



## **WHEN THE TIME COMES TO SAY GOODBYE**

### ***A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO AFTER-DEATH SERVICES FOR PET OWNERS***

When a dear companion animal dies, it can leave you feeling sad and alone. And while you will no doubt feel distressed at losing a pet who was a valued member of the family, it is important to take a little time to think about how you wish to offer a final service in terms of burial or cremation.

Some people prefer to leave everything in the hands of the vet, whilst others want to make their own arrangements or employ the services of a private concern. Time spent considering this beforehand, perhaps in discussion with all members of the family, can help prevent regrets later.

What follows are a few pointers to help you consider the different options that are available.

#### **Cremation**

Communal cremation, where several pets are cremated together, means you cannot have your pet's ashes returned. However, you can ask your vet to arrange an 'individual cremation'. This means that you can have the ashes returned to you to bury in your garden, to scatter in a favourite place you had shared with your pet or to keep in a casket or special container. Alternatively you can contact a private pet crematorium which offers a similar service and which may also have a Garden of Remembrance – a peaceful place for you to visit in quiet contemplation and fond memory of your companion animal. This service is usually more expensive.

#### **Burial**

You can ask your vet for some practical advice on pet burial, however, here are a few useful tips. The law only allows people to bury their pets in grounds which they own (unless there are local by-laws against this), and therefore most people prefer to use their own garden. The whole family may wish to be involved in preparing the ground and finding a suitable stone or plant to mark your pet's final resting place.

It is wise to prepare a burial site at least four feet deep, and afterwards to place a large stone over it to maintain its integrity. You can wrap your pet's body in a blanket or sheet (biodegradable is best if possible), or you may prefer to obtain a small coffin.

Pet cemeteries are scarcer and more costly than pet crematoriums. Your vet's surgery should be able to advise you on the availability and standard of local services.

## ***Other Considerations***

### **Post Mortems**

Occasionally your vet may advise a post mortem, or pet insurers may require this. There are important considerations to discuss with your vet, one of these being that you may not be able to bury or cremate your pet's remains afterwards.

### **Ceremonies and Memorials**

This is, of course, a matter of personal choice and belief. Children often naturally arrange a pet funeral in their own way and select special stones, flowers, plants and mementos for a site in the garden. It can be an excellent way for the family to come together to make a mark of respect and remembrance, and to recognise their mutual grief. Even when the body or ashes of your pet cannot be buried for any reason, having a particular place of remembrance in the garden can bring comfort in the days to follow. Pet crematoria and cemeteries sell engraved plaques and stones, as do some of the private concerns who offer after-death services.

### **Very large pets**

For larger animals, such as a pony or horse, you can seek the advice of your vet to find out what services are available. Naturally the cost involved is higher and facilities may be less easy to access; however, your vet should be able to guide you.

### ***After-death Services***

The Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria (APPCC) provide important information and definition of after-death services for pets. They advise pet-owners to look beyond the glossy marketing presentation of private firms to ensure that the standard of care delivered matches that which is advertised. They can be contacted at: APPCC, Nunclose, Armthwaite, Carlisle, CA4 9TJ, [www.appcc.org.uk](http://www.appcc.org.uk); tel. no. 01252 844478.

### ***And Afterwards..***

There are many ways to create a memorial for your beloved pet. People sometimes like to make an album of pictures and poems, or plant a tree in a special place in the garden.

It is perfectly natural to go through a grief process at the loss of a companion animal, and it can help to talk to someone who understands how you feel. Pet bereavement support services can be of valuable help.



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