

## WORST-CASE SCENARIO®

# HOW TO DEAL WITH A DEAD PET

### 1 Make sure the pet is really dead.

Cats often sleep without moving for hours, dogs can be lazy, reptiles are cold blooded and still, fish with parasites sometimes float upside down at the surface, and opossums are well known for feigning. Observe the pet's chest: If it rises and falls, even very slowly, the animal is still alive. Hold a mirror to the pet's nose. If no condensation appears, the animal is probably dead. Pick up the animal. If it does not move and its body is stiff and cold, it has passed away. Feel the neck for a pulse. If you cannot feel one, and all the other signs indicate death, the pet has died. Finally, check for involuntary blinking reflex: Lightly touch the pet's cornea. Any animal that is alive will blink reflexively.

### 2 Break the news to your child.

If the pet's death was sudden and unexpected, the child is likely to be distraught. Explain that death is a fact of life. Emphasize that the pet had a happy life, the child had taken good care of it, and that the pet is not suffering.

### 3 Prepare the body.

Close the animal's eyelids—you may need to hold them in place for several seconds so they will stay closed. Place the corpse in a matchbox, shoe box, or

wooden box and cover with a washcloth, towel, or sheet, depending on the size of the pet.

#### **4 Hold a family funeral.**

Pets are a part of the family, and children expect them to be buried when they die. Give everyone a chance to speak at the funeral ceremony. Burial should immediately follow the ceremony, though there may be laws restricting the burial of pets in a yard. Check with your local vet on burial options, or contact a pet cemetery.

#### **5 Allow your child to grieve.**

Do not replace the pet right away. Grieving is an important part of the recovery process, and children should be given time to adapt to the loss.

#### **Be Aware**

- A pet cemetery charges from \$100 to many thousands of dollars, depending on the coffin, type of service, and size and quality of the headstone/plaque.
- Many vets have cremation services available. If the local vet cannot help with disposal, the local public health department or any large veterinary hospital or university will have facilities.

