



Planning for Your Pet(s)'s Future

If you care about your pet(s), you need to plan so that if you are injured, incapacitated or deceased, people will know you have pet(s) waiting at home, and what your wishes are for those pet(s):

The first step in planning for your pet(s), in the event that it should become necessary, is to locate two responsible friends or family members who are willing to act in your stead and provide temporary emergency care for your pet(s). Both caretakers need keys to your home, feeding and care instructions for each pet(s), your vet's name, and a "authorization" letter from you to your vet authorizing them to request treatment for your pet(s). They also need a copy of whatever permanent care plans you make for your pet(s), in the event that should become necessary. Be sure a number of additional people know how many pet(s) you have and the names and phone numbers of your pet(s)'s caretakers. Keep an "alert" card in your wallet with the names and phone numbers of the pet(s)'s caretakers.

Post an "in case of emergency" notice on both your front and back door on the outside and on one or more windows. The notice should include the number of and type of (s) in the house. These will alert rescue personnel during a fire or other emergency to look for your pet(s).. (If you move, be sure to take the notices down and put more up at your new residence!) You should also post a notice to the inside of your front and back doors with your emergency pet(s) caretakers' names and phone numbers.

You should also plan the long-term care for your pet(s) should you become seriously ill or die:

To make more formal arrangements for your pet(s)'s care, have an attorney draw up a will or trust to provide for the care of your pet(s) and a way to insure that care is provided for financially.

You will need to decide who should have custody of your pet(s), whether you want them all to go to one person or whether different pet(s) should go to different people. You may want to try to keep pet(s) that have bonded closely with one another together. When choosing potential caretakers, consider trustworthy adults who have met your pet(s) and who have successfully cared for pet(s), and, most importantly, who like your pet(s) and are willing to care for them should something happen to you. Name two alternate caretakers in case your first choice becomes unable or unwilling to take your pet(s). Be sure to discuss the level of care you want your pet(s) to receive with your pet(s)'s designated caretakers. Stay in touch with them, if their plans change, you need to know.

If all else fails, you can direct your executor or personal representative, in your will, to place the animal. Finding a suitable new home can take weeks, so you need to line up temporary care. Provide useful, but not unrealistically restrictive, instructions in your will. Authorize your executor to expend funds from your estate for the temporary care of your pet(s) as well as for the cost of finding a new home and transporting the animal to that home. Your will should grant broad discretion to your executor for decisions about the pet(s) and in expending estate funds on the animal's behalf but be specific about your expectations for your pet(s)'s care.

Think twice before entrusting the care of your pet(s) to an organization. Most organizations do not have the space or funds to care for your pet(s) indefinitely and cannot guarantee that someone will adopt your animal, although some may be able to board and care for your pet(s) temporarily until it can be transferred to your designated caretaker.

Some organizations may agree to find pet(s) a new home or care for them until they die. However, be aware that your pet(s) may not do well being institutionalized. Before making any arrangements, visit the organization to see how animals are cared for; where they are confined; who looks after them; how they are socialized and exercised; and policies regarding care at the facility and placement with a new family. Also, you will want to think about what might happen if that organization faced funding shortages, bankruptcy, or staff shortages.

Some owners request that their pet(s) be euthanized upon their death. This type of will provision may be ruled invalid by the legal system if the animal is young or in good health and someone challenges the provision on behalf of the animal.

Whatever you do, be sure to choose responsible caretakers and discuss the animal's condition and needs so they can make informed decisions for the animal after you are gone.

One of the best way to provide for your pet(s) is to have it written into either your will or a trust set up for that purpose.

You should consult with an attorney to make any formal arrangements. Advance planning is critical. Your attorney can review important, complex points regarding wills, probate, and delays in carrying out your pet(s) care instructions. Be advised that additional documents may be needed beyond a will.

For example, it may be more advisable for you to set up a trust to provide for your pet(s) immediately, because a trust will apply not only if you die but also if you become ill or incapacitated. A trust created separately from a will can be written to exclude certain assets from probate so that those funds are more readily available to care for your pet(s).

A more simple alternative than a trust is a "Power of Attorney" which authorizes someone else to conduct some or all of your affairs while you are alive, and takes effect immediately upon your physical or mental incapacity. Provisions can be added authorizing your attorney-in-fact — the person designated to handle your affairs — to take care of your pet(s), expend money for that purpose, and/or even to place your pet(s) with permanent caretakers should it become necessary.

Which ever option you choose, will, trust or power of attorney, be sure to leave a copy of it with the executor of your estate and with your pet(s)'s designated caretaker(s). Make sure the caretaker(s) also have copies of your veterinary records and details about your pet(s)'s behavior and dietary needs.

