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## **Making the Difficult Decision of Euthanasia**

How can we make that difficult decision to end the life of a pet who we have loved, played and lived with, and nurtured? The pet may have been with us for a short period of time, or for many years. It may protect us, serve us or just be there when we need to have something to cuddle.

Our domestic pets have maintained many of their "wild" instincts: they wag their tail in happy reception of those whom they recognize as they do for the pack leader; and, they urinate and defecate on certain spots to "mark" their territory. **One of the most important instincts, however, is the one in which they mask pain or illness.** Many pet owners, advised that a pet is suffering from a serious illness, make the comment, "But he doesn't act sick?" What happens to a wild animal if they "act sick?" Invariably, they are killed by other animals, sometimes, even members of their own pack.

But, when **WE** have to make that final decision, we feel so GUILTY. We are torn by the feelings of helplessness, guilt, anger, and sometimes, the misguided notion that we owe it to the pet to keep it alive at all costs. How can I tell a doctor to give my pet an injection that will kill it????!!

When a pet becomes ill, or is seriously injured, we have to make decisions based upon several factors. We must set realistic limits; limits which include emotional expense to the family, physical costs to the pet, and, many times unfortunately, financial cost which the family can afford. It is best for the family members (or a single owner) to sit down with all of the facts in front of them, and as rationally as possible, set those limits. This is the FAIREST thing that pet owners can do for their pets - and for themselves. Sometimes we have to elect to treat for a "good disease," based on educated guesses concerning the pet's illness, and hope for the best. A "good disease" is one that can be successfully treated or controlled. It may be a disease that can cause death, but if it can be diagnosed, the veterinarian and owner can either cure the illness or, at least, buy the pet good quality time. On the other hand, if the pet has a "bad disease," even if the diagnosis is made, there may be nothing that can be done. Therefore, with a few exceptions, veterinarians try to spend their efforts looking and/or treating for a "good disease."

So, we come to that difficult decision-making time. We have decided what is best for the pet. Regardless what decision is made, we face the possibility of feeling guilty because we made the wrong decision. We feel guilty if we elect to have our pet euthanized. We feel guilty if we elect treatment and it is unsuccessful. We should put ourselves in the pet's position - what would "I" want done if "I" were in this situation?

We **HAVE** to love our pets enough to let them go.