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Counseling services:

(All services listed below are provided at no charge to Ramsey Veterinary Hospital clients)

Quality of life assessment

Support/guidance for end-of-life decision-making

Presence of counseling during euthanasia (home & at clinic)

Bereavement counseling following loss of pet (phone and/or one-on-one)

Information for guidance in talking to children about euthanasia and grief following death of pet

Counseling/guidance for new pet in the home

To speak to the counselor, contact Ramsey Vet or call Anne Smith, Bereavement Counselor, directly at (201) 803-3721.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Pet Loss:

How do I assess "quality of life" for my pet?

Although there are many different assessment tools for determining a pet's quality of life, there are several universal factors to consider:

- 1. Is your pet in physical pain; is the pain able to be controlled?*
- 2. Is your pet continuing to eat? Does he/she need help to eat?*
- 3. Is your pet continuing to hydrate?*
- 4. Can your pet get up, move around, walk on his/her own?*
- 5. Is your pet able to maintain hygiene? Does your pet continue to groom him/herself?*
- 6. Has your pet demonstrated changes in behavior, i.e., sleeping in odd places, not greeting family members, changes in the interaction with other pets in the home?*
- 7. Is your pet interacting with the family?*
- 8. Does your pet express joy and interest in life?*
- 9. What is your perception of your dog's life? Are you able to make the final decision?*

How will I know when it's the "right time" to euthanize my pet?

One of the hardest decisions is determining the "right time" to euthanize a beloved pet. Oftentimes, it is not a clear-cut decision but one that comes from measuring the quality of life (review the above), ongoing discussion with your veterinarian, and measuring good and bad days in the life of your pet. An important factor to also consider is family readiness to make a unified final decision. Sometimes, working with a counselor through the decision-making process can be helpful. We encourage an open dialog with your veterinarian to ensure all questions are answered so that you receive the

support you need. Many families dealing with end-of-life decisions have discussion with our doctors and/or staff on a daily basis. Our goal is to accommodate your needs to the best of our ability.

What is palliative care for my pet? How is palliative care different from hospice care? Is there hospice care for pets?

Palliative care is compassionate care that aims to alleviate the symptoms of a disease, chronic illness, etc. In addition to controlling physical pain, palliative care also focuses on holistic (whole body) "comfort" care. In human medicine, that would include emotional, mental & spiritual care. In veterinary medicine, the term "palliative" would include controlling pain as well as other forms of distress. At Ramsey Vet, we strive to provide overall comfort for your pet by alleviating pain, making sure your pet is comfortable and clean, enhancing your pet's ability to eat and providing a caring and secure environment at our hospital, and/or helping you to provide that comfort at home. Generally, palliative care may also include curative care – this means treatments that will cure the illness currently being managed. Palliative care is not restricted by treatment options.

Hospice care is really a form of palliative care with certain specific restrictions. It is also compassionate care that aims to alleviate the symptoms of a disease; however, true hospice care does not include curative treatment. The philosophy behind hospice focuses on quality of life, dignity in dying, embracing death as a "natural" part of life, and considers the individuality of each family. The premise of hospice is to neither hasten death nor prolong life. In it's purest form, hospice would not include a euthanasia option. In veterinary medicine, hospice is used to mean palliative care. At Ramsey Vet, we believe in palliative care for pets, but we also adhere to a true hospice philosophy. For those that do not wish to euthanize their pet, we will develop a palliative plan to ensure that your pet experiences a "good death" naturally. If this is of interest to you, please discuss this option with your veterinarian.

What happens during euthanasia? What is the procedure? How will my pet react?

It is very important that you understand the procedure that will be performed when euthanizing your pet. Prior to scheduling euthanasia, we recommend a detailed discussion with your veterinarian so that you understand the medical aspects of the euthanasia process. The doctor will explain medications used in the procedure, expected length of time entailed in the entire procedure, and the physical reactions that may occur during the process. At this time, you may wish to talk to your veterinarian about whether or not you would like to be present during the procedure. The doctor will be happy to discuss the options with you. Please know that your questions during this appointment are very important to us; we want you to feel satisfied that all of your questions are answered thoughtfully and thoroughly.

When euthanasia is scheduled at Ramsey Vet, we make every effort to provide an atmosphere of peace and comfort for your family. For a euthanasia appointment, we

provide a private euthanasia room allowing you time with your beloved pet before and after the procedure. We strongly believe in supporting our families at the hospital during this difficult time. Prior to the family's arrival at the hospital, we light a candle to alert other clients and staff to the important procedure in progress requesting a quiet and respectful manner for all those present. In addition, a counselor is available if requested by the family. We also provide memorial options for the family.

Ramsey Vet also offers the option to have euthanasia performed at your home. To schedule this option, please discuss with your veterinarian.

Is it important to be present during euthanasia?

Many people struggle with whether or not to be present during the euthanasia procedure. There is no right or wrong decision – each individual makes a personal choice based on individual factors. Talking with your veterinarian often helps to guide you to a decision that is right for you. If you would like to have a counselor present with you to support you during the procedure, we are happy to make the arrangements for you.

Is there something wrong with me because I'm having a strong grief reaction to the loss of my pet?

*Grief is a **normal, healthy, and appropriate** reaction following a loss in life. Losses take many different forms – and the loss of a beloved pet can be a very significant loss in life.*

Bereavement affects the entire person – physically, emotionally, behaviorally, cognitively, interpersonally & spiritually. Grief reactions are expressed through all these dimensions.

For example, a grief reaction may include:

Physical symptoms such as sleep disruption, poor appetite, headache, nausea, digestive upsets, dizziness, tightness in throat or chest

Emotional symptoms such as crying, sadness, loneliness, guilt, anxiety, shock

Cognitive symptoms such as confusion, disbelief, intrusive thoughts

Behavioral symptoms might include restlessness, agitation, excessive use of alcohol and/or drugs, lashing out at people

Social symptoms might include isolation, disconnection, withdrawal

Of note, people often have very different grief reactions – even in the same family. It is important to acknowledge and allow everyone in the family to grieve in their own way. If you have any questions about children and grief, grief reactions, or other questions related to a grief response, please feel free to consult the counselor at Ramsey Vet.

How long will I feel the pain of grief?

There is no easy answer to this question. Many people attempt to apply a timeframe to the grieving process, but unfortunately, that's not how grief works. Each person's experience is unique – over time people accept the loss and adapt to the loss in their life. Finding a way to memorialize the pet in the family is often a healing process.

When is the right time to have a new pet in my home?

The right time to have another pet join your family is a personal, individual choice. However, our veterinarians and counselor will be more than happy to discuss and guide you in the process.