

Animal Trust™

Ensure your loyal companions have the love and care they deserve after you're gone.



Can you ever really have complete peace of mind until you know you've made provisions to take care of those you love the most? Of course your will or trust specifies what should happen to protect your children and spouse. But what about your faithful companions? The four-leggeds or feathered friends who never run out of love and companionship?

Most people assume someone will take their pets after they die. Maybe a relative or a friend. But the rising numbers of animals who have no recourse but a shelter tell a different story.

There are six primary reasons why animals go to shelters:

1. The owner doesn't have the time or money to care for the pet.
2. Behavioral problems with the pet which can be from a lack of proper training.
3. Disputes between landlords and tenants.
4. Owner cannot afford cost of vet care for a sick pet.
5. Family issues like a new baby, allergies, divorce.
6. Lost pet (shelters typically only hold the pet 3-to-5 days before offering them for adoption, euthanizing them or sending them to a research lab).

The high unemployment rate is a major factor in recent surges at animal shelters. For example, the Anderson County Humane Society in S.C. saw about 75 animals a day dropped off in 2010 because owners could no longer afford to feed their pets. I recently adopted a new pet and was stunned at the overwhelming number of animals at my local shelter. Clearly the economy is taking a toll on so many of us. So you may want to identify a pet care giver who can also be a foster family if you find yourself in hard economic circumstances.

The elderly frequently are faced with difficult choices regarding their animal companions. They may encounter health issues or financial circumstances that necessitate assistance to keep their pets safe and comfortable. There are a handful of organizations that are committed to helping the elderly keep their pets should they need to move into institutional care or should they not have the funds to continue paying for animal care.

Have You Considered?

According to the 2009-2010 National Pet Owners Survey, 62% of U.S. households own a pet. That's 71.4 million homes. Dogs lead in popularity with 45.6%, but cats follow closely with 38.2%. Multiple pet families are common. There are 93.6 million cats owned by Americans and 77.5 million dogs.

We spend just under \$60 billion (2014) on our pets. That goes towards food, vet visits, supplies, grooming, boarding, etc. But how many of you have actually included language in your estate documents specifying their care? Based on my own informal poll, very few.

Studies show animals not only provide an enormous source of joy and love, but can also play an important role in reducing human health care costs. Here are some of the many proven benefits:

- » People with pets are less lonely
- » People with pets recover more quickly from illness
- » Living with pets can help lower blood pressure
- » Recovering heart attack patients live longer when they have a pet
- » Alzheimer's patients with pets have fewer anxious outbursts
- » Pets encourage movement and exercise
- » Pets help decrease depression and anxiety

Another study by the American Animal Hospital Association (U.S. and Canada) reports the following on human-animal bonds:

- » 83% adopt pets for companionship
- » 44% adopt to keep another pet company
- » 66% prepare special pet food
- » Of those that have a will, only 27% have included provisions for their pets
- » 37% talk to their pets on the phone or answering machine
- » 52% provide more exercise for their pets than they do for themselves
- » 70% consider their pets as children and seek a very high level of care for their pets

What You Should Do

You can't leave the care of your loyal companions to chance. Follow these steps to ensure they have the love and care they deserve:

1. Choose a “pet guardian”

If something happened to you, temporary or permanent, who should care for your pet? If you have multiple pets, do you want them to stay together? Does the person you have in mind have room for multiple pets? Do they have pets of their own? Do they have the financial ability to care for all of them?

Once you decide on who you'd like, talk to them. Make sure everyone is on the same page. Make sure your pets get to know this person long before you'd need to rely on them. Observe how they get along.

Make sure you also choose contingent pet guardians. Despite your best planning efforts, unexpected things can happen.

Notes and Date Completed:

2. Decide on financial assistance

According to the APPA National Pet Owners Survey, it costs about \$1,300 to \$1,900 a year to care for a dog on average and about \$1,100 for a cat. That covers vet care, food, boarding, grooming, vitamins, treats and toys. Dogs live on average for 12 to 13 years and cats for 12 to 18 years. But that can vary quite a bit depending on the breed and the lifestyle.

If you decide to provide financial assistance to your caregiver, you can set up provisions in a trust to ensure this happens after your death. Be sure to fund your trust appropriately. This means setting up an account in the name of your trust and moving assets into it. Those assets can then be invested any way you choose.

Notes and Date Completed:

3. Add language to your trust document to provide for your pets' care

Your attorney is the best person to help you draft just the right provisions for what you want, but here is some sample language as an example:

While any of my pets are alive the trustee may pay so much of the net income and principal as the trustee considers advisable for the maintenance and welfare of my pets which I own at the time of my death. The trustee shall make payments to the individuals caring for my pets for pet food, pet sitters, veterinary bills and any other expenses that are appropriate for the comfort and care of my pets. I direct that my trustees take into account the manner of care that I have provided for my pets during my lifetime.

I direct that my pets be placed in a single private home with one (or more) individuals known to me during my life. The residence should provide for my pets in a similar manner of care and living atmosphere provided during my life. I specifically direct that my pets not be placed in a shelter. The trustees of my trust shall immediately make arrangements for the continual care of my pets in my residence until placement has been completed.

Then you can go on to say what you want to happen to the remaining assets after your pets have all lived out their natural lives.

Do not assume the people you choose as beneficiaries for your assets are the best people to care for your animals. Do not assume the people you choose to care for your pets should also manage the money in the trust (you can name a separate trustee to manage the assets). You may also want to alert your vet to your wishes.

Notes and Date Completed:

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4. Write instructions for your caregiver

Provide a complete historical and medical record for each pet. Do this for each animal – we've provided several copies of our worksheet for this on the following pages.

Animal Trust ~ Important Information About My Pet

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Pet's Name:

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Date of Birth:

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Breed/Color/Distinguishing Marks:

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Place of Adoption:

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Location of Pedigree Papers:

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Favorite Toys:

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Vet Contact Info:

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Medical Issues/Medication Instructions:

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Pet's Friends (people and/or animals):

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Designated Caregiver and Contact Info:

.....
Feeding Instructions:

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