**Preparing to say a final good-bye to your pet**

This is one of the hardest things you, your family, and your vet are ever going to have to do. No matter how many times you’ve done it before with other pets, it never gets any easier. There are no definite rules, as situations vary individually for each family and each animal.

So how can we prepare as best as we can? Keep open communication with your vet. Ask the difficult questions and listen to their response. Get second opinions or specialists’ advice. Have a heart to heart talk with the members of your family and your vet to evaluate what the quality of life is like for your pet. Are they able to do the things they once enjoyed doing? Can they eat on their own? Can they take in enough water to keep themselves hydrated? Can they relieve themselves with dignity? Do they need help getting around, and are they a small enough size that family members can help if needed? Are they in pain? Can the pain be controlled or managed satisfactorily? What is the prognosis for the ailment the pet has? Is hospice care an option? Is the animal’s body too tired and weak to be able to cross over on their own? Are alternative therapies such as reiki, acupuncture, shamanic practice, herbs, or physical therapy an option to improve the quality of life or to help with the transitional process?

Make peace with the decision, knowing that you’ve considered all aspects. Writing a memorial poem, remembering fun times during your life together, creating a scrap book of photos, and letting friends know about the situation can be helpful in dealing with the pain and sadness of the transition. Allow time off from work or major obligations. Give yourself and your children time to grieve in a safe and supportive place. Planting a tree or a flower as a way of honoring a pet’s memory can be therapeutic. Seek out a counselor if needed to help process the grief. Seeking the assistance of a spiritual advisor, energy worker, or counselor both before and after life and death decisions can make a big difference in feeling supported in these difficult times.