

**PETCLOUD'S  
QUALITY-OF-LIFE  
AND EUTHANASIA  
GUIDE**

*Information and tools to help you support  
and monitor your pets quality of life.*

# A NOTE FROM KEVIN



## TO MY FRIENDS AND FELLOW GRIEVERS,

I want to personally say that I'm sorry for what you're going through and for the decision you may soon have to make for someone you love very much. This is the hardest decision that many of us will ever have to make. The loss of a pet is a profound loss, and it's a loss unlike any other.

This guide is meant to help you monitor various metrics about how your pet is doing on a day-to-day basis. Then, over a period of time, we begin to see how they are doing on a greater scale. We do this to help recognize gradual changes that we would have otherwise not noticed until it was too late.

It's hard to see when we're so close to it. Plus, most likely we're not going to be completely honest with the reality, but when we see it written down, over time, we begin to see that it comes to one inevitable conclusion.

Please use this as a guide and tool to help you in the next few weeks. *This is not meant to be an absolute authority and complete source*, so please keep in regular contact with your veterinarian and people in your life who support you. Hopefully, this can lift some of the burden you have to carry.

I want to personally tell you that you are not alone on this journey. There are many, many people who also share your feelings and your struggles, and I am one of them.

We all need a community of friends, colleagues, and family who will understand and sometimes just listen. Anytime that you feel overcome with grief, or alone, without anyone who will listen, we're just a phone call or click away. Come see what our community is like.

Sincerely,

**Kevin Ringstaff**

*Founder, Listener, Speaker*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



What Is Euthanasia? .....	4
Anticipatory Bereavement .....	4
Your Decision .....	5
Treasuring Your Time .....	6
Quality of Life (QOL) .....	7
Breathing .....	8
Pain .....	9
Mobility .....	10
Cleanliness .....	11
Eating and Drinking .....	12
Happiness and Social Ability .....	13
How Are You Doing? .....	14
Finances .....	15
<b>Quality-of-Life Charts .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Interpret the Results .....	20
Three-Things Activity .....	21
What to Expect During the Procedure .....	22
Should I Be Present During the Procedure? .....	23
Scheduling the Euthanasia .....	24
Aftercare Resources .....	25
PetCloud .....	26
Sunday Chatrooms .....	27
Anticipatory Bereavement Chatrooms .....	27

# WHAT IS EUTHANASIA?



εὐθανασία

## "GOOD, PEACEFUL DEATH"

Euthanasia is the intentional ending of a life to relieve pain and suffering. It comes from a place of deep compassion and love, and it is the last loving act we ever do for our pets. It is for them that we do this.

*Being uncertain about euthanasia is normal.* No matter how sure we are that we are doing the best for our pets, we still can feel very uncomfortable with making this choice for someone unable to speak to us.

Remember, it is the *disease* that is killing your pet; the only thing you are doing is preventing them from suffering and dying on their own. No matter what, this disease or age will eventually take your pet.

# ANTICIPATORY BEREAVEMENT



Anticipatory bereavement is when we start grieving the loss of someone who is still alive, but dying. Just like grief after a death, anticipatory grief involves a host of physical, emotional, and mental reactions that can create sadness, denial, anger, and indecision. It is a grief experience unlike any other.

Knowing your pet is dying is so hard. It is so hard watching someone you love so much, who has always been there for you, grow old, frail, and sick.

Being our pet's advocate can be the hardest thing we ever have to do, but we love our pets too much to allow them to live in pain or to suffer. Sometimes, the only way that we can end the suffering of our pets is to begin our own suffering. *This is real love.*

# YOUR DECISION



*Only you* have the power and authority to make this decision for your pet. **Nobody else has that right.** This is your burden and your responsibility. This is the contract that we enter into with our pets: That we will not let them needlessly suffer.

This decision is not easy. For many people, this will be the hardest decision that they'll ever have to make. We all secretly hope that we won't have to make this decision for them. We hope that they'll pass peacefully and quietly in their sleep or at home, but that's not always the case. Sometimes, that choice is ours to make.

There is nothing that can make this easy or painless. But, there are things that we can do to lighten the burden and be more present and grateful for the time that we have.

This guide is designed to help in the coming weeks:

- ✓ To navigate the end of life stages for your beloved pet,
- ✓ To be used as a tool to reduce suffering,
- ✓ To plan these upcoming intense emotional experiences,
- ✓ To create a meaningful end-of-life experience, and
- ✓ To bring you into the present, and gently remind you to enjoy the precious time together that you have, *right now.*

We have included an activity and chart to help you monitor your pet's decline in health, and other information to help plan and prepare for the euthanasia process, aftercare options, and memorabilia.

Most importantly, we have information on living and being present now to enjoy the time you have remaining together.

*Because tomorrow isn't guaranteed,  
Lead with Love Today.  
Never let your love be in doubt.*

# TREASURING YOUR TIME



It's important to cherish and treasure the time that you have with your pet everyday. Pamper them as much as possible. Do all the things that you two love to do together while you still can.

There are a number of ways to be present and enjoy the time you have instead of constant dread and worry for the future. There will be plenty of time for tears later.

Make a bucket list of their favorite things to do, places to go, and things to sniff. *Then go do them together.* That might mean extra attention, grooming, special meals, and scheduling time off work to be together. You may decide to go on a walk, spend time in a favorite park, or take a special trip to visit long-time friends to say hello and goodbye.

**Their ideal last day: Who would they want to see? What would they want to do? What could you do to make it extra special and memorable?**

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# QUALITY OF LIFE (QOL)



QOL is a way to measure and monitor how much pain and discomfort a loved one is in. Our animals feel a loss of well-being just like we do. They know when they are sick, and were they to have the right to choose, they would find a place to lie down and die on their own.

From your pet's perspective, they don't have the same fear and anticipation of death that we do. They live in the present with no concept of death or dying. The only thing they know is how they are feeling right now.




Below each item are descriptions of each rating. You'll record and track their progress on the following pages.

For each of the following QOL measures, there are descriptions for each rating 0, 3, and 5. Every day, record how they are doing in each of the categories by writing a number between 0 and 5.

*Be honest for their sake!*

## HOW DID THEY DO TODAY OVERALL?

Add their score for all the categories. Then, in the DAY column, draw a 😊, a 😐, or a 😞 for how they did that day.

 <10	A score of less than 10 is a great day. Put a smiley face on it.
 10-20	A score between 10 and 20 is in the middle. They may not be in good shape, but at least they should be generally happy and enjoying life as much as possible.
 >20	A score greater than 20 is a bad day. This is an overall poor QOL <b>TODAY</b> , not necessarily in general.

# BREATHING






Not being able to breathe is just as terrifying for your pet as it is for you. This is the most important metric in QOL to watch. Trouble breathing can be associated with heart disease or heart failure.

Monitor your pets respiratory rate by counting their resting breathing rate. A normal rate is generally between 15-30 breaths per minute, so anything *consistently* higher can be cause for concern, especially in combination with these other clinical signs.

Watch for these signs:

- ✓ Increased Effort To Breath, Panting, or Labored Breathing
- ✓ Restlessness, Agitation, and Difficulty Sleeping
- ✓ Coughing, Wheezing, or Gagging Attacks
- ✓ Collapsing or Fainting
- ✓ Distended Abdomen

 <b>0</b>	They breathe normally and naturally, without apparent effort.
 <b>3</b>	They breathe normally, most of the time, only demonstrating problems after physical activity or exertion.
 <b>5</b>	<p>They spend most of the time gasping, wheezing, or struggling for breath.</p> <p>A 5 in Breathing means your pet is experiencing acute trauma and breathing with great difficulty. This changes everything, and they need immediate help!</p> <p>This results in a failure for the entire day!</p>

# PAIN






How much pain are they in? Can you tell? Animals, generally, hide their pain very well. You can pick up clues by watching their posture and expression. If they are defensive about a certain part of their body, if they growl or hiss during normal interactions, or when their eyes are almond shaped or furrowed, it is a sign of pain.

However, generally if they don't want to be touched that could be more of an indication of overall discomfort rather than localized pain.

Answer these questions:

- ✓ Does your pet's face appear furrowed or worried?
- ✓ Are they always tense, never relaxed? Are they hunkered?
- ✓ Do they tremble, shake, or excessively pant, even when resting?
- ✓ Do they flinch, growl, or hiss at your touch?
- ✓ Are they on medications to control the pain? Are the medications working at least 75% of the time?

 <b>0</b>	No outward or obvious signs of pain or discomfort.
 <b>3</b>	They are tense some of the time. They sometimes flinch away from being handled or touched in places.
 <b>5</b>	<p>They are in considerable, constant pain, most of the time. They frequently withdraw from touch and appear to be in discomfort.</p> <p>A 5 in Pain means your pet is hurting very badly and is experiencing an acute situation that needs immediate help!</p> <p>This results in a failure for the entire day!</p>

# MOBILITY



Our animals will gradually lose their mobility as they age. Their ability to jump into a favorite chair, get up and down stairs, and even go for a walk may start being painful for them.

For many animals, this can be a minor nuisance. However, for larger animals it can quickly become an issue for owners. For instance, imagine needing to carry a 90lb dog up and down the stairs multiple times a day.

If your pet can't move, but is otherwise alert and engaged, this can be a manageable situation. Try moving their bed into the family room so they can interact with the family. Keeping them socialized helps.

Here are some questions for you to answer:

- ✓ How well can they move around? Do they have a cart or harness to help them get up?
- ✓ Do you have to help them get up?
- ✓ How painful is it for them to get around?
- ✓ Do they have arthritis, hip dysplasia, cancer, seizures, tumors, or anything else that gradually affects their ability to move?

 <b>0</b>	No visible pain or discomfort with movement.
 <b>3</b>	Some difficulty getting up and down, climbing stairs, running, or walking, but more or less able to move about on their own.
 <b>5</b>	Significant difficulty or inability to get up and down without help, painful walking, or a condition that is only worsening.

# CLEANLINESS






The ability to self-clean and do self-care is so important for our pets. If your pet is no longer able to clean themselves or control their bowels, it can quickly create additional issues in the house.

Incontinence is a big annoyance, and many people can feel guilty over the natural annoyance they have when they have to clean up accidents around the house.

It's important to realize here that your pet probably feels this stress as well. For example, it's very natural for an animal to not go to the bathroom where they sleep. If they can't control this, you can also be sure that they're not happy with the situation either.

Here are some questions:

- ✓ Is your pet still able to take care of themselves?
- ✓ Is their coat maintained, or is it greasy and matted?
- ✓ Are they incontinent? Do they often have accidents in the house?
- ✓ Do they have mouth or esophageal cancer? Pets with any kind of oral cancer can't keep themselves clean so they can get demoralized very quickly.

 <b>0</b>	They are able to groom, take care of themselves, and have no accidents in the house.
 <b>3</b>	They occasionally have incontinence, or have lost the ability to take care of themselves 100%.
 <b>5</b>	They are completely incontinent and/or require routine daily hygiene and other body maintenance.

# EATING AND DRINKING



There are a number of diseases and cancers that affect the ability and desire to eat and drink. If our pets are not eating and drinking, that opens up the door for a faster decline in health.



Malnutrition is a slow declining road to starvation, and it's very painful to watch.

If you have to give them appetite stimulants every day, hand-feed them, or "fight" with them to get them to eat anything at all, talk about other options with your veterinarian.

Our bodies "know" when we are dying. They start shutting down naturally, and refusal of food can be an unfortunate signal of that.

Questions to ask:

- ✓ Are they eating and getting enough nutrition? Do they still enjoy their favorite foods?
- ✓ Are they losing weight? How much do they weigh compared to a month ago?
- ✓ Do they eat on their own or do you have to hand feed them special treats or food?
- ✓ Do they throw up or have trouble keeping food down after they eat?
- ✓ Are they able to chew or do they have difficulty swallowing?

 <b>0</b>	They eat normally and with gusto.
 <b>3</b>	They eat, but only when fed treats, by hand, or by appetite stimulants.
 <b>5</b>	They struggle or refuse to eat and drink, or they consistently have trouble keeping food down.

# HAPPINESS AND SOCIAL ABILITY



Does your pet still enjoy life? Are they still happy? Do they still engage with life and family?


This is hard to objectively measure, but you know your pet best. Look out for unusual signs of disengagement and withdrawal.

When our animals stop enjoying life, they start spending most of their time hiding or denning, or they are often defensive or aggressive when interacting with people or other pets, even long time friends and owners.

As one veterinarian put it,  
*"It's a good sign as long as they're purring or wagging their tail".*

Ask yourself if:

- ✓ Has their mental state changed?
- ✓ Are they acting normally? Are they more aggressive?
- ✓ Do they still remember who you are?
- ✓ Do they respond to your presence when you enter a room or do they hide?
- ✓ Do they still want to play or do they seem withdrawn or depressed?

 <b>0</b>	They are happily engaged, enthusiastic, and their normal self.
 <b>3</b>	They are withdrawing and socially isolating themselves, changing behaviourally, and just not who they used to be.
 <b>5</b>	They spend most of their time hiding, preferring to withdraw, or they are aggressive or defensive when approached.

# HOW ARE YOU DOING?






When we are caretakers, it's so easy to forget to take care of ourselves. We can't take care of others if we're not taking care of ourselves. That includes eating a good diet, drinking enough water, getting enough sleep, light/moderate exercise, and social interaction.

How are you spending your time right now? With something so large looming just out of eyesite, it can make it hard to focus on anything else in our lives. When we allow ourselves to become overrun with worry, doubt, fear, and sorrow, we miss all the joy, meaning, and love that is directly in front of us.

There are lots of things that we can do to help ourselves during this time, such as talking, meditation, journaling, and taking time just for ourselves.

### Time Questions:

- ✓ How are you spending your time? Are you spending more time away from your friends, family, and work?
- ✓ How are your family and children reacting to this grief?
- ✓ Are you concerned with not knowing when the right time would be?
- ✓ Does your pet have a condition that can't be predicted? How much uncertainty do you deal with on a daily basis?

 <b>0</b>	I'm managing everything well for the moment.
 <b>3</b>	I have a routine and a support system to manage everything going on. I may worry about finances, treatments, or having to say goodbye, but it's not overwhelming.
 <b>5</b>	I'm constantly worried about what's going to happen. All my time is occupied taking care of them, I no longer take time for myself, or I have no support system.

# FINANCES



Finances are a sensitive but necessary topic to discuss. What happens if we can't afford treatment? If we can't afford it, sometimes, we really do have to consider euthanasia.

We can attach so much shame and blame (to ourselves) about how and why we are in this situation. We may feel like we've failed our pet, failed at our duty to protect them by not being able to afford expensive treatments, *but that isn't true*.

Your pet knows that you're doing everything that you're able to do. They know that you love them. Every single day that you have shown up for them you have shown that love to them. They trust you to make the choice that you have to make for them to keep them out of pain.

### Lifestyle Questions:

- ✓ Can you afford the treatment? What is your personal "bottom line" with regard to maintaining your family's lifestyle?
- ✓ Are you preoccupied with treatments, with worry, with indecision?
- ✓ Are you taking care of yourself? How are you eating, sleeping, exercising, and engaging with others?
- ✓ Do you have the emotional and physical bandwidth to provide the ongoing care they need?

### What is my bottom line?

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## QOL CHART FOR WEEK 1

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	WEEK TOTALS
BREATHING								
PAIN								
MOBILITY								
CLEANLINESS								
EATING								
HAPPINESS								
YOUR QOL								
DAY TOTALS								

## QOL CHART FOR WEEK 2

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	WEEK TOTALS
BREATHING								
PAIN								
MOBILITY								
CLEANLINESS								
EATING								
HAPPINESS								
YOUR QOL								
DAY TOTALS								

## QOL CHART FOR WEEK 3

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	WEEK TOTALS
BREATHING								
PAIN								
MOBILITY								
CLEANLINESS								
EATING								
HAPPINESS								
YOUR QOL								
<b>DAY TOTALS</b>								

## QOL CHART FOR WEEK 4

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	WEEK TOTALS
BREATHING								
PAIN								
MOBILITY								
CLEANLINESS								
EATING								
HAPPINESS								
YOUR QOL								
<b>DAY TOTALS</b>								

# INTERPRET THE RESULTS



## MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD

Add up the score for each category for the day. *Remember, be honest.* Having one bad day does not mean that they are done with this life. **You are looking for *many bad days in a row.***

When the human-animal bond is no longer possible, when your pet is just not themselves anymore, and when the bad days start outweighing the good days, it might be time to discuss euthanasia with your veterinarian.

This is something we never want to discuss, but we owe it to our loved ones to not let them live on in pain. Keep in mind that it is better to euthanize a week too early than an hour too late.

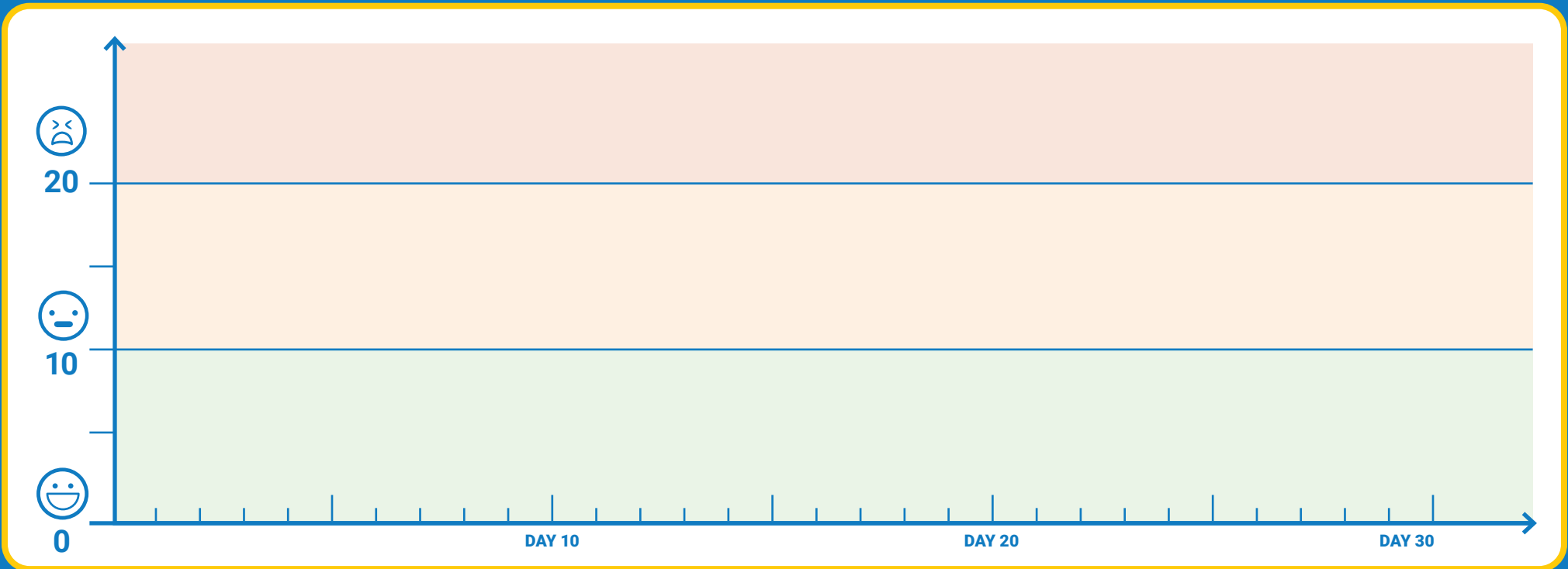
Discuss your results at:  
[www.PetCloud.pet/qol/results](http://www.PetCloud.pet/qol/results).

# THREE-THINGS ACTIVITY



When my pet can't do these 3 things any more, it may be time.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE PROCEDURE



The process of euthanasia is designed to be as painless and comfortable as possible for both you and your pet.

Generally, the process begins by starting a catheter to make it easier and painless to deliver the two euthanasia drugs. There can be some mild discomfort during the initial catheter, but it quickly goes away.

- 1 The first injection is a profound sedative to produce *complete anesthesia and calmness*. There is no thought, no sensation, and no movement afterwards.
- 2 The second injection is a Pentobarbital solution designed to stop the heart. Within just a few seconds, their breathing will slow down, then stop. Cardiac arrest will follow, resulting in death.

After they have passed away, there may be some reflexive muscle movements, a couple of last big breaths, and their bowels might release as the body relaxes, but these are all part of the process and very normal and natural.

## EUTHANASIA AT HOME

The euthanasia procedure can now be done in the privacy of your own home in many areas. Many people find that this is a great option for them, especially knowing that their pet is comfortable in their own house. Find out if this service is available in your area with the URL below.

Would we feel more comfortable at home or at the veterinarian's office?

AT HOME / AT THE VET

# SHOULD I BE PRESENT DURING THE PROCEDURE?



Many people that think they can't bear to be in the room with their pet during the process go on to later regret that decision. This is an extremely emotional decision and moment, and you should expect great sadness and tears. Your discomfort should not govern your decision of whether or not to be present with your pet. Being present will help your peace of mind after the fact because you will know that they passed on peacefully.

However, this is such an individual decision, and *there should be no guilt either way*.

If you really can't be present, let that be okay. Many people find this too distressing and can't handle the process. If you are in this category, there should be no guilt in leaving the room. Whether you chose to be present or not, you are still caring for and loving them by giving a peaceful release from pain. Your pet knows that you love them, that you take care of them, and that you are not abandoning them. They trust you to make this decision for them.

Should you let your children be present during the procedure? This is entirely up to their individual developmental level; can they emotionally handle it or will it be too traumatic? If they are ready and willing to be present, make sure that they know what to expect during the process. Regardless, your children should at least know that this is happening and be given the chance to say goodbye!

Will I be present during the procedure? YES / NO

Is anyone else going to be present with me? YES / NO

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# SCHEDULING THE EUTHANASIA



If at all possible, planning ahead is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your peace of mind. Some important questions to answer ahead of time are:

- ✓ Who will be my veterinarian? Keep their contact information handy.
- ✓ How much will it cost? Make arrangements beforehand *and pay!* This isn't something you will want to do afterwards.
- ✓ Can you get time off from work before and after? Let your boss know, and take the day (and maybe the next few) off of work.
- ✓ Can you get someone to drive you?

**My Veterinarian:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Are they open 24/7?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Will I have a ceremony or memorial service?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What do I want for a memorial?**  
(Pawprint, pictures, hair, cremains, urn)

**Questions and Notes**

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# AFTERCARE RESOURCES



There are many aftercare options available, for all types of people and budgets.

## BURIAL

The traditional method of burial is to wrap the body in a shroud or a favorite blanket, and bury them at least 3 feet deep, then cover the site with stones to prevent animals from scavenging. Check with your local municipality first, because burial is not always permitted by law.

## CREMATION

Cremation is the most common method because most people don't have property to be able to bury their pet. There are three different types of cremation:

**\$ Mass Cremation** - Many pets are cremated together and their cremains are mixed together.

**\$\$ Individual Cremation** - Your pet is cremated alone and the cremains are *only* those of your pet.

**\$\$\$ Witnessed Cremation** - You witness the entire cremation process.

## AQUAMATION

Aquamation is like cremation, except instead of burning the body, an eco-friendly chemical bath is used to dissolve the organic material. The cremains returned are identical to those of the cremation process.

**What do I want to do for aftercare?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Crematorium:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is their scheduling process?** \_\_\_\_\_

# PETCLOUD



## WHO ARE WE?

We are a community of love, respect, and support who know what it is like to lose a pet. We “get it”. We understand pet loss, and we exist to support each other and go through this loss together.

Learn more about our community and see how a community of support truly helps in all areas of grief recovery.

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

We provide many useful resources, articles, and activities to help you and your family navigate this difficult topic and deal with these intense feelings of grief and loss. Some of these resources include:

- ✓ The Pet Memory Project
- ✓ Kid Activity Center
- ✓ Virtual and In-Person Support
- ✓ Local Resources and Information
- ✓ Community Membership
- ✓ The Pet Loss Blog
- ✓ Q&A: Ask a Counselor
- ✓ Personalized Memorabilia

Discover for yourself the relief and community of support that we provide. Becoming a part of our community of compassion, grief support, and remembrance means talking, sharing your stories, laughing, and crying with others who are also here for the same reasons.

Come and see what we’re all about.

## SCHEDULE YOUR FREE 15 MINUTES

Schedule a free 15-minute video chat or phone call with one of our counselors to find out if you could benefit from our services.

[www.PetCloud.pet/free-15-minutes](http://www.PetCloud.pet/free-15-minutes)

# SUNDAY CHATROOMS



Every Sunday, we provide free video chatrooms to help support our pet loss community. Come share your story and listen to the stories of others.

## SUNDAY AFTERNOON CHATROOM

**3:00pm - 4:15pm PST**

(6:00pm - 7:15pm) EST

## SUNDAY EVENING CHATROOM

**6:00pm - 7:15pm PST**

(9:00pm - 10:15pm) EST

[www.PetCloud.pet/sunday-chatroom](http://www.PetCloud.pet/sunday-chatroom)

# ANTICIPATORY BEREAVEMENT CHATROOMS



We have a special chatroom specifically to help support Anticipatory Bereavement. Come find support, ask questions, plan for the future, and share your stories unique and grief with others who are in similar situations.

## 1ST AND 3RD THURSDAYS

**6:00pm - 7:15pm PST**

(9:00pm - 10:15pm) EST

[www.PetCloud.pet/anticipatory-bereavement-chatroom](http://www.PetCloud.pet/anticipatory-bereavement-chatroom)



To discover more grief support, resources, activities, and join our community visit us at [www.PetCloud.pet](http://www.PetCloud.pet) or call

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**1-833-PET-1234**  
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