rules to observe while you are in the room. _____

 - If your Vet does not allow you to be in the room during the procedure, do you want a referral to a Vet that does? Yes No
 - If you feel being in the room will upset you so much that it would upset your pet, consider not staying in the room. The comfort and welfare of your pet remains the prime goal.
 - Do you want to spend some private time with your pet after the procedure? Again, this is a personal choice with no right or wrong answer. Yes No

Line up a family member or friend who can drive to the Vet's office with you, and who will drive you home after the procedure, especially if you are bringing your pet's body home with you for an at-home burial.

It would be a very difficult time to concentrate on being a safe driver. You do not want to risk harming yourself or others.

Person: _____

Agreed to Drive Me On: ____/____/____

Verified Day Before Procedure: Yes No

Disposition Arrangements: Overview

What do you want to do with your pet's body after the procedure?

There are two basic methods for handling your pet's remains: burial and cremation. And there are location considerations also. ***If you do not wish to be a part of this, your Vet will make arrangements for you.***

If yours is a multiple pet family and you bring your pet's body home for burial, it is possible that your remaining pet's grief will be lessened if they can sniff and see the body of their lost friend.

Disposition Arrangements: Things to Consider

Burial at Home

Some want to bury their pet in their yard or on other land that they own. There are zoning and deed restrictions to consider if you want to bury your pet at home. There are also several living arrangements, like apartments, condominiums, and town homes, that would eliminate this option.

- Do you want to bury your pet at home? Yes No
 - If yes, is it allowed where you live? Yes No

Prepare the burial site before the procedure so you can place your pet's remains in as soon as you get home or directly after the procedure if done at home.

Another consideration of home burial is the possibility of moving at some point in the future. Both of the following questions/options can be very emotional to consider, but need to be thought out before you make a decision to do a home burial. If you move:

- Would you leave your pet's remains? Yes No
- Would you disinter and rebury at your new location? Yes No

Burial at a Pet Cemetery

There are pet cemeteries and there are compassionate and understanding Funeral Directors who regularly perform pet services.

This is the most expensive burial option as there are the costs of the Funeral Director's services and the cost of the cemetery plot to consider. Be sure to get a quote of all the costs involved so you can make an informed decision.

- Is this something you want to consider? Yes No

If you are considering this option, you can ask your Vet for a referral to a pet cemetery or Funeral Director, or a trusted friend can lead you in the right direction. You can also check the phone book or search on-line for pet cemeteries or Funeral Directors in your area who perform pet services.

An on-line service that can help you locate a Funeral Director in your area is Pet Passages™. They describe themselves as: "a unique alliance of trusted, local funeral homes which also provide pet loss services with the same high standards they abide by every day for the human members of their communities." Their web address is www.petpassages.com.

If you plan to use a pet cemetery and/or Funeral Director, contact them in advance of the procedure. Discuss their services and related costs. Tell them the date the procedure is scheduled and ask that they make arrangements directly with the Vet.

Cremation

Having your pet cremated is the most common practice. Here are several considerations to think about and decide upon.

- Do you plan to have your pet cremated? Yes No

Personal Notes:

Cremation Pickup Arrangements

- Do you want your Vet to arrange with a local pet crematory to pick up your pet's body? Yes No
- Will you make arrangements with a pet cemetery or crematory directly?
 Yes No
 - Will they pick up your pet's body? Yes No
 - Do you plan to take your pet to the crematory yourself?
 Yes No

Individual Cremation

If you want your pet's cremains (the term for your pet's remains after the cremation process) returned to you, you will need to ask for an individual cremation. With an individual cremation, you will be assured that the cremains you receive are those of your pet. This individual process costs more than a combined cremation, where several pets are cremated together.

If your Vet will handle contacting the crematory, and you have requested an individual cremation, your Vet will call you when your pet's cremains are ready to be picked up.

- Do you want your pet's cremains returned to you? Yes No
- Or, do you want the crematory to arrange for their disposition?
 Yes No

If you have decided to have the cremains returned to you, you will need to decide on a container for your pet's cremains. There are multiple options, with an urn being the most common vessel. Urns can range from the very simple to the uniquely ornate.

This is not a decision that necessarily has to be made immediately. You could take possession of your pet's cremains in whatever container provided by the crematory, and decide later on a special urn.

You could also make the decision up-front by asking the crematory if they have urns available, or by contacting a pet cemetery, Funeral Director, or searching on-line.

The cost of urns varies greatly so be careful and know exactly what you're getting and how much it will cost. Since your pet's body weight, according to the ASPCA, is about 60% water, the volume of your pet's cremains will be very small, likely filling less than a regular shoe box. This fact surprises many people.

- What container will you use for your pet's cremains? _____
- What does this container cost? _____

Cremation Service Fees

There are fees for cremation; be sure to ask about them and any associated additional costs.

As with any suggestion in this book or received from friends or colleagues, investigate any group or service before committing to anything.

******Read any paperwork and consent forms carefully. If you don't understand something, seek professional guidance of a specialist in the related field.******

- What fees are associated with your decisions? _____

Cremains Placement

- If burial is chosen, will you place your pet's cremains in a cemetery plot or at home? _____
- Some like to have a little memorial area in their home. If burial is not chosen, will you place your pet's cremains in a special place at your home? Yes No
 - If yes, where? _____

Wherever and however you choose your pet's final resting place, allow that place to be a spot where you remember your pet with love. The place should be one that helps you remember the fun you had, the times you shared, the love that so easily flowed and existed between you.

If you find that your pet's final resting place, even after your life has begun

to feel normal again, remains a place of sadness, consider getting professional help and guidance that will allow you to work through your feelings.

Mementos

Make a list of any items you wish to accompany your pet's body. These can be taken and left at the Vet's for the crematory, cemetery or funeral director to pick up when they come for your pet's body. Put the list in a logical spot along with the items you assemble to bring with you to the Vet's office or to provide to the person who is assisting you in the final disposition of your pet.

- Whether you bury your pet or have your pet cremated, do you want a memory of you and/or your pet placed in the grave, or to be cremated along with your pet's body? Yes No

- If you do, what will it be: a picture, a poem, a favorite toy? _____

- Are these items you will place in the grave yourself? Yes No

- If you do, what will they be? _____

Collars, tags, locks of fur, all of these can be special and cherished reminders of your pet. My wife's parents asked her if she wanted Duchess' collar before they had to put her to sleep after a very long life. This memento of her lifetime friend meant a great deal. She still has it nearly 40 years later. Gather the items or clip the fur before you go to the Vet for the procedure.

- Do you want a special memento of your pet? Yes No

- If you do, what will it be? _____

Personal Notes:

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

Ask any person who has a special relationship with your pet if they would like a memento. If your offer is declined, don't be offended or hurt. To some, a tangible reminder of your pet might cause memories of loss instead of memories of joyful times.

- Will any family members or others who are close to your pet want something? Yes No
 - To whom will it be provided and what will the memento be?

Who? _____ What? _____

Who? _____ What? _____

Who? _____ What? _____

Final Celebration

A celebration of your pet's life, prior to the procedure, can either be a joyous remembering, or a quiet, calm, sincere time of reflection.

Try to avoid making this a time of extreme emotions, if you can.

This can be a way for others to say goodbye and begin the process of closure for both you and them.

- Do you want to have a final celebration of your pet's life, before the procedure, either privately or with a few others who were close to your pet? Yes No
- Do you want a final "family photo?" Yes No
 - If you do, take it as soon as is practical.

Remember, your pet does not fear death as we sometimes do because of their different level and extent of conscious awareness. Passing from this life to the next realm of expression is natural. The Life Force that animates your pet lives on after the body that housed your pet has ceased to function.

Gathering and distributing tangible memories of your pet, or having a final time with your pet, in the turmoil and confusion surrounding these final days, often gets overlooked or forgotten and that can cause remorse later.

Develop a Budget

Develop a budget of all the expenses you have discussed with your Vet, crematory, Funeral Director, pet cemetery, etc., to give you a clear picture of your total costs. Hopefully, this will allow you to avoid unpleasant surprises later.

Then, either prepay or make payment arrangements before the procedure. Prepayment will allow you to focus on your pet and yourself the day of the procedure instead of having to deal with payment issues. Prepayment will also minimize reminders of the procedure in the days immediately following your pet's passing.

You will likely be emotional, and working to eliminate extra grief triggers is a good idea.

Your Pet's Belongings

What will you do with your pet's belongings: bed, toys, food/water bowls, etc.?

- Will you keep them? Yes No
- When will you gather them: before or after the procedure? _____

- If you will keep them, where will you store them? Leaving them out will be a reminder that your pet is no longer with you. _____

- Do you want someone whom you know and trust, to come gather your pet's belongings and put them where you want them stored while you take your pet to the Vet's for the procedure? Yes No
 - If yes, whom is the person you will ask? _____

- If you decide not to keep them, have you considered donating to a local animal shelter? Yes No
 - If yes, which shelter? _____

What, when, and how will you tell others about your pet's passing?

The act of notifying those who love you and your pet will likely be both cathartic for you and appreciated by those you contact.

- No one who cares about you wants to be purposely insensitive.
- By notifying those close to you, you honor your pet and help those close to you avoid a potentially awkward moment.

Work on a short statement to practice and deliver. This should help you when someone who doesn't yet know about your pet's passing asks. You could say something like this:

*"Oh, I'm sorry I didn't let you know.
After (# of years, a disease, or an accident),
my dear (pet's name) passed on (insert the date)"*

You can choose to mention the manner of passing, or not. Most people will simply give condolences, and not ask further. If they do ask, you could say something like:

*"Because of (insert pet's name) extreme pain and suffering at the end,
I/we, in consultation with our Vet, decided that the most loving
and humane thing we could do for (insert pet's name)
was to have him/her put to sleep."*

Consider sending out a short note, perhaps with a picture of your pet to those who understand how important your pet was to you. This could be a written note to your holiday list or an email to your close contacts.

Social sites are now a major part of how many communicate. Before posting, remember that once you post or tweet, what you say is "out there," and there is no practical way for you to erase it or take it back permanently.

There are also several web sites that allow you to post a picture and memorial of your pet. These are three popular websites I am aware of:

<http://aplb.org/memoriam>

<http://www.petloss.com>

<http://www.critters.com>

When and How to Consider a New Pet

This next topic is a very sensitive and important one. Should you consider getting a new pet and if so, what type and when? There are three primary time frames for considering this question: prior to your current pet's passing, immediately after your loss, and "eventually." Let's look at each time frame.

Prior to the passing of your current pet

Some people are so accustomed to having a pet in their family that the thought of any time without a pet in their lives is unthinkable, so they bring another pet into their home prior to the passing of their current pet.

Those that do this report that the old pet, if in a condition to do so, will help the new pet "learn the ropes" of being a part of your home and family.

If you decide on this option, think in terms of getting a new pet, rather than as replacing your current pet. Each of your pets is unique. Consider getting a different breed to help avoid comparisons with your current pet. If a new pet reminds you too much of your current pet, it might be difficult.

If you are a "multiple pet person," getting a new pet might make the transition and loss of your current pet easier on the other pets in your home. Pets notice and mourn the loss of their companion, too.

Immediately after the loss of your current pet

Unless planned, this is often an emotional reaction to the loss of your current pet, and a decision that could increase your pain and suffering. It is a decision that could possibly lead to regrets and misgivings later.

By getting a new pet immediately after the loss of your current pet, it might impair your ability to properly grieve and mourn your loss because of the attention the new pet will require.

You can't replace your pet. Like people, no two are exactly alike.

“Eventually”

*“However, once I get through the grieving,
I do start to get excited again about what type of new dog to get
and what this experience is going to be like.”*

Jerry Osteryoung, Ph.D.

Most pet people do eventually bring a new pet into their lives after losing a pet. Many suggest waiting until after the strong emotions of grief begin to diminish and your life has returned to some semblance of a regular routine.

Get some help with this decision if you are not clear about it. Ask your trusted friends who have lost a pet and then gotten another one.

- How did they make their decision? _____

- How long did they wait? _____

- What else did they consider, such as breed, age, type, gender? _____

Ask your Veterinarian’s opinion on when to consider getting a new pet. They will give you both their personal and professional insights based on their experiences with all of the families they serve.

Personal Notes:

Consider Writing a Letter

Consider writing a letter now to your pet, yourself, your family and any others who love your pet and are involved in your pet's final days. Write about:

- How much you love your pet. Remember good times and say goodbye.
- If you believe in the afterlife of pets, tell them you will see them again. (Many people find the poem "Rainbow Bridge" comforting. Here is a link to the poem: <http://www.petloss.com/rainbowbridge.htm>)
- Detail how you will make the decision of whether or not to get a new pet and how you will decide on the timing.

This letter can serve as a guide and support for you after your pet is gone. It could help you not make a reaction decision that would bring a new pet into your home and family before you feel the time is right.

How Do You Feel?

Now that you have made the decision, gone through all of the pre-procedure planning questions, calls and scheduling, one last time ask yourself, and answer:

- Do I feel guilty right now? Yes No
 - If "yes," work to understand and release the basis for the guilt.
- Do I feel that I've not done enough for my pet? Yes No
 - If "yes," what else, could you do? _____

- Am I being selfish by thinking more about myself than my pet?
 Yes No
 - If "yes," how? _____

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

- Do I feel that my pet's condition is somehow my fault? Yes No
 - Normally the answer is "no." However, this is still often an emotion to deal with.
- Given all that is going on, and how I feel, would it help me to see a counselor, clergy person or therapist to help me sort out my questions, feelings of guilt, and self-doubt, etc.? Yes No
- Is there anything else that I'm feeling right now, other than understandably sad, about the prospect of my pet no longer sharing my life? Yes No
 - If "yes," what else are you feeling? _____

You want to minimize or eliminate second-guessing after your pet is gone. The best way to do that is to have confidence in your decision and its timing beforehand.

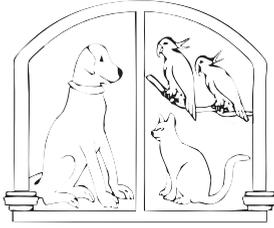
- Do I still feel that this is the correct decision for my pet right now?
 Yes No

Honestly answering these questions should help you deal with the majority of the doubt or feelings of guilt and hopefully reduce any second guessing that many report feeling after their pet is gone.

Many of those after-the-fact feelings could be due to not properly planning beforehand. By going through the process presented in this book, you optimize the opportunity to provide your pet with a loving, humane and compassionate passing at the appropriate time. This is your final and greatest act of love as a human friend.

"I have recommended this book as a resource to friends, family and colleagues. All have found it to be useful and of great comfort."

*Chuck Mitchell
Nationally Certified Therapy Animal Evaluator
"Is It Time to Say Goodbye?" Advance Reader*



“Death ends a life, not a relationship.”

- Jack Lemmon

The Procedure

What can I expect the procedure to be like?

The procedure that I have referred to throughout this book is medically called “euthanasia,” from the Greek root words meaning “good death.” Other common euphemisms are “putting to sleep” or “putting down.”

It is a procedure performed by a licensed and trained Veterinarian when circumstances indicate and the pet’s human companion decides that the correct time has arrived. There are definitely times when euthanasia is the proper and humane decision.

It is a fast, usually a matter of seconds, and painless procedure for your pet.

There are guidelines and methods (species specific) set forth by the American Veterinary Medical Association (www.AVMA.org) that are the basis for the decisions your Vet makes and the procedures they follow when it is time to assist in your pet’s transition.

I will now go over, in general terms, what you might expect the day of the procedure. However, since each Veterinary office will have slightly different protocols and procedures, discuss what you can expect to experience in your situation with your Vet.

The following procedure usually occurs for cats and dogs. If your pet is another species, discuss specific procedures for your pet with your Vet or a staff member when you call to make the appointment for the procedure.

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

1. If your Vet or the staff member uses terms you are unfamiliar with or don't fully understand, ask for clarification. Misunderstandings could possibly cause unwanted surprises later.
2. This will probably be a very emotional call for you, so it would be a good idea to write any questions you want answered before you call.
3. Write down answers as you receive them. This will help you to be accurate and you won't have to rely on your memory later.

The Day Before the Scheduled Appointment

1. Go over the answers and plans that you have created using this book.
 - Will the procedure be at home or at your Vet's office?
 Home Vet's Office
 - Will you stay in the room with your pet during the procedure?
 Yes No
 - Will you hold your pet during the procedure? Yes No
 - Will you spend time with your pet after the procedure?
 Yes No
 - Do you still feel good about your decision to bury and/or cremate?
 Yes No
2. Review your entire list. Make sure you've addressed all of the pre-planning steps. List anything you'll need to do or remember the day of the procedure, such as pre-signing the forms.
3. Verify the appointment time and location with your Vet's office.
4. Contact the person who will drive with you to the Vet's office or who will be your support person if the procedure is done at home.
5. Some people like to pamper their pet on their final day. Others carry on as usual. How you spend your last day with your pet is your decision. Think it through; the goal is no regrets for the future.

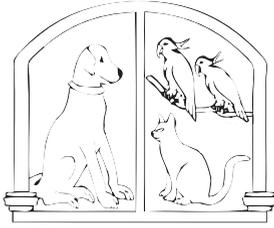
The Day of the Procedure

1. If you've decided to store your pet's belongings, have someone do it while you are gone.
2. Prepare your pet for a visit to the Vet's office as you usually do, or have as normal a schedule prior to the Vet's visit as is possible.
 - If you act differently your pet will sense it.
 - Now is a time to be strong for your pet, to allow as peaceful a transition as is practical, given your pet's current condition.
- 3. Remember to bring any pre-signed consent forms with you.**
4. Arrive at the Vet's office a few minutes early.
 - The staff will know why you are there, and will likely have told you to enter through a private entrance, if they have one, or they will soon escort you to a designated room.
 - This should be one of the items you discuss either when you make the appointment or when you call the day before to verify the appointment.
5. When your Vet enters the room with you and your pet already there, your Vet's normal protocols and procedures will likely be in place.
 - If your Vet isn't as talkative as usual, or appears distant, that could be because your Vet is aware of the seriousness and solemnness of the situation.
 - Your Vet both understands your sadness and is probably experiencing some level of sadness of their own.
 - Even though your Vet must perform the procedure regularly, it never becomes easy or routine.
 - Your Vet most likely feels a sense of loss, too.
6. Your Vet will go over the procedure and may ask you some final questions.
 - Now would be the time for you to ask any final questions, too.
 - Since each Veterinary office is unique, the exact sequence detailed here might vary slightly.

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

7. Your Vet's staff will probably wrap your pet in a towel, blanket or other covering.
 - After your pet has made the transition, all muscle control ceases and bladder and bowels are likely to release.
8. If you have decided not to stay in the room with your pet during the procedure, or your Vet's office protocol does not allow it, this will probably be the point that you will leave the room.
 - Remember, this is an emotional but personal choice.
 - Do what you feel is right for both you and your pet.
 - Be careful not to allow someone with strong opinions to force you into a decision.
 - This is one of the decisions that, when looked back on, can cause second-guessing and regrets.
9. If you have decided to stay in the room, now might be the time for you to begin holding your pet if you have chosen to do that.
 - Ask your Vet first.
10. Your Vet or a staff member will shave or trim a small spot on your pet's upper leg.
 - This is done because it is important that when the Vet administers both the sedative and the euthanasia drug, that a vein is easily found and accessed.
11. Depending on many factors, including the Vet's past experiences and your pet's level of anxiety or pain, your Vet will give your pet a sedative via a syringe, before administering the final drug.
 - This will relax your pet and help alleviate any stress your pet might have.
12. Your Vet will then inject your pet with a drug, in a predetermined dosage, that will enter your pet's system quickly, and cause your pet's heart to stop within a matter of seconds.
 - Your pet will feel no pain and will experience no suffering, and will quickly and peacefully pass on to the next level of expression.

- Your Vet will verify that your pet has passed by listening to the chest with a stethoscope.
13. During the final moments of your pet's life, your pet might sigh slightly, or experience an involuntary muscle twitch.
- These are auto reactions and not an indication of pain or suffering.
 - Any such sighs or movements will subside quickly.
14. Your Vet will now ask you if you'd like to spend some private time, alone with your pet.
- If you do, they will leave the room you are in.
 - If you chose not to be in the room during the procedure, your Vet or staff member will find you and ask you if you want to spend some private time.
 - Not everyone chooses to spend private time.
 - If you have already said goodbye to your pet and feel that was sufficient, or if you feel that staying alone with your pet's body would be overwhelming, then choose not to remain in the room alone.
 - If you plan to come back into the room to spend a few quiet moments with your pet after the procedure (again your choice), ask the Vet or a staff member to please remember to close your pet's eyes before they bring you back into the room. This gesture will make your return to the room easier.
15. After your private time, or soon after the procedure if you chose not to have any private time, your Vet or a staff member will likely offer to escort you to your car.
16. If you are taking your pet's body with you for home burial or personal delivery to a crematory or funeral home, you will be discreetly escorted, along with your pet's body to your car, or the car of the person who will drive you home.
- Realize because of their schedule and office obligations, they will probably not be able to stay with you at your car very long.
17. If you have prearranged with your Vet, crematory or Funeral Director to



*“Although the world is full of suffering,
it is also full of the overcoming of it.”*

- Helen Keller

*“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but
of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They
are the messengers of overwhelming grief... and unspeakable love.”*

- Washington Irving

After the Procedure and Your Pet Has Passed

Details and Dealing with Grief

Once your pet is gone, you will have memories, but not the physical presence you so enjoyed. What now? The list probably includes grief, sadness, wondering and some final details that you will need to handle.

The details will be the memorial service, if you plan to have one, sending out notices, if you choose to send them, and paying the final expenses that you didn't know about or didn't pay before the procedure. Take each of these details as they present themselves, or as you had planned them previously.

And then, the big one: figuring out how to live a life without your pet. The best answer to this challenge is to learn about grief and how to effectively deal with it. This knowledge, coupled with the great healer, time, should eventually help you through the maze of emotions you will likely experience.

After your loss, the number one person to be taken care of is YOU! You've just suffered a difficult loss. The grief you feel is a natural, expected and healthy reaction to such a major loss, even if some of those around you, out of ignorance, tell you otherwise.

Fortunately, there is stitched into the fabric of our humanity a great ability to endure, persevere and eventually prevail over adversity. Science calls it "resilience." Immediately after a major loss, we as humans, often feel frail, lonely, and hopeless. However, although time might not "heal all wounds," it usually

does allow us to adjust our perspectives, to acknowledge our loss, keep it in our hearts in a healthy way, and move on to a new way of expressing after our loss.

An Introduction to Dealing with Grief

As a human companion to your pet, your grief does not begin with the loss of your pet; it begins the moment you start to consider whether or not it is time to say goodbye.

There are many misconceptions about grief, mourning and the bereavement process. These misconceptions often arise from either a superficial knowledge of what grief truly is, or the continued adherence to old, unsupported models of grief.

- **Grief** includes the emotions that you feel.
- **Mourning** is how you express the emotions of grief.
- **Bereavement** is the process and interplay of grief emotions and mourning expressions.

Grief is a stress reaction to a catastrophic loss in our life.

According to the classic Holmes & Rahe stress scale³ and even more so in subsequent updates to the scale by Dr. Richard Rahe⁴, the loss of a loved one, human or pet, is among the most stressful of human life experiences. As your pet's companion, there are three types of grief you are likely to experience. They are, as briefly mentioned earlier, **anticipatory grief**, **disenfranchised grief**, and **the grief of actual loss**.

1. Having to consider and eventually make the final decision for your pet often causes **anticipatory grief**, as we've already discussed, due to the apprehension concerning your impending loss.
2. Encountering insensitive and ignorant people who do not understand the depth and importance of the human-pet bond might cause you to experience **disenfranchised grief**. It is best to avoid those who you know don't understand the bond you have with your pet. You won't be

able to explain it to them. Something in them makes them incapable or unwilling to fully comprehend what your pet means to you and your depth of love and affection.

3. After your pet's transition, you will experience traditional grief, **the grief of actual loss**, which is the reaction to having to deal with the finality of death.

There are NO "Stages of Grief."

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross developed her "stages model" for terminally ill patients, NOT for those grieving the loss of a beloved human or pet. She herself admitted that her "stages" were not meant to represent a linear progression of how grief is experienced.

- Contrary to all you see, hear and read, there simply aren't set, specific stages of grief. Many studies have been unable to substantiate the claim that specific stages exist.
- There is NO set order in which you will experience grief emotions. You might experience denial, anger, bargaining, depression and eventual acceptance (the five classic stages), BUT you might not. And if you do, they may not be in that exact order.
- There is NO specific timeline for how long the bereavement process will last. There are places where you read that "grief lasts about a year," or "you should be over grieving the loss of your pet in three months, or you're not psychologically stable." You wonder if whoever wrote statements like that ever actually experienced the loss of a cherished human or pet. Grieve and mourn in your way, and at your pace, not someone else's.

"Emotions of Grief" better describes what you will experience.

The range of emotions will likely be far in excess of the five, seven, or twelve "stages" I've seen promoted.

Triggers will cause grief **episodes**, and the **frequency, intensity** and **duration** of the episodes determine the course and length of your grieving and mourning experiences.

- Any memory, from any of your senses, can be a trigger that will initiate

a grief episode or event. The sight of your pet's water bowl, seeing a can or bag of their favorite food, going past a park you played in together, holidays, birthdays, anything can be a trigger.

- Once an episode begins, there is no way to predict how intense the episode will be or how long it will last. It will simply have to "run its course." Don't be surprised when some seemingly minor sight, word, smell, or sound triggers a deep and long-lasting grief event.
- Right after your loss, you will experience a higher frequency of episodes, which will probably be both more intense and will last longer than later episodes.
- Over time, you will come to understand the relationship between triggers and episodes and what once triggered a major episode might eventually only cause a twinge of emotion. The frequency, intensity, and duration of the episodes you do experience will normally begin to diminish. If they don't begin to diminish after what you consider to be a reasonable time, seek professional help in dealing with the most intense situations.
- Grieve and mourn at your own pace, on your own terms, in your own way. Do not try to conform to anyone else's expectations or time line. You are a unique individual. Your feelings and expressions of grief might be similar to others, but they won't be the same. They won't be identical. They will be yours. If you ever feel overwhelmed, deeply depressed, or unable to deal with your loss on your own, seek professional help. ***Remember, it is a sign of intelligence, not weakness, to use professional help when needed.*** Sometimes we just need a little boost of support and understanding, or some help in clarifying our thoughts to get us through.

There are three ways to deal with grief: Relief, Release, and Recovery.

1. **Relief** from the debilitating emotions of grief, if only temporary in the beginning, is therapeutic and helps to maintain a healthy immune system.
 - Practicing Meditation or the Relaxation Response (track 2 on the CD of The Pet Loss Grief Support Program "***You Will Always Be A Part Of Me...***") is a way to quickly allow the mind to rest from all of the racing and conflicting emotions of grief.
 - Getting natural, restful sleep is nature's number one stress

management tool (Track 3 on the Program CD is “The Sleep Technique”). The loss of your pet might cause disrupted sleep or vivid dreams. Try to maintain a normal sleep-wake cycle.

- Learn specific Stress Management And Relaxation Techniques (For an effective program, see the B. R. E. A.D. S. formula explained on page 25 of “**You Will Always Be A Part Of Me...**”) that work for you, then practice them on a regular basis.

2. Release from the cause of your stress is the eventual goal. Here, time is usually the best remedy along with situational inner reflection.

- Don’t deny your loss.
- Don’t diminish or deny your pet’s importance to you.
- Experience the episodes as they come, don’t try to force them to stop. I refer again to time because that is often what it takes to understand, accept, and adjust to your loss.

3. Recovery is seldom, if ever, complete. You’ve lost an important part of you. You’ve lost your friend, your companion, your confidant and so much more.

- You will be able to find a way to move on without forgetting.
- You will get back to a new normal life and routine for you. It might even include a new pet at some point.
- Don’t force yourself. Don’t set a time line.
- As long as, after a few months or so, you begin to feel some sense of recovering from your loss, continue to be gentle with yourself and give the recovery process more time.
- If you experience unending deep depression or thoughts of violence toward yourself or others, seek help. Grief can become what is called “difficult or complicated grief,” which is a situation that requires professional and sometimes medical help to resolve.

Consider joining a support group.

Your Vet will likely know of a local support group you can contact and consider joining.

- Some Veterinary offices, most often the very large practices, are beginning to offer social support for those who have lost their pet friends.
- Many Hospices offer Pet Loss Grief Support as an additional service to their Human Support.
- If you use the services of a Funeral Director, ask them if they offer Pet Loss Grief Support and, if they don't, ask if they are aware of any resources available in your area.
- Use the Yellow Pages, or search on-line for Pet Loss Grief Support in your area.
- There are many web sites that offer on-line support. Be careful with how much time you spend at these sites. Don't allow these sites to become a substitute for local human interaction.
- There is a list of web based pet loss resources listed at www.petlossgriefguide.com/resources. This is a web site related to my Pet Loss Grief Guide & Journal described below.

"I liked that the book took the reader through every step and every possible scenario involved.

I think this was especially helpful at the end, in the sections that follow once the decision is made that a pet must be put down.

The book does a great job of covering every aspect of what a person should be prepared for in this situation. Certain things, such as whether or not to remain in the room, might not even occur to someone until the time of the event. I think the book does a great job of preparing people for what to expect."

*Jessica Fowler, myASD
"Is It Time to Say Goodbye?" Advance Reader*

Hope for the Future

No one wants to make a decision to put their pet to sleep. No one wants to think of a time when their pet friend is no longer with them. However, accidents, disease and time eventually dictate that we must, as a loving, compassionate and humane companion and friend.

Yes, you wish and hope that your pet could pass peacefully in their sleep. That does occasionally occur, but it isn't something that you can count on happening.

Guilt, self-doubt, self-blame, second guessing and a myriad of other emotions crowd the brain as you try to think through doing what is best for your pet, but not too soon if your pet could still have more days or months of quality of life. You desire to ensure a long life for your pet, but you do not want to wait too long and subject your beloved companion to unnecessary pain and suffering for selfish reasons.

How can you know it is the right time? Unless you feel that your pet gives you definitive signs that they are ready to go, it is nearly impossible to be 100% sure of the exact time to say goodbye. This is what causes so many of the negative emotions, the guilt, the feeling of letting your friend down, or even a feeling you are betraying your best friend.

This book has helped you to think about the decision and the timing of when to say goodbye. If you have answered the questions honestly, done your assessments, charted your ratings on the QOLAG, connected the dots and analyzed the trend line with your Vet, you have acted in a righteous way, keeping your pet's best interests and welfare foremost in your mind.

If everything about your pet, coupled with your Vet's opinion and those of others you trust, indicates that it is time to let go, time to say goodbye, tell your pet how much they are loved, make the decision, set the appointment and proceed. This will be the ultimate act of loving kindness that you can show your pet.

If everything indicates that it is time to say goodbye but you can't get yourself to make the final decision, find a way to have the inner strength and conviction to release your pet from suffering.

If you are a religious or spiritual person, pray for strength and guidance. If you need additional help with this final part of the decision, find it as soon as possible. That is best for both you and your pet.

Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

This is not a call for you to rush your decision. If there is some reason for hope, or other indication that your pet can still enjoy a reasonable quality of life, it is not the time to say goodbye. It is, however, a suggestion that if everything you've considered and those you have consulted indicate that there is nothing left to be done for your pet and you know it too, but just can't "go through with it," you need to find the support to make this decision.

It is difficult and painful. You wish there was another option, but eventually, there isn't. Then it is the time to say goodbye.

After your pet has passed, take time for yourself. Be kind to yourself, you will have just made and carried out the most difficult decision you will ever have to make for a pet friend.

A major place where "disenfranchised grief" occurs is when your pet has passed and you have to go back to work. If you display sadness or difficulty performing your job, you may find people who make inappropriate and insensitive comments. Do the best you can to let these comments just pass over you. Realize that they are the words of ignorance.

Few, if any, businesses extend "family leave" provisions and time off for the loss of a pet. You might discreetly ask if it is permissible, but don't be surprised if it isn't. If you feel that returning to work immediately after your pet is gone will be difficult, consider taking an additional day off following the procedure. Taking that time off would give you an extra day before going back to work. This would give you at least two days to allow the initial wave of grief to wash over you. If you have very understanding coworkers, employees or owners, actually being at work could lend you some support. This is obviously a personal decision.

Remember to have your personal and family memorial service if you had planned one. **Find support if you need it. Get professional help if your grief is very persistent or if you feel deeply depressed.**

Remember your pet often and fondly. Recall your happiest times. Talk to your pet if you feel like it. Keep encouraging poems and words close by and read them often for strength and encouragement if you find them helpful.

Find and follow a personal Grief Support Program that will allow you some relief from the symptoms, eventual release from the causes and recovery to a new normal life after losing your pet.

Believe and know that your pet is no longer in pain. Also, believe and know that even though you hurt so much and you miss your pet, built into

A Final Thought

You are not alone as you walk this path. There are those who have walked this path before you who wish for you strength, wisdom, and courage. Your Vet and close trusted friends support you. And, your pet loves and supports you because your pet knows that you have always been there for them and have always kept their best interests in mind. That is the mark of a true loving human companion. May cherished memories be your comfort, and your return to a productive and happy life be your tribute.

Very Sincerely,



Timothy J. O'Brien, M.S.

November 15, 2011

Free Distribution of *"Is It Time To Say Goodbye?"* is made possible by *"You Will Always Be a Part of Me. . ." A Guide and Journal for Grieving the Loss of Your Pet* by Timothy J. O'Brien, M.S.



"I wish I had something like that to read when my kitties died. I love the journaling aspect. It is amazing how our work is so similar in terms of conclusions drawn from the literature/experience. Very exciting. I appreciated the "calming" tone of the book and the many reminders that this grief is legitimate."

- Dr. Mary Pilgram, Communication Department, Washburn University, Author of *Communicating social support to grieving clients: The veterinarians' view.*

www.petlossgriefguide.com

Two Requests:

1. If this book has helped you, please share it with anyone who might benefit from it.
 - If your Vet is unaware of this publication, please tell them about it.
 - It is FREE to everyone to either read on-line or to print out at [**www.petlossgriefguide.com/time**](http://www.petlossgriefguide.com/time).
 - It is also available in a Kindle version on [**www.amazon.com**](http://www.amazon.com)
 - Or as print copies in bulk for a nominal fee at [**www.petlossgriefguide.com/timebulkorder**](http://www.petlossgriefguide.com/timebulkorder).
 - Do you have friends or colleagues that you know are considering the final decision for their pet? Please share a copy or the link with them. [**www.petlossgriefguide.com/time**](http://www.petlossgriefguide.com/time)
2. Please help me improve this Guide.
 - Do you have any comments, ideas, or suggestions of what else I should include in the next edition of this Guide?
 - Did I miss something?
 - Should something be covered in more depth?
 - Was something too long or confusing?
 - What did you like?
 - What didn't you like?

Please help me improve this. Our goal is to make this Guide as useful as possible for those human companions who must contemplate the final days of their beloved pets.

Please leave comments, questions, and suggestions at:

[**www.petlossgriefguide.com/timecomments**](http://www.petlossgriefguide.com/timecomments)

Or send us an email at:

[**comments@petlossgriefguide.com**](mailto:comments@petlossgriefguide.com)

Thank you

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Is It Time To Say Goodbye?

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