Behavior Euthanasia:
Approaching Decisions with Care and Impacts with Compassion

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Behavioral Sciences Team

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Behavior Euthanasia

• It IS
  – Humane euthanasia of an animal because of a severe problem behavior that may include
    • risk of harm to the animal themselves
    • risk of harm to those around them
    • compromised quality of life for the animal or their human family.

• It is not
  • Humane euthanasia purely due to a physical illness, injury, or decline.
  • Euthanasia unrelated to behavior
E. Shelters should retain the discretion to decline placement of animals with severe behavior or medical issues or dogs deemed dangerous under applicable law.

Shelters should retain discretion in adoption and placement decisions generally, and specifically with regard to animals with serious medical issues or where there are valid concerns regarding behavior or aggression. Obviously, the capacity of potential adopters or animal rescue organizations to provide adequate care for animals with serious medical or behavior conditions must be considered, as well as the safety of the public.

Where concerns regarding behavior are present, it is important to rely on multiple sources of information whenever possible. An owner surrendering an animal may not always provide a candid or accurate description of the animal’s past, and thus observations by shelter staff should be given appropriate weight, along with the results of behavioral and medical assessments, where available. These decisions are not often straightforward ones and discretion in these matters properly rests with the shelter.
A scoping review of published research on the relinquishment of companion animals.
Coe, et al. (2014)

- Aggression 58%
- General Disobedience, unspecified, other behavior problems 49%
- Destruction, hyperactivity, noisiness 43%
- Fearfulness and escaping 33%
- Housesoiling 42%
- Unfriendly, does not get along with others 31%
- Separation Anxiety 12%
- Fearfulness and escaping 33%
Factors informing the return of adopted dogs and cats to an animal shelter.

Hawes, et al. (2020)

- Aggressive toward humans
  - Dogs: 23.5%
  - Cats: 12.5%

- Aggressive toward animals
  - Dogs: 15%
  - Cats: 10%

- Destructive tendencies
  - Dogs: 11%
  - Cats: 11%

- Separation Anxiety
  - Dogs: 7%
  - Cats: 1%

Factors Associated with Behavioral Euthanasia in Pet Dogs.

(Hitchcock 2023)
Animals need behavior help...

76% of S&R pros feel the number of animals with behavioral challenges is increasing; 67% feel the number of animals with medical challenges is increasing.

Number of Animals with Behavioral & Medical Challenges
Among Cat/Dog S&R, Cat S&R, Dog S&R, Veterinary S&R Professionals

The number of animals in need with behavioral challenges is:
The results are consistent across subgroups:

- Decreasing significantly: 0%
- Decreasing slightly: 1%
- Staying about the same: 23%
- Increasing slightly: 31%
- Increasing significantly: 43%

The number of animals in need with medical challenges is:
The results are consistent across subgroups:

- Decreasing significantly: 0%
- Decreasing slightly: 1%
- Staying about the same: 32%
- Increasing slightly: 41%
- Increasing significantly: 26%

Intensity of Behavioral Challenges
Among Cat/Dog S&R, Cat S&R, Dog S&R, Veterinary S&R Professionals

69% of S&R pros feel the intensity of behavioral challenges is increasing; large organizations and shelters are feeling it the most.
Assessing Welfare & Risk

Our responsibility to assess...

Quality of Life & Welfare

Potential risk to
• The animal themselves
• Shelter staff & volunteers
• Adopters
• Community (including other animals)

Figure 1. The Five Domains of animal welfare in action

https://www.aspcapro.org/training/webinar/shelter-behavior-roundtable-embracing-behavior-capacity-care-planning
Behavior Euthanasia: Approaching Decisions with Care

INFORMATION GATHERING

Behavior Assessment Process

- Treatments
- Observations
- Activities
- Outings

Behavior Pathway Planning

Intake Evaluation

Pre-Intake Information

Investigators

Returns

Owner Report

Foster
Objective Language

Everyone speaks the same (behavior) language

Behavior Evaluation & Assessment:
Assess behavior comprehensively and consistently
Welfare & Risk Assessment

Behavior Pathway Planning

- Treatment Eligibility
- Risk Assessment
- Adoptability Guidelines
- Quality of Life Monitoring
- Outcome Recommendation

Monitoring Quality of Life:
Psychological QoL & Holistic QoL
Adoptability Guidelines:

What must an animal be able to do and what they can’t do

Risk Assessment - Aggression

Shelter Behavior Risk Assessment Tool

This tool guides the user through a series of questions to identify potential hazards and their possible mitigation when considering aggression cases.

Use the tool to assess overall risk level for a given case and factor that into your decision to treat a dog with a history of, or the potential for, aggressive behavior. The risk assessment can also be used when deciding if you should place an animal without treatment (for example, a resource guardian).

Risk assessments examine three major questions:
1) How bad will the result be if the dog reacts aggressively?
2) How likely is aggression to happen?
3) Are there additional mitigating factors that impact the overall risk?

In other words: Overall Impact = (Severity of Consequence + Likelihood of Occurrence) – Mitigation
Treatment Eligibility

ASPCA Behavior Treatment Eligibility Chart

Refer to the end of the document for definitions of the Problem Behaviors

KEY (for most likely intervention of choice)

A = Adoption Plan
M = Management/Exercise/Socialization
T = Treatment (Drug or surgery to correct behavior)
B = Behavior Change (Staff trained to change behavior)

To determine Mild, Moderate, or Severe, refer to Fear Scale and View Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Behavior</th>
<th>Mild</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Severe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear of People</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B/E</td>
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Behavior Euthanasia

Integrated Outcome Planning

Adoption

Euthanasia

Treatment

Medical Rec.

Sheltering Rec.

Behavior Recommendation

Behavioral Assessment Plan (BAP)

Pathway Planning

Continued Assessment and Planning

Holistic Outcome Planning

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Ethics, Maps, & Decisions

Ethical Perspectives in Decision-Making

**VIRTUE ETHICS**

Good people make good decisions

**Ethic of Care**

Other-focused ethics

Common in medically-focused decisions
Ethical Perspectives in Decision-Making

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CONSEQUENTIALIST ETHICS
The consequences determine if a decision is good.

Utilitarianism
“Greater Good”
Common in risk-based decisions (behavior)

DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS
Decisions are based on rules provided in external sources.

“Following the Rules”
Common in circumstances with legal influence
### Ethical Perspectives in Decision-Making

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<td><strong>Decisions are based on rules provided in external sources.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ultimately, we make decisions align with our personal ethics &amp; morality.</strong></td>
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**Virtue Ethics**

- Good people make good decisions
- Ethic of Care
- Other-focused ethics
- Common in medically-focused decisions

**Consequentialist Ethics**

- The consequences determine if a decision is good.
- Utilitarianism
- “Greater Good”
- Common in risk-based decisions (behavior)

**Deontological Ethics**

- Decisions are based on rules provided in external sources.
- “Following the Rules”
- Common in circumstances with legal influence

**Psychological Egoism**

- Ultimately, we make decisions align with our personal ethics & morality.
- “Decisions that let you sleep at night.”
- “Gut-check ethics”
Decision-making in collaborative environments

- Think about your own decision process & ethical GPS
- Why vs. How questions
- Listening vs. Debating
- Judgment vs. Informed Understanding
- Shifting resources & limitations
- Compassion...

Communicating Euthanasia Decisions

- Timing
- Transparency
- Agency & Choice
- Communication process
  - Verbal
  - Written
Behavior Euthanasia: Approaching Impacts with Compassion

Psychosocial emotional Impacts
Emotional Demands of Shelter Behavior Work

“Animal care professionals are some of the most pain-saturated people I have ever worked with. The very thing that makes them great at their work, their empathy and dedication and love for animals, makes them vulnerable.”

-J. Eric Gentry

Compassion Fatigue, Moral Stress, & Moral Injury

**Compassion Fatigue**
- **Natural consequence** of stress due to caring for others, particularly suffering or victimized populations
- Physical and emotional exhaustion
- Resulting from constant demands on us to be compassionate and effective

**Moral Stress**
- “Occurs when a person engages in, bears witness to, fails to prevent, or learns about acts that transgress that individual’s moral code.”
  - (Litz et al., 2009)

**Moral Injury**
- “Lasting emotional, psychological, social, behavioral, and spiritual impacts of actions that violate an individual’s core moral values and behavioral expectations of self or others.”
  - (Litz et al., 2009, Shay, J. 2014, Griffin, et al., 2019)
Self-Care & We-Care

**SELF-CARE**
- Ethically necessary for sustainable caregiving
- Seek social support & Avoid isolation
- Create (and stick to!) healthy boundaries
- What activities create joy in your life?

**WE-CARE**
- Check in with teammates
- Social support groups
- Assistance from mental health professionals
- Nurture relationships outside of the workplace
- Speak up

Compassion Satisfaction

Emotional rewards received through empathy and compassion felt by those who care for the suffering and traumatized.

(Stamm, 2010)
• **Employee Assistance Programs**

• **Professional Quality of Life Survey**

• **Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project**

• **Jessica Dolce, Compassion Fatigue Educator**

• **Losing Lulu (Behavior Euthanasia Grief Support)**

• **University of Tennessee Knoxville Veterinary Social Work**

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**Thank you…**

All the animals who have crossed and will cross the Rainbow Bridge...

The animals who have crossed my own path...

All the individuals who care so deeply about them…
Do you want to influence the future of Animal Welfare?

Don't miss the annual ASPCA-AAWA Research Forum

**Wednesday, November 1, 2023** Virtual 12:00pm to 5:00pm Eastern

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**Apply for an ASPCA Research Grant** in Access to Vet Care, Behavior, Cruelty, or Psychological Trauma

[QR code to obtain RACE credits]

Behavior Euthanasia

QR code to obtain RACE credits
Questions?
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