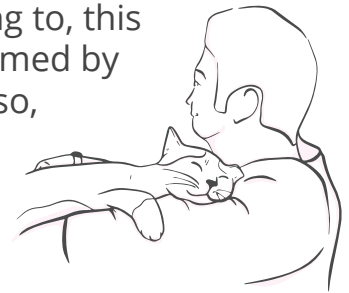


HANDLING THE EUTHANASIA APPOINTMENT

Few veterinary receptionists are lucky enough to have training on guiding a client through a euthanasia appointment. For the person you are talking to, this may be the most difficult decision of their life. They are overwhelmed by a sense of shame, guilt, and a great emotional burden. So much so, that they may forget whether their cat is a cat or a dog and how much it weighs. This mixture leads to confusion and requires different management.



LEADING THE CONVERSATION

Call the animal by name. This simple gesture comforts the person and shows that you understand that it is more than an animal and that it has a face. It is a character, a chapter in their life, a source of unconditional love and joy. When you feel the person is becoming overwhelmed, offer choices by guiding them.



ASK CLOSED QUESTIONS

It's easier to answer closed-ended questions that can be answered with a yes or no than with an open-ended question.

*Is Fluffy a cat or a dog?
Is it a small, medium, large or
giant dog?*

*Don't ask the exact weight,
estimate what weight range it
falls into.*



OFFER AT-HOME EUTHANASIA

Many families don't know this option exists. If your facility does not offer it, refer them to a mobile service. That client will be grateful for the offer and will more easily return to you. About 20% of customers, no matter how much they like you, will not return to your facility with their new pet because it is associated with a difficult experience.



BREAK THE ISOLATION

You can share that you also have a pet that you are attached to and if you have also faced this ordeal, don't hesitate to say so. I am sorry you are facing this. I remember when I was there. This openness will make the person feel safer and less judged.



OFFER A PRE-EUTHANASIA CONSULTATION

There are so many things to discuss. Have you ever thought of offering families the opportunity to ask questions, explain the procedure without the confusion of emotions, make their choice and settle the bill in a separate appointment? This appointment can be conducted by different team members and free up the veterinarian.

This appointment can be conducted by different team members and free up the veterinarian.



CHECK THE ADDRESS

Make sure that the nice card signed by the entire team will arrive safely to end the relationship on a positive note and not an unpaid bill notice that arrives months later via mail transfer.



DO NOT ITEMIZE COSTS

Include euthanasia and cremation in the service and adapt otherwise. Include sedation for every euthanasia like recommended by all major veterinary associations. You can also include a dignified and adapted body bag like **EUTHABAG** because only 15% of pet owners consider a plastic bag to be acceptable*. Base your choices on the majority, not the minority who complain about prices. Your team will feel better too, in line with their practice standard and desire to honor the bond.



DIRECT FAMILIES TO THE CREMATORIUM

You are not a funeral director. Work as a team with the aftercare provider who has staff dedicated to advising families and save your valuable time for what you do best while providing better service to the client.



OFFER A RITUAL

For the loss of a pet, there is no ritual. Just an empty cage or no one at the end of the leash. You can offer to decorate a **EUTHABAG**, write a letter or draw a picture to accompany the family on this next step. Rituals allow us to honor the memory and regain some control over a situation we have no control over.



You can also watch this [5-minute video](#) featuring a client and a veterinary receptionist.

Share it with your team.



LEAVE THE CHOICE

There is a lot of social pressure to be present throughout the euthanasia, but depending on experience or age, it is not necessarily desirable for everyone to be present. Would you prefer to be present or not? Reassure them that it is acceptable and understandable not to stay the whole time. You can stay for the whole date or leave when you prefer. Or even just come back to say goodbye after their pet is gone. This is also a solution when children are present. They can draw a picture of their pet during the euthanasia and come back when it's over to say goodbye. This way the veterinary team is less disturbed by their presence.

ABOUT CELINE LEHEURTEUX, DMV+ EUTHABAG

Celine Leheurteux, DMV has been a veterinarian in practice in Quebec since 1999. She had to euthanize thousands of beloved pets and put them in plastic bags because there was no option. She created EUTHABAG to help families and veterinary teams FEEL better around euthanasia. She is also dedicated in training veterinary practices around end-of-life to improve the euthanasia experience for all involved. You can learn more on her Free CE platform at veterinaryeuthanasiaeducation.com.



References:

1. Cooney, K, Koghan L, Brooks S, Ellis C. Pet Owners' Expectations for Pet End-of-Life Support and After-Death Body Care: Exploration and Practical Applications, 2020. *Topics in Companion An Med* 43 (2020) 100503.
2. AAHA, AVMA, HABRI, CAETA, CVMA recommend sedation prior to euthanasia when a pet owner is present.