



Setting Up an Emergency Caregiver for Your Dog

Every year, almost 4 million dogs enter animal shelters—and a large number of them wind up there because their owner has died. For these dogs, the move from a loving home to a crowded shelter can be a traumatic experience. Luckily, it can be easily avoided with a little forward planning. So how do you set up an emergency caregiver for your beloved dog, in case they should outlive you?



Choosing a friend or family member to take care of your dog after your death

Perhaps you're thinking: "I know exactly where Fido will go if I die: to my sister/best friend/neighbor/aunt." If you do have an emergency caregiver in mind, wonderful! Even so, experts recommend spending some extra time thinking the decision through.

First, consider whether your pet will truly be happy in the caregiver's environment. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my dog like this person?
- Has this person cared for pets before?
- Will this person be able to provide the quality of life my dog is used to? For instance: will your dog have a yard if they're used to one? Will they get as much exercise as they're used to? Will they have as much company as they're used to? Or, if your dog has led a quiet life, will their new home be too busy or chaotic? You might also want to consider household rules, such as whether your dog will be allowed upstairs, or onto furniture.

- Will my dog get along well with every member of the household, including any other pets or children?
- If your dog has any medical requirements, such as medications: will someone in the new household be able to take care of those needs?

Juliet Boyd, Executive Director of Oakland's Hopalong Animal Rescue, also advises giving serious thought to how happy your designated caregiver will be with the arrangement.

She encourages pet owners to ask themselves: **"Is my friend or family member someone that truly loves my pet, or are they doing this as a favor to me because they love me?"**

At the Pet Survivor Program, Hopalong's program for pets who have outlived their owners (more on this later), she notes "We have had some people contact us who've said, I'm supposed to inherit my sister's cat or dog but I'm not completely comfortable." Remember: if your pet's new owner isn't truly happy to have them around, your pet won't be truly happy either.

And don't keep all this deliberating to yourself. It's important to bring your potential caregiver into the conversation and discuss your dog's needs with them at length, to see if they'd be a good fit. When you have that conversation, also be sure to discuss how you'd like your dog's medical and end-of-life care to be treated.



Money, money, money: making sure your designated caregiver can afford your dog

Sadly, finding a caregiver for your pet won't only be about establishing mutual respect and lifestyle compatibility. Anyone agreeing to care for a dog—especially an older dog or one with existing medical needs—will also have to consider medical expenses, as well as the day-to-day cost of caring for a dog.

In fact, the financial burden of caring for pets is one of the major reason so many dogs end up in shelters after their owners die.

It's also why these bereaved dogs—who are often older and more likely to face medical problems—so often struggle to find permanent homes once they've reached the shelter.

All of which makes it clear:



when you select a caregiver for your dog, it's important to leave enough money for your dog's care, too.

But how much should you leave?

A good rule of thumb is to calculate your annual expenditure on your dog, and multiply that by your dog's life expectancy, then add some extra money for unexpected medical expenses. "You don't have a crystal ball for what that future will be, and veterinary costs can be incredibly high, depending on

the dog's future health," Boyd notes. "So I would say, honestly, allot a little more money than you thought, just to cover the bases for care should a medical condition develop."

And how can owners will money for their pet's care? Sadly, it's not legal to leave money directly to a pet, but you have a few other options: you can will the money directly to the designated caregiver, or set up a trust in your pet's name.

Setting up a pet trust will mean that the caregiver must follow your instructions and use the money only for the care of your pet.



When should you choose your dog's emergency caregiver?

Boyd encourages all dog owners to consider their pet's emergency care sooner rather than later. "Many people are shocked to hear that still so many pets wind up in shelters," she told me. "I can't tell you how many we see. And you can tell that they were cared for and deeply loved by someone, and because no arrangements were made, they wind up at your local city shelter."

Since there's no knowing what tomorrow holds, the best time to prepare for your dog's comfortable, loving life after your death is right now.