

SunShine Animal Hospital Client Education Series

THE FINAL DAY – MAKE IT SPECIAL

Do you ever think about that final day with your beloved pet?

Nope, you don't go there. You don't even want to read about it. Just the idea of it hurts too much.

But what if thinking about that final day, actually planning for it, made it especially comforting for your dearly loved companion? Wouldn't you want to do that as a final gesture of love?



Death is inevitable. Sometimes, having time to prepare for our pet's final day really does make that time special. We get a chance to plan what would be most meaningful for our pet and ourselves.

Most of us agonize about the decision to end the life of a debilitated pet or one whose pain can no longer be controlled. We have to try to remain focused on the fact that we are doing what's best for our pet. Our grieving starts before the actual dying. It begins once you know, once you hear the diagnosis, not just on the final day. Not thinking about or planning that day does not eliminate the grief.

So, what can you do to make that final day as good as it can be?

We have these suggestions:

Spoil your pet with his favorite foods—but be careful not to overdo it. Too many treats can cause GI distress.

Surround your pet with his favorite toys, people, or pet friends.

If possible, take your pet one last time to his favorite spot, whether it be a dog park, your back deck, or the drive-through for a burger. For my dog Katie, we drove her through her favorite state park. With the car windows down, we hoped she might be able to see, hear, and smell the place she loved to go for walks.

When the time comes, your pet might like to be their favorite plush bed or blanket; with their favorite toy nearby.

Take photos or video of your pet. Otherwise, you may find later that you do not have as many images of your beloved pet as you thought. Take selfies with your pet, have a close friend take

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photos, or, if there's one in your area, hire a pet photographer. There are even photographers who specialize in pet hospice sessions.

Allow your children to be part of your pet's final day, even if only part of it, so they can say goodbye. Children will look to their parents to learn how to grieve. Make sure they are aware of what dying means and that you are celebrating the time you have had with your beloved pet.

Family members want to share favorite stories, say prayers, or spend a few minutes alone with the pets. We've even heard of a young girl who wrote a poem for her dog and read it to him during his last moments.

Be aware that situations may arise when an animal is near death but the person he is most bonded to is not around. We sometimes keep your pet medically comfortable for a day or two until that person can be there.

If you have other pets, decide whether they should be present. Sometimes, it is important to include pets that are bonded and allow them to see their companion after they are deceased. Otherwise, they may continue to look for the other pet and their grief will be prolonged. On the other hand, a new or young pet may seek attention when the focus should be on the pet whose time has come.

Schedule the final passing when you can take time off from work. You may want to schedule for the first or last appointment of the day. Schedule a time within a day or two. Planning a date too far out may have you agonizing through a long countdown.

Think about whether you would like to be present during your pet's final moments. We normally will sedate pets before the final step of euthanasia. We have clients that want to say good bye when the pet is still alert, some want to stay until they are sedated and other want to stay through every step. We will let you know what to expect with every stage of the process so you can be prepared and decide how long you want to stay.

Avoiding the idea of death until it arrives has made many people wish they would have thought about the whole process sooner. Don't let that happen to you. Make the best out of an inevitable part of life.