



# Planning for Your Pet's Future Care

A Guide to Caring for Your Beloved Pet After You've Been Diagnosed With Cancer



**CANCERcare**  
Pet Assistance & Wellness Program™

# Welcome

Hello, to you and your beloved pet.

I know personally that cancer is complicated. I know that when you are a cancer patient, with or without a pet, you have to take one step at a time to move forward.

My canine soulmate Sully gave me so much love and support while I was going through treatment for cancer. It was a very difficult time for me, but Sully was always by my side.

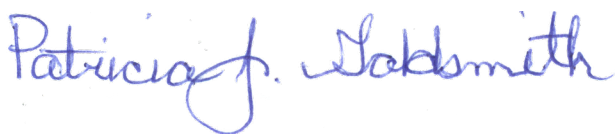
In that spirit, this guide is designed to support you through the many joys and challenges of caring for your pet after you've been diagnosed with cancer. Within, we will offer:

- Suggestions for how to have ongoing conversations about your cancer diagnosis and your pet's care with your own health care team and your pet's veterinarian;
- Tips for finding low-cost or free pet care support resources;
- Guidance on how to find temporary care support such as a foster home; and
- Comprehensive information so you can be fully informed of all your options should you have to make the difficult decision to find a new home for your beloved pet.

Pets are family. We hope that the many ideas and resources presented in this guide will empower you to make informed, loving decisions about your pet's care while also caring for yourself.

You know your pet best. You know yourself best. We are here to support you in whatever decisions you make, and to let you know: You are not alone.

Warmly,



**Patricia Goldsmith**


Founder of CancerCare's  
Pet Assistance & Wellness (PAW) Program





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All photos & quotes throughout this guide are from CancerCare clients and their pets. 





## Honoring Your Emotional Journey

*“My cats bring me joy and companionship by cuddling with me on those terrible days. They seem to know when I need that extra support. On those bad days I am often not up for company, so they keep me from getting lonely. Unless you have gone through cancer it’s hard to know how isolating it can be and how scary it can be. These types of diagnoses come with big price tags. Not only are you worrying about your health but about your financial health. You have to make some really tough choices. Having my cats has saved my mental health. I couldn’t be more grateful.”*

— Michelle, with her cats Loki & Cosmo

To have the capacity to care for someone else we often must care for ourselves first.

Balancing your own health care needs with the needs of your pet can be challenging. If your diagnosis has affected your ability to care for or have a relationship with your pet in any way, it is natural to feel guilt, grief or loss.

For those moments when you feel guilt, please remember that a cancer diagnosis can affect your life in many ways that are outside of your control. You love your pet. You want the best for your pet. Try not to blame yourself. But if you do, we encourage you to have grace for yourself because these circumstances are not your fault.

Feelings of grief and loss can arise because this may not be the ideal relationship you pictured sharing with your pet. And you may not know how long these circumstances or changes may last. Know that your feelings are valid. Give yourself space to feel them. Processing these painful and complex emotions will not only help you cope, but it will also help you see more clearly as you begin to plan for your pet’s future care.



So, how do you cope in this present moment?

## **Consider talking to a friend or family member.**

Talking with someone who respects your unique and incredible relationship with your pet can provide relief. Is there anyone in your circle of friends or family who you feel you can confide in? Or is there anyone in your community who you might talk to, such as another pet parent, neighbor, or a member of your religious/spiritual group?

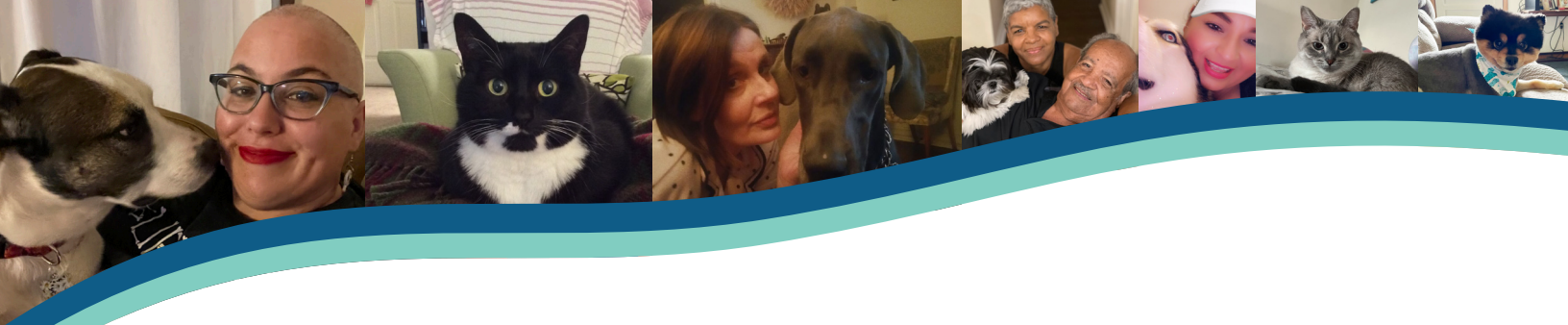
## **Consider talking to a mental health professional.**

Mental health professionals, such as social workers or psychologists, can give you the space you need to process your emotions while offering emotional support and guidance. Oncology social workers are trained and experienced in speaking to the unique effects of a cancer diagnosis.

## **Consider talking to a veterinary social worker.**

Veterinary social workers specialize in the unique bond shared between pet parents and their pets. They can help you navigate grief, loss or caregiver fatigue. They may also be able to connect you with pet care resources in your local area or throughout the animal welfare field. While the services of a veterinary social worker may not yet be readily available in all areas, the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine offers a state-by-state directory and e-mail contact for further assistance with finding someone in your state: <https://vetsocialwork.utk.edu/veterinary-social-work-directory/>.





## Communicating With Your Health Care Team and Veterinary Care Team

*"I was worried about exposing them to radiation or the chemotherapy drugs."*

—Denise, with her cats Buddy and Binx

*"I was not able to take Grey to the vet for over a year due to the lack of financial ability. I felt terrible that I had to ignore her health needs for my own."*

—Laurie, with her Great Dane Lady Grey

One of the most proactive things you can do to ensure your pet has the best care possible is regularly discuss your pet with your own health care team, as well as talk about your cancer diagnosis with your veterinary care team. Your health care team and veterinarian are vital members of your pet care support system.

Having ongoing discussions about pet care can open the door to treatment planning that is mindful of your pet and resources that may help you care for your pet. These discussions may also afford you much needed time to plan in advance should you need to make more complex or difficult, long-term decisions about your pet's care.

**Discussions with your health care team.** When you talk with your own health care team, let them know that you have a pet. Share how important your pet is to you. Don't be afraid to speak about your pet just like you would a family member or a friend. Let your doctor know that you want discussions about future treatments, or potential side effects, to include how it may affect your ability to care for your pet, or even daily routines with your pet such as walking a dog, cleaning a cat's litter box or administering pet medications.



# Communicating With Your Health Care Team and Veterinary Care Team

(continued...)

## Examples of questions you might ask your health care team include:

- Do you foresee any situations where I might need to be away from my home for an extended period? I'd like to know as far in advance as possible, so I can plan who will care for my pet.
- Do you expect me to experience any side effects from treatment that could impact daily pet care routines, like walking my dog twice a day or administering my cat's oral medications?
- Should I have any concerns about my own health or immune system while interacting with my pet?

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to pet ownership during cancer treatment. Different doctors may give varying advice based on their expertise and your specific situation. If you're uncomfortable with any advice you receive, such as finding a new home for your pet, express your concerns to your healthcare team and consider seeking further information from other trusted medical or veterinary professionals.

**Discussions with your pet's veterinarian.** If you are comfortable, let your veterinarian know about your cancer diagnosis and the ways it might affect your ability to care for your pet. Also have clear conversations about any financial strain you may be experiencing related to your diagnosis. Veterinarians may be able to connect you with programs that offer financial assistance for veterinary care. They may also be aware of other local animal care support services such as pet food banks or low-cost spay/neuter, microchip and vaccine clinics.

## Examples of questions you might ask your veterinarian include:

- Can we discuss costs before making any decisions? My cancer diagnosis has really affected me financially, but I want my pet to receive the best care possible.
- Can you recommend any low-cost or free services that might help me afford my pet's food and supplies? And do you know of any programs that offer financial assistance for veterinary care, or reduced cost services such as vaccine clinics?
- I've noticed changes in my pet's behavior since I started treatment. Can you recommend any tips or training that help with pet behavior?
- Can you offer any tips for administering my pet's medication? I'm experiencing some neuropathy in my hands, and it's already difficult to give my pet oral medications.
- Can you recommend any low-cost or free boarding, pet sitting or temporary foster home support?







## Resources to Help You Care For, and Keep, Your Pet

*"I worried about providing proper care, exercise and vet costs. I don't have any children, so I'll do almost anything to be able to keep my dogs. I was able to hire a pet sitter to help me with exercising my dogs."*

*--Cheryl and her German Shepherd's Lucien and Fallon*

A growing number of organizations and programs exist to provide support services that can assist with pet care. Consider searching for the following services in your local area to help support you in keeping your beloved pet in your home.

**Food pantries/food banks for pets.** One of the most expensive aspects of caring for a beloved pet is pet food and supplies. Thankfully, one of the most common resources available to pet parents across the country are pet food pantries (also called "pet food banks"). Some organizations' sole mission is offering these services.

Other organizations, like animal shelters, for example, may offer pet food pantries as one of their many programs to support pet parents in keeping their pets. Note that some pet food pantries also give out supplies, such as treats, toys, litter boxes and pet carriers. Before visiting any pet food pantry you find online, be sure to check that you meet their eligibility criteria. Call in advance to confirm availability of food or supplies, locations, and hours.

If you are experiencing any mobility challenges, or lack of access to transportation, some pet food pantries can provide home delivery rather than just in-person pickup.





## Resources to Help You Care For, and Keep, Your Pet

(continued...)

**Food pantries/food banks for people.** Food pantries (also called “food banks”) for people are more common than food pantries for pets. Getting help with your own food can help save money to support your pet. Some food banks occasionally offer pet food and supplies.

However, there are a few challenges to be mindful of. Since many food pantries receive their supplies from various sources, including donations, they often cannot predict the availability of pet food and pet supplies. Similarly, they may not mention pet food at all on their websites, even though it is something they can occasionally offer. The best thing you can do is call or email any local food pantries in your area. Ask, “Do you ever offer pet food or supplies? If so, is there a way I can be notified when they become available?”

Just as with pet food pantries, check eligibility criteria, locations and hours before making the trip.

**Low-cost veterinary care services and mobile vet clinics.** Local animal rescues, shelters or government programs may offer low-cost or free veterinary care services. These can include vaccine clinics, spay/neuter surgeries, microchipping or even mobile veterinary clinics. Nonprofit veterinary clinics can offer veterinary care at an affordable cost. Be sure to read reviews to ensure dependable and quality service.

**Financial assistance for veterinary care.** Some organizations offer direct financial assistance towards veterinary care services, reimbursing you for veterinary care services, or work directly with your vet to help reduce your costs. Due to high demand and intermittent funding, these programs may exist briefly or be put on pause temporarily while the organization secures additional funds. Please don't let that deter you from searching! If anything, you should search regularly for these services because you never know when something new might pop up.

Many organizations that offer different forms of financial assistance for veterinary care dedicate their mission to support specific causes. For example, some organizations may offer funding to support pets with chronic medical conditions like cancer, senior pets, or even specific breeds. Other organizations may be dedicated to supporting senior citizens; active military or veterans; or individuals living with a disability, illness, or who may be experiencing a medical crisis, hospitalization, housing insecurity, homelessness or domestic violence.



## Resources to Help You Care For, and Keep, Your Pet

(continued...)

If any of these criteria match with something you or your pet is experiencing, consider doing a custom search for organizations with that mission. And don't just search your local area. Some organizations serve locally, and others offer service statewide or nationally.

Ask your veterinarian if they can recommend any financial assistance programs to help offset the costs of veterinary care. Be wary, however, of any programs that offer you temporary interest-free credit, as many may then charge interest after a certain period of time.

**Crowdfunding websites.** You may be familiar with crowdfunding websites as ways to raise money for a variety of reasons, including medical care. These websites can be one way to raise funds from your community and beyond, but they can come with a catch. With any crowdfunding website, you should take careful note if there are any hidden fees, thoroughly review their data privacy policy and be mindful of any decisions you've made regarding disclosing your diagnosis publicly when you share you or your pet's story.

There are also pet-focused crowdfunding websites, one of which is a non-profit organization dedicated to using crowdfunding to support pets in crisis; see information regarding Waggle at [www.waggle.org](http://www.waggle.org). One hundred percent of any funds raised through a Waggle campaign will go directly to your veterinarian to pay for your pet's care. The site also offers clear guidance on how to set up your profile and how to work with veterinarians who have never used Waggle before.

If you decide to pursue a crowdfunding approach to help pay for pet care related costs, be sure to see our section of this guide titled, "Sharing Your and Your Pet's Story."

**Tips, education, or training for pet behavior.** Some pet behavior-related challenges can feel impossible to deal with, especially if you are coping with other ongoing challenges in your own life. But animal welfare professionals and pet behaviorists or trainers can offer guidance and tips to deal with many common issues, such as cats scratching or spraying furniture and dogs howling or guarding their food. Some organizations also offer free behavior hotlines, or reduced cost sessions with a behaviorist or pet trainer. Changing a pet's behavior isn't always easy or straightforward. Help from an experienced professional could give you a new "bag of tricks."



# My Pet Care Support Contact List

Write down the contact details of any person or organization who can help you care for your pet.

Name/Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone & E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Website \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Ways they can help \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone & E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Website \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Ways they can help \_\_\_\_\_

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Website \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Ways they can help \_\_\_\_\_





## Finding Temporary Care Support for Your Pet

*“Buddy has been by my side. He accepts me bald with the same love as before. He sleeps next to me, and I don’t feel lonely. He gives me a reason to fight and not give up. I am scared I will be hospitalized and not at home to care for him.”*

— Delonna and Her Golden Retriever Buddy

Having ongoing conversations about your pet with your health care team can help you foresee any potential situations where you might need to seek temporary care support for your pet. Unfortunately, there can still be many unknowns with a cancer diagnosis, such as side effects which may impact your daily pet care routines or an extended hospital stay.

Since finding temporary care support for a pet can sometimes take time and research to set up, it is best to plan in advance as much as possible. Try to have a clear idea of situations where you might need additional assistance, and what kind of assistance you would be looking for.

For example, are you looking for someone to come into your home for occasional care assistance such as feeding or walking your pet? Or will you be looking for extended care assistance, such as placing your pet in someone else’s home for a few weeks while you are away from home for treatment?

As you consider which options work best for you, be sure to ask your veterinarian, other local veterinarians, and local animal welfare organizations for advice as well. They all will have a great deal of knowledge and experience with the animal care resources in your community. And if you know any other loving pet parents, they might be able to refer you to a service they have used and trust.





## Occasional Care Assistance

**Community support.** If you are concerned about the costs of pet sitting or boarding, your friends, family and local community will be your best options for occasional care support. It may be hard to ask for help, but writing down a plan for what specific types of support you need may help you feel like it's not that big of an ask. As a few examples, you might consider:

- Asking a friend to walk your dog while you are receiving chemotherapy treatment;
- Asking a neighbor to feed your cat or walk your dog on the days you know you might need time to rest and recover following treatment; or
- Asking a family member to take your pet into their home for a day or two, or one day out of every week.

CancerCare's My Cancer Circle (<https://mycancercircle.net/>) is a free online private website for people facing cancer where you, or a caregiver, can build a community of friends, family and more who are willing to offer volunteer support. Through My Cancer Circle, you can request assistance that would best support your needs, such as transportation to medical or veterinary appointments, walking your dog, cleaning a litter box, picking up and delivering pet food, and more.

**Pet sitting websites.** If you can afford a service like pet sitting, there are websites that can help you find experienced pet sitters in your area. If you use a website to hire a pet sitter, be sure to thoroughly research their services and reviews. You'll want to research multiple factors to ensure your pet receives reliable care. Factors to research include:

- Reviews of the website;
- The website's criteria for doing background checks on pet sitters;
- Reviews of any pet sitters who apply to assist with your pet's care, as well as recent references you can call to better understand their experience with the pet sitter;
- Cancellation policies; and
- Any hidden fees.

**Local pet sitting and boarding companies.** Similarly, there may be numerous pet sitting and boarding services available in your area. Be sure to review each to ensure they provide quality care for your pet at a price you can afford.



## Extended Care Assistance

**Prioritize in-home care.** If you are searching for extended care assistance, such as over the course of a week or more, the best place for your pet is in a home. This could mean having someone care for your pet in your own home, or placing your pet in the home of someone else you trust. Once again, seeking out community support from friends and family could be your first approach to finding a situation you trust and where your pet will thrive.

**Crisis support programs.** Across the country there are various programs that offer temporary foster homes or boarding facilities for pets while their owners navigate a health crisis.

Finding these programs can be a challenge, as they aren't available everywhere.

Try searching online using terms like:

- Pet crisis care;
- Pet crisis assistance;
- Pet emergency foster; and
- Pet temporary foster.

These programs are often dedicated to supporting a specific community or experience, such as:

- Individuals living with an illness;
- Individuals experiencing a medical crisis or hospitalization;
- Individuals with a disability;
- Senior citizens;
- Military or veterans;
- Individuals experiencing domestic violence; and
- Individuals experiencing homelessness.



## Finding Temporary Care Support for Your Pet

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**Other ways to find a temporary foster home for your pet.** Call or e-mail local foster-based animal rescues to ask if anyone in their foster network might be able to assist in temporarily fostering your pet. If your pet is a specific breed (such as a Dachshund, Pit Bull or Great Pyrenees), reach out to breed-specific rescues, even if they aren't in your state, as many have networks across the country. Asking your local animal shelter for advice may be helpful as well, as they may know of people or programs who can help care for your pet in a home, or, in select circumstances, assist with temporarily boarding your pet at the shelter. Just be mindful that a shelter is not an ideal environment for a pet to stay in for an extended period of time.

Additionally, you may consider creating a profile on Home-to-Home ([www.home-home.org/fostering/](http://www.home-home.org/fostering/)) — a website dedicated to connecting “pet owners who are seeking temporary housing for their pets with people willing to provide a temporary, loving home.”



# My Pet Care Journal

Journaling can help you make sense of complex thoughts and feelings. It can be helpful to set aside some time to write down and process some of what you have been experiencing.

**How am I feeling about my relationship with my pet and my cancer diagnosis?**

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**What practical pet care support do I need help with?**

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**Is there someone I can confide in to discuss some of the things I've been feeling?**

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**Is there someone who can help me brainstorm solutions or further research assistance for my pet?**

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**What do I want most for my pet? This can be practical things, but also quality of life experiences.**

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## Finding a New Home for Your Pet

*"I currently feel like my dogs might be better off in a home where they can get more walks. It makes me sad, but I'm doing the best I can."*

— Tracy, with her cats Janis & Whiskers, and her dogs, Bugsie and Ella

Making the decision to find your pet a new home is so hard.

If you have skipped directly to this section, please know that the other sections within this guide are all designed to give you as many options as possible to help you keep your pet. We want to inform you of all the resources that may be available, and approaches you might consider, which may help with some of the issues you have been experiencing related to caring for your pet. There might be some ideas you hadn't considered, or some support programs you didn't know existed. If you can make the emotional space for it, we hope you will go to back to review those sections.

With that said, if you have made the difficult decision to find your pet a new, loving home, we understand and we support you.

We are so sorry that you have had to experience all the hardships and complex emotions related to making this decision. And we are so sorry if this is a decision related to your cancer diagnosis. We want to remind you that you know your own health best, and you know your pet best. And even if you are wrestling with some feelings of guilt, loss or grief, making the decision to find your pet a new home because you believe someone else would be better suited to care for them at this present time is an act of incredible love. Thank you for caring for your beloved pet and looking out for their best interests.

Below you will find tips, guidance and approaches so you can plan appropriately and ensure your pet receives the best future care possible. Take your time moving through this section. The process of finding a new home for your pet can take research, planning, time and persistence. It can also bring up a lot of complex, challenging emotions.



### Home-to-Home is Best

**It is always best for your pet to be placed directly in a home.** Companion animals like dogs and cats thrive in a home environment. There are many different organizations and services that can help you place your pet directly in a home, whether it be a new permanent home or a temporary foster home that will care for your pet while a permanent adopter is found.

Please note: Surrendering your pet to an animal shelter should only be considered as a last resort, because a shelter environment is not ideal for a companion animal.

### Community First

**Reach out to your own community first.** Let your friends, family, social media network and veterinarian know you're looking for a new home for your pet. Reaching out to people you know and trust is your best option. You may also consider asking neighbors, neighborhood associations, religious or spiritual groups, and other trusted members of your community.

It can be hard sometimes to ask for help. But remember: you are not just asking for yourself, you are asking for your pet. Expanding your connections can open new possibilities.

**Other ways your community can help.** Your community can support this process in many other ways beyond just trying to directly help you find a new home for your pet. You might consider:

- Asking a friend to research local foster-based animal rescue groups for you;
- Asking a fellow pet lover to help write your pet's profile or take heartwarming pictures of your pet;
- Asking a family member you trust to help write some details of your own story which might compel others to help; and
- Asking someone to make calls or emails to local organizations to see if they can help find a new home for your pet.



# Finding a New Home for Your Pet

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## Animal Welfare Terms to Know

These are terms commonly used by animal welfare organizations. Knowing these terms can help you search for organizations that can help.

- **Owner surrender.** When a pet owner gives up their pet to an animal welfare organization. This is sometimes also referred to as “owner relinquishment.”
  - **Intake Policy.** The criteria an animal welfare organization may have for accepting an animal into their care. Organizations may or may not list their intake policy publicly, and any intake policy may be subject to change or exceptions.
  - **Rehoming.** The act of finding a new home for a pet.
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## Outreach to Animal Welfare Organizations

**Reach out to the person or organization where you adopted your pet.** Whether you originally adopted your pet from an animal rescue organization, pet store, breeder or even an animal shelter, reach out and ask if they can help you find a new home for your pet.

It is completely understandable if you feel some guilt or hesitation about reaching out to the place where you originally adopted your pet, but these individuals and organizations also want what is best for your pet. They would rather you give them a chance to help find a new home for your pet than see you place your pet in a shelter or leave a pet on the street. Be aware that some shelters may suggest you keep your pet in your own home while they actively look for a new adopter.

**Websites that help you place your pet directly in a new home.** Another approach to consider is looking into a few of the websites designed specifically to help people find new adopters for their pets, ensuring that they will go directly to a new permanent home. These sites offer a convenient way for you not only to share your pet’s profile, details and a bit about your own story (depending on what you are comfortable sharing) but also to review multiple applications for potential new families. Some sites even offer guidance on screening applications and tips for setting up meet and greets with potential adopters, as well as help in coordinating official adoption paperwork. Two of the most popular sites are:

- Rehome by Adopt-a-Pet ([www.rehome.adoptapet.com/](http://www.rehome.adoptapet.com/))
- Home-to-Home ([www.home-home.org/rehome/](http://www.home-home.org/rehome/))



## Finding a New Home for Your Pet

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**Foster-based animal rescue organizations.** Many animal rescue organizations are “foster-based,” which means they don’t have a physical facility where they keep their adoptable pets. Instead, they rely on volunteers who serve as foster families for pets, caring for them temporarily while the organization searches for a new permanent family to welcome that pet into their home.

Foster-based animal rescues are one of your best options for finding a wonderful new home for your pet. One important thing to note, however, is that many organizations don’t clearly state their intake policy, or whether or not they accept owner surrenders. If you find a local foster-based animal rescue and this information is not on their website, give them a call or send them an email to ask. Many don’t list this information publicly because their capacity to care for pets often relies on the number of foster families they have, which can fluctuate.

Also note that some foster-based animal rescue organizations may focus exclusively on a certain breed of pet. Breed-specific organizations often cover a wider area, sometimes multiple states and occasionally even the entire country, and may even be able to assist with transportation. So, if your pet is a specific breed, be sure to widen your search range! If you have a purebred dog, The American Kennel Club (AKC) also offers a searchable directory of AKC-registered breed clubs ([www.apps.akc.org/club-search/#/national](http://www.apps.akc.org/club-search/#/national)). Breed-specific clubs often have rescue arms that may be able to take in and rehome pets.

**Animal shelters.** As we’ve stated before, surrendering your pet to an animal shelter should only be considered as a last resort, after you have exhausted all other options. In a shelter, dogs and cats may live in confined quarters, have limited opportunities for exercise, experience a prolonged stay which impacts their health, and risk being euthanized (also known as “being put to sleep”). Also note that some pets are at especially high risk for poor outcomes in a shelter, such as senior pets.

However, we understand that an animal shelter may be the only reasonable option in your circumstances. If so, make sure to research the shelter, read reviews, and get a written copy of their euthanasia policy so you can be fully informed of any risks.





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### Animal Welfare Terms to Know

- **“No-kill shelter.”** There are many complexities behind the meaning of the term “no-kill shelter.” What is most important to know is that the term “no-kill” does not guarantee euthanasia won’t be performed on your pet for a variety of reasons.
  - To be able to use the term “no-kill”, a shelter needs to report that 90% of the animals in its care are placed into a home. The standards of that 90% reporting can differ among organizations. Traditionally, healthy and treatable animals are not considered for euthanasia. But there are a variety of factors that could affect the health of companion animals while in a shelter’s care that could lead to them being considered for euthanasia.
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Animal shelters often offer many incredible programs to support your pets while they remain in your care. Some can be a great source for advice on how to find a new home for your pet, and even keep your pet out of a shelter. Call your local shelter to ask for guidance, and if they offer any programs to help with pet care while you search for a new permanent home.

### Special Care Requirements

**Animal sanctuaries.** Animal sanctuaries can be private or nonprofit organizations that admit animals who typically need specialized care for the rest of their lives, such as senior pets or pets with a chronic medical condition. Animals in a sanctuary often live in a communal space with other pets that may be indoors or outdoors, depending on the type of pet and their health care requirements.

While these organizations are typically animal care facilities, rather than a home, they are dedicated to ensuring pets are well cared for and respected for the rest of their lives. Be certain to do your due diligence to ensure the reputation and quality of the sanctuary.

**Senior pet care.** If you are looking for a new home for your senior pet (generally, ages eight years and older), it is best to go the extra mile to ensure they receive the special care they deserve. Many foster-based rescue groups are dedicated exclusively to supporting senior pets.



## Finding a New Home for Your Pet

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**Hospice care for pets.** Some programs provide hospice care for pets who have untreatable or terminal illnesses. If you are considering rehoming your pet because you can't afford their veterinary care for a terminal illness, or you no longer can care for their special needs related to a terminal illness, consider searching for an animal rescue organization that offers hospice care support. The goal with these programs is to place a pet in a loving home where a foster family can provide palliative care, warmth and comfort to ensure your pet has the best quality of life possible. Some of these organizations may serve a wider area, including multiple states, and offer transportation support.

Since this is such a specialized field, if you believe your pet needs hospice care consider reaching out to any organization with a pet hospice care support program for advice. To find these programs, try searching online using the terms “pet hospice,” “pet hospice foster,” or, as it is sometimes referred to, “fospice” (a term combining the words “foster” and “hospice”).

**Hospice care for people, with pet care support programs.** If you or a family member is receiving hospice care, some organizations are able to offer pet care assistance alongside these services.

Pet Peace of Mind is a national nonprofit organization that teaches hospices how to provide pet care assistance and rehoming services for their patients with pets. To find a local program, visit: [www.petpeaceofmind.org/find-a-local-program](http://www.petpeaceofmind.org/find-a-local-program).

**Advanced care planning for your pet.** Many people find it helpful to put a plan in place in the event of a crisis situation where they may be suddenly unable to care for their beloved pet, or unable to communicate their wishes for their pet. It can be helpful to create a document to coordinate your pet's care in advance. Two resources you may find helpful are:

- **Pet Peace of Mind's “My Pet Placement Plan”** ([www.petpeaceofmind.org/pet-placement-plan](http://www.petpeaceofmind.org/pet-placement-plan)) You can prevent your pet from facing an uncertain future by making a plan to ensure your pet(s) will continue to have the loving home and great care they deserve should something unexpected happen to you. Completing My Pet Placement Plan provides a specific roadmap of your wishes.
- **FreeWill** ([www.freewill.com](http://www.freewill.com)) offers no-cost estate planning tools. FreeWill includes a pet clause section where you can view questions about your pets and who you want to care for them.



### Sharing Your and Your Pet's Story

Finding a new home for your pet may take persistent outreach to various organizations and individuals who could help. There will be many instances where you will be asked to share important details about your pet, or even aspects of your own story. How you share that story may differ depending on the platform (such as over e-mail, in an online contact form or on a home-to-home adoption website).

Animal rescue organizations receive a lot of requests for assistance with rehoming pets, so you will also want to be clear but brief. Most importantly, you'll want to share your and your pet's story in a way that genuinely connects with others who might be able to help.

If this sounds like a lot to consider, we promise you, you already fit the first criterion: You love your pet! The following tips will help with all the other aspects of sharing your and your pet's story.

**First and foremost, always be mindful of your online privacy and security.** Information you share online, whether it be on a public website or direct email, could be subject to potential misuse. Always think twice before sharing secure information with strangers. Information you may not want to share online include:

- Your address;
- Dates you may be away from home for treatment;
- Personal identification (such as a driver's license, social security number, passport);
- Financial details (such as credit card or bank account numbers); and
- Any other information that identifies personal information about you, your residence, or your activities.



## Finding a New Home for Your Pet

(continued...)

**Telling your story.** During each outreach, there may be an opportunity to share a bit about your own story. Depending on your comfort levels, you may be sharing some details or discussing emotional topics that lead to feelings of vulnerability. It can be helpful to set aside some time to write down some “talking points.” Having something prepared in advance, in writing, can help ground you in these moments and place your focus on your goal of finding support for your pet. Having written language prepared in advance will also help reduce the amount of effort it will take to reach out to multiple people and organizations for support. This would also be a good place to identify any boundaries or any topics you do not want to disclose or discuss. You may even consider asking someone who knows you well, and you trust, to help write a few ideas down.

A few tips for telling your story include:

- Be mindful of any decisions you’ve made about whether you are comfortable disclosing your cancer diagnosis and decisions about personal privacy in general;
- Determine what you are comfortable sharing, know that these details can be a bridge to find families or services who empathize and are willing to help;
- Focus on being clear and brief;
- Thank people for their time; and
- Ask people, even if they can’t help directly, if they know of any other people or services that can help.

**Telling your pet’s story.** Clearly communicating your pet’s behavior and medical history is important to finding a new home or family that will offer your pet appropriate care. When sharing details of your pet, remember that you love your pet and you know your pet best. Let that love shine!

A few tips for sharing details about your pet include:

- Share details about your pet’s adoption story and background;
- Note if your pet is high energy and playful, or a cozy cuddle-bug; and
- Share some of your pet’s favorite activities and quirkiest habits.





## Finding a New Home for Your Pet

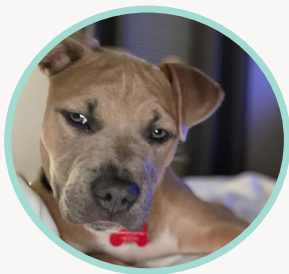
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You'll also want to communicate key medical and behavior details such as:

- If your pet is spayed and neutered;
- If your pet is up to date on vaccinations;
- If your pet has any medical conditions or special medical needs;
- If your pet has experience interacting with, and gets along with, other pets;
- If your pet has experience interacting with, and gets along with, children; and
- If your pet is struggling with any behavioral issues.

It is also best practice to make sure you have physical and digital copies of your pet's major medical records on hand in case anyone requests them.

**Pet photos.** Lastly, set aside some wonderful photos of your pet, or do a pet photo shoot. A few tips for sharing pet photos that will warm other people's hearts include:



*Show your pet's eyes  
and face clearly*



*Make sure your  
pet is well-lit*



*Make sure your pet  
is clear and in-focus*



*Show your pet during  
their sweetest and  
silliest moments*

- If you are comfortable, you may consider sharing loving photos of you and your pet. Just always be mindful of your online privacy and security.



### Assessing Potential Adopters

If you are meeting with potential adopters, it is in your and your pet's best interests to be selective and to be clear about your pet's unique behavior and needs. Always be mindful of your own personal safety when you are meeting with a prospective adopter. Create a clear list of questions to ask any potential adopters.

#### Examples of questions you might ask include:

- What is your history owning a pet or pet(s)?
- Do you currently have a pet or pet(s)? And are they used to living with other animals?
- Do you have any children, and are they accustomed to being around a pet?
- How much time will you and/or your family devote to caring for my pet daily?
- How often will my pet be left home alone? Will my pet be left in a crate or be able to roam freely?
- Do you own a home or rent? May I see photos of your home?
  - Or you may request a home-visit (if you feel comfortable and safe doing so).
- If the pet will be outside, is the yard securely fenced?
- Can you provide references I can speak to?

If your pet has any special needs such as behavioral issues or medical issues, it is also very important to ask potential adopters about their ability to provide, or afford, the appropriate care.

Though it understandably may be difficult, if it interests you, consider also asking if an adopter would be willing to let you receive occasional updates about, or visits with, your pet.



### Coping With Grief and Loss

Parting ways with your pet, especially due to factors beyond your control like a cancer diagnosis, can feel devastating. It is completely natural to grieve. Know that everyone experiences grief differently and at their own pace. Don't let anyone put a time limit on your grief or judge your own unique experience.

As you move through these complex and difficult feelings, also make space to honor and cherish all of your many wonderful memories with your pet. Though it may bring up raw and vulnerable emotions, having something to hold onto and reflect on, like a picture or some other form of memento, can feel healing as well.

Offer kindness and compassion to yourself, as often as you can. Navigating a cancer diagnosis can be difficult. Remember that finding a new home for your pet where they can receive the care they need is an act of selflessness and love.

We also encourage you to seek out support from others. As we mentioned in the opening section, "Honoring Your Emotional Journey," confide in trusted friends or family who respect and value how much your pet means to you. If anyone judges your grief or the time you are taking to grieve, or suggests that losing a pet is something you should brush off, know that their opinion isn't helpful or valid. Mental health professionals such as licensed social workers can be especially helpful in navigating all the thoughts and feelings you may be experiencing. Having dedicated time to speak with a mental health professional regularly can be a healing ritual as you move through your grief.

We also encourage you to consider whether joining a pet loss support group would assist you. It can be helpful to find others who share similar experiences. There is a chance you may find a group that meets in person in your local area. However, many pet loss support groups are online, can be accessed by anyone in the United States, and are entirely free. Try finding one that is run by a licensed mental health professional.

We are so sorry that you have experienced this loss. Above all, please remember: **all** of your feelings are valid.



# My Pet Loss Journal

Journaling can help you process the many complex feelings you may be experiencing associated with the loss of a pet. Set aside some time to write down what you have been feeling. Make some space to have those feelings, rather than ignoring them or bottling them up. Above all: offer kindness to yourself during this difficult time. Reflect on how loving you are to be concerned about your pet's best interest.

**How am I feeling about the loss or potential loss of my beloved pet?**

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**What are some activities I can do to feel some comfort or peace during times that feel the most difficult?** (For example: coloring books, relaxing music, meditation, spending time outside or with family or friends, etc.)

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**Is there a friend or family member I can confide in to discuss some of the things I've been feeling? Do I know anyone else who has experienced pet loss who would be willing to talk?**

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**Is there a mental health professional I could meet with to help me with this experience?**

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**What are cherished memories of times that I've shared with my pet?**

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## CancerCare's Free Support Services and Programs

It can be very difficult to receive a diagnosis of cancer, and adjusting to the necessary changes in your life can be challenging.

CancerCare can help. We are a national nonprofit organization providing free, professional services to anyone affected by cancer. Our licensed oncology social workers can provide support and education, help in navigating the complicated health care system and offer information on support groups and other resources.

To learn more about how CancerCare helps, call us at 800-813-HOPE (4673) or visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org).





# Special Thanks

## PAW Panel of Experts

- **Christy Bork**, National Program Manager, Pet Peace of Mind
- **Fumiko Chino, MD**, Radiation Oncologist, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
- **Jennifer Currin-McCulloch, PhD, LMSW**, Assistant Professor at Colorado State University's School of Social Work; Lab Director of the Serious End-of-Life Narratives Research Lab
- **Camille DeSantis**, Executive Vice President, Group Head, Corporate & Biotech, Edelman
- **Patricia Goldsmith**, Founder of CancerCare's Pet Assistance & Wellness (PAW) Program
- **Rachel Herman**, President, PAWS NYC (Pets are Wonderful Support)
- **Joye Keeley**, Founder, Kentucky Link Coalition; Retired Lieutenant from Louisville Metro Police Department; Long-time animal rescuer
- **Dr. Len Lichtenfeld, MD, MACP**, Medical Oncologist; Former Deputy Chief Medical Officer, American Cancer Society
- **Haleigh Mistry**, Physician Assistant, MD Anderson Cancer Center
- **Sondra Oliver, DVM**, Veterinarian, Bayside Animal Medical Center
- **Victoria Puzo, LCSW**, Clinical Supervisor and Online Support Group Program Director, CancerCare
- **Natasha Steele, MD, MPH**, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Stanford University
- **Connie Wong**, Medical Education Librarian, Stanford University School of Medicine

## Amie's Place Foundation

Funding for this educational resource is made possible by a generous grant from Amie's Place Foundation, which funds not-for-profit organizations that create and provide no-fee programs dedicated to keeping families and pets together safely.

## Your feedback is welcome!

If you have any feedback about this booklet, we would love to hear your thoughts. E-mail us at [paw@cancercare.org](mailto:paw@cancercare.org).

