



**Melissa Kaplan's
Herp Care, CND, & Lyme/TBD Information
Collections**

Don't Forget The Pets

When you are incapacitated or gone, what's going to happen to your pets?

As much as pet owners love their pets, they are often unwilling to think about what will happen to the animals if something happens that prevents the owner from caring for them.

Making arrangements for our pets and documenting them in writing is as important as making a Will and ACD is for us. Keeping those arrangements and wishes updated is crucial, too.

The first thing to do is to appoint a sort of Pet Executor, someone who is comfortable enough with animals in general, who you trust with your animals and your house key, who is willing to go into your home and take care of your pets while you are temporarily incapacitated, or who will oversee daily pet care provided by a pet care service.

The Pet Executor will ideally be the one who, in the event of your permanent incapacity or death, will take care of making sure your pets go to those individuals or organizations who made prior arrangements with should such a need arise.

Before Need Arises

Think carefully about each of your pets individually, taking into consideration their needs, temperaments, and expected lifespan, and decide who would be the best person or organization to take each one. In some cases, it might be that you will need to find someone who will commit to looking for a proper permanent home for a pet that they will not be able to keep for the rest of its life.

Contact the people you wish to take your pet(s), and make sure that they are okay with being chosen for the specific animals you think they are right for. If they agree, create a master list of each pet, identified by both name and species or breed, and the name, address, phone number and e-mail of the person who will take each individual pet.

Include personal information about your pet, besides its name, species, age and sex. List any prior illnesses and surgeries, and the names, addresses and phone numbers of its current vets. Note its favorite type of toy, the colors or patterns it hates, where its favorite

blankie is, its favorite treat foods, food allergies, where it likes to be scratched or petted, and where you keep the pet's special equipment and supplies (like the things you take with you when you travel with your pet).

- If you have more than one pet, specify in your pet's description where that pet can normally be found. Do not assume that the stressed Pet Executor going to remember what you told them several years ago. Help them out by providing the details they need to make sure the right pet is given to the right person.
- If you have more than one pet of the same species or breed, but the individuals are going to different people, do not assume that the Pet Executor can tell the pets apart like you can. For each one, you will need to give a good description, attach photographs, include microchip numbers, tattoos (including both location and what the tattoo says), etc., anything that will ensure that the right pet goes to the right person. Proper identification is crucial for pets on medication, as you don't want the healthy cocker spaniel to get the other one's thyroid medication.
- Line up one or two alternatives for each pet, so that you have two or more people listed for each pet. That way, if the primary choice is unable for some reason to take the pet they originally agreed to (life happens!), your Pet Executor will easily know who to try next.
- If any of your pets are complicated or otherwise exceptionally difficult to care for, say, a Cyclura iguana, an adult male sulcata tortoise, that not-so-miniature pot-bellied pig, a large outdoor aviary full of exotic finches, or any species with special needs, make it a point to have three or four alternates lined up.
- For special needs pets--elderly pets, and those with chronic illnesses or other conditions which require special equipment, foods, medications, veterinary services, etc.-- identify where their things are kept, and how and when to use them. Be sure to maintain a regularly updated list all of pets' current medications, where they are kept, the dose and frequency, and how the drugs are to be administered.
- Be specific. Do not assume your Pet Executor will know, when reading the prescription bottle's order to "give by mouth", that really means "crush the pill, mix it in a little crunchy peanut butter, and smear on 1/4 of a French roll and give 1/2 hour before dinner" for Stevie, the Moluccan cockatoo, whereas for Rugwort the iguana, it means "hide in a small ball of mashed banana and place on top of his salad in the morning."

Your absence, whether temporary or permanent, from your pet's life will affect your pet. Even species that do not form attachments of the kind we associate with species like parrots, dogs, cats, horses, iguanas, and bearded dragons, will be affected by the mere presence and activities of their new human caretaker. The stress will be compounded when the pets are moved from their 'own' home to their new homes.

Stress can adversely affect our pets health and well-being, so do what you can ahead of time to reduce the stress. Take the steps you can to ensue your pets are moved to their

new homes along with the things they are familiar with in their old: food bowls, "their" blankets, towels, pillows, their toys, etc.

If you are only temporarily incapacitated, your recovery will be helped by your not having to stress out as much about your pets, knowing that you have already made provisions for them, allowing you to concentrate on you.

Covering the Cost

If you are just temporarily incapacitated, chances are your family will pitch in and cover the costs of your pets' care for the duration. If you are permanently incapacitated or die, and your Pet Executor is not a trusted and willing and committed-to-carrying-out-your-wishes family member, you should not expect the Pet Executor to bear the full cost of caring for your pets and getting them to their new homes.

If you have an excellent relationship with your Pet Executor, you could set up a joint savings or money market checking account. You make the deposits into the account up to an amount you feel is reasonable to care for your pets (daily care as well as routine and other veterinary services, special foods, medications for special needs pets, and treats) and get them shipped or otherwise delivered to their new homes. The account is otherwise left to gather what little interest it may, until the day comes when your Pet Executor needs to withdraw funds to cover the costs of caring for and re-homing your pets.

A better option, one that will not be affected by a relationship gone sour, is to set up a savings account, or stock or mutual funds account, that you build up to the point where it will cover the anticipated costs of pet care and re-homing. Make your Pet Executor the beneficiary of this account, and include reference to this account and beneficiary in your Will and in the papers you leave for your Pet Executor.

Limited Power of Attorney

Whether you are going away on vacation or a business trip, or you are incapacitated or die, you need to give your veterinarian the authority to deal with your Pet Executor. One way to do this is by giving your Pet Executor Limited Power of Attorney privileges to incur necessary veterinary services on your behalf when you cannot be there yourself, such as this one that a friend and I use when her dog stays with me; we update the specific information in there as needed. I keep the updated signed form to take with me to her vets if ever Sidney needs to go.

Formalize The Pet Executor/Guardian Rights

Do not put your faith in the spoken word. People forget, relationships change, people come and go in our lives, and people's abilities to do what they said they would 20 years ago may be so altered that they cannot fulfill their promise to you when the time comes for necessary action.

To avoid pitting family member against family member or friend, put in writing what you want done. Be specific. Put your pets needs first, not the feelings of your elderly Aunt Millie who will be hurt because you feel that she is no longer capable of caring for herself, let alone your cherished cat who requires daily medication.

Ideally, more formal arrangements should be made. The Human Society of the United States has an excellent resource page, Ensuring Long-Term Care for Your Pet, at their site, along with a kit, Providing for Your Pet's Future Without You.

One thing is for sure: if it isn't in writing, there is nothing to prove to anyone what you wanted when you were able to speak for yourself and your pets.

Keep Things Current

In the natural course of things, new pets arrive, some pets die, we change vets or acquire a new specialty vet for a new species of pet, friends die or become incapacitated themselves, and relationship dissolve. Your directives, for yourself and for your pets, are only as good as you make them. If you make them once, and then never touch them again, those you have appointed to act for you may find that you have left them with nothing useful, so long outdated that they are virtually on their own in trying to decide what you would want.

And that isn't good.

Do yourself and your pets a favor, and keep these documents up-to-date. Set up an annual reminder in your calendar to bug you until you review your directives--and Will--and execute the necessary changes.

Lives depend on it.

Limited Power of Attorney Example
<http://www.anapsid.org/acd/pet-limitedpoa.pdf>

Ensuring Long-Term Care for Your Pet
http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/providing_for_your_pets_future_without_you/b_ensuring_longterm_or_permanent_care_for_your_pet.html

Providing for Your Pet's Future Without You
http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/providing_for_your_pets_future_without_you/

Additional Resources

Estate Planning For Your Pet

<http://www.estateplanningforpets.org>

Help For Pet Owners

<http://www.2ndchance4pets.org/help.html>

PetGuardian.com

<http://www.petguardian.com>

When Your Pet Outlives You

<http://www.newsagepress.com/whenyourpetoutlivesyou.html>