

THE CHALLENGE OF HEALTH ISSUES WITH OUR PETS -1-

Our pets are like family, our loving and loyal companions, and we feel so responsible for their care. Because our pets trust us completely, knowing how to best care for them may sometimes feel overwhelming. We want to do the right thing, but we don't always know what that is. Or, we may know the right thing to do, but it feels too difficult to do.

I am the person to talk with about your pet's health and welfare concerns. As a grief therapist and pet lover who has had to confront difficult health issues with my cat and several dogs, I truly understand. And if this is what you need, I am someone who will help you face the loss of your beloved pet.

You may be suffering because your pet is ill. You may want to talk with me about your veterinarian's recommendations. You may need help with decisions about treatments or euthanasia.

Our pet's age with much more grace than we humans do. Older dogs and cats tolerate and accept infirmities like loss of hearing, loss of sight, loss of a body part like an eye or a leg, limited mobility, and aches and pains often with unusual equanimity. But their health or behavior changes can be disturbing for us, their owners. I am someone you can talk with about these concerns.

Ted came to see me while his boxer dog, Rocky, was going through cancer treatments. Ted was very shaken seeing his dog so ill. He was also

ambivalent about whether to do the recommended chemotherapy after surgery. Most of all he needed a place to cry because he was so devastated by his dog's illness. Having help with his grief enabled Ted to deal with Rocky's illness and recovery. Rocky is a healthy dog today.

Because pets rarely complain, we have to figure out what is going on and what they need. Of course we consult our veterinarian. But who can help us consider choices and concerns outside of the vet's office? That is what I do.

We have to make decisions based on the impact on the pet of whatever treatment is recommended, the cost, the long-term effect, whether the treatment will make enough of a difference. Ultimately we have to decide.

Barbara was distressed that her black lab, Daisy, had chronic digestive problems with vomiting and diarrhea. Out of our conversation, Barbara decided to seek another veterinarian's opinion. The second doctor diagnosed the fatal disease causing Daisy's symptoms. Then Barbara and I talked through her options until she concluded that she had to stop Daisy's misery and euthanize her -- no matter how hard she felt it would be. She grieved with me before and after Daisy died. Later Barbara wrote me a thank you note. "Your support at this worst time of my life is what helped me survive. Now I can remember Daisy with love."

The issue of whether and when to euthanize a pet is an agonizing one. We don't want to have to choose. We don't want to let our beloved pet go. Like it or not, we may have to make decisions like this as their loved ones. This is a time when we must put their needs above our own. We may need

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help trusting and accepting whatever we decide. Know that if your pet is ill or dies or if euthanasia is what is called for, I can help you through the process and through your grief.