Unconditional Love
Preparing for the Loss of a Pet

A free grief resource from
The Parmenter Foundation
We hope this brochure can serve as a helpful, quick guide for you, your loved ones, and your pet. For additional end-of-life planning information, please visit: parmenterfoundation.org.

Dogs, and even more so with cats, will often hide their pain.

The most important thing you can do to begin evaluating your pet's potential decline is to consult your veterinarian.

It’s a tough conversation that needs to be open and honest.

Before you sit down to talk, consider bringing someone with you. Listening, thinking, and processing these types of conversations can be difficult without help.

At the very least, take notes and write down answers. Ask as many questions as you can think of.

Your vet will have a medical perspective into your pet's condition and will also know his/her individual medical history and benchmarks.

Identifying decline in your pet can be difficult.
The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine has one of the best quality-of-life scales to assess the potential decline of your pet:

**LINK: How Do I Know It’s Time?**

You may also try keeping a calendar or journal of your pet’s day-to-day condition.

Is my pet:
- Eating normally?
- Sleeping more or less?
- Not moving around as much or as easily?
- Not seeing or hearing as well?

There are quality-of-life scales available online that can provide measurable assessments of your pet’s potential decline.

These objective tools can take some of the deep feelings we have for our pets out of the equation.

Recording your observations over time may provide perspective.
About the Authors
Kelly Drescher Johnson
CTP, CGCS
Grief Counseling Specialist

Kelly's position provides her with the opportunity to support pet owners, as well as other veterinary professionals, in a variety of circumstances surrounding pet loss and compassion fatigue.

Her approach is a hybrid of support and education. While her work is primarily focused on being present through difficult times, she also brings an understanding of how trauma affects the brain in regards to thinking and emotions.

Additionally, Kelly offers weekly group grief care sessions for anyone struggling with the loss or imminent loss of a beloved pet. Kelly is a certified Pet Chaplain through the Association for Veterinary Pastoral Education, a certified Trauma Professional, and a certified Grief Counseling Specialist. It should be noted that Kelly does not provide clinical therapy as a part of her services.

The Parmenter Foundation

One of the ways losing a pet is different than other grief is that euthanasia may be a factor.

If you have the time and space to decide that euthanizing your pet can prevent their suffering, you may also experience anticipatory grief.

Fear. Sadness. Dread.

This time and space can also be a final gift to your pet. It can be one last chance to make your remaining time with your pet special.

Take your pet to their favorite places. Give them their favorite food or toys. You can create positive memories, even when they’re in decline.

It's also never too early to consult with a professional about these feelings.
About the Authors

Susan Holt, DVM, PARS-C
Veterinarian
Pet Loss Grief Recovery Specialist

After 8 years of practice in California, Dr. Susan Holt decided that she wanted to be closer to family and moved back to the South Shore in 2017. Since then, she has continued her work in general practice. Shortly after arriving home, Dr. Holt decided she wanted to do more for the community. Offering at-home euthanasia was her way of giving back to the community as she knows all too well how difficult this time can be. To further help pet owners, Dr. Holt also became certified in Pet-Loss Grief Recovery by the American Institute of Health Care Professionals.

Dr. Holt is very grateful that she can help make the process of losing a pet a little easier for both the pet and the family. She is very thorough in explaining the process, loves to hear all of the fun stories people have had with their pets, and is a great ear and shoulder to cry on. She, too, lost her best friend at home and is forever thankful she had that opportunity to make her boxer, Kiva, comfortable at home during her final moments.

Euthanasia is not giving up. It’s an act of compassion.

In humans, we may associate euthanasia with “pulling the plug,” the act of giving up hope.

But with pets, euthanasia is an act of compassion. You are making the decision based on the love you have for your pet; you are taking away your pet’s suffering.

If you have the luxury to pick the time and place, you can opt to have your pet euthanized at home or even at a special outdoor location.

Also decide beforehand how you would like to handle the remains. Some areas allow for burial, while others do not. There are also some crematoriums that will allow you to keep your pet’s ashes.

Be sure to talk through all of your questions with the veterinarian before the day comes, to reduce as much stress and uncertainty as possible.

And when the day comes, know that the process is peaceful, not painful or startling. Your pet will not seize or suffer. It will look like they are going to sleep.
About The Parmenter Foundation

The Parmenter Foundation provides support for compassionate end-of-life care and bereavement programs in MetroWest Boston. We invite you to learn more about our mission and legacy, as well as how we help bring HOPE to MetroWest residents and their families during end-of-life and bereavement.

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About the Authors

Annette Scanlon, LICSW
Veterinary Social Worker

As an experienced Social Worker, primarily in health care, Annette possesses effective skills in working with clients, health care professionals and the organizations in which they work.

She has had experience in not only human medicine but also veterinary medicine, and takes great pride in sharing what she has learned with others and values the training and education of the social workers of the future.

She is available to provide clinical and organizational support to veterinary staff and veterinary organizations related to managing workplace stress, compassion fatigue, self care and burnout.

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