

# Caring for and Making Choices about Animals with Behavioral Issues

When we bring a new pet into our lives, we expect a mutually loving and rewarding relationship. When those expectations are not met and we have an animal that is fearful, panicked and/or aggressive, our lives may be turned upside-down. We may grieve the loss of what is considered a typical dog or cat experience; one in which our lives aren't limited.

We form strong bonds, feel love and responsibility for our pets, which can make it hard to make decisions about their care. Sometimes it is hard to find support from others without feeling judged. Ideally, making difficult choices would not be complicated by the unsolicited opinions of others. If you want advice or thoughts from others, you are welcome to ask for it, just as you are welcome to ignore opinions you did not seek.

When making choices, it is important to look at the quality of life of the animal in question, as well as the humans and other animals in the household. Whether you choose to keep and manage, re-home or euthanize your pet, know that your

decision is made with kindness and what is in the best interest of your animal and your family. You are the one who has a strong enough bond with your pet to be willing to look at all the options and make the decision that works best. One choice is not morally better than another. It is never easy, and even harder when our furry friends appear normal.

At times it seems as if there are no good options. On pages 2-4 of this flier, we discuss possible options for you and your animal with behavior issues, and provide links to helpful resources.



Living with and managing an animal with behavioral issues can be challenging or overwhelming. It is common to experience many emotions during this time. Owners may feel as if they are walking on eggshells, having to be constantly on guard. This situation can feel very isolating.

You are not alone; many people have had similar experiences. You may wish to reach out to one of our social workers with our Honoring the Bond (HTB) Program. The HTB team is here to provide non-judgmental, emotional support to owners as they navigate living with a special needs animal. They can be reached at **614-247-8607** or **[CVM-OSUVET.HonoringTheBond@osu.edu](mailto:CVM-OSUVET.HonoringTheBond@osu.edu)**

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center - **Columbus**  
601 Vernon L. Tharp Street, Columbus, OH 43210  
**614-292-3551**

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center - **Dublin**  
5020 Bradenton Avenue, Dublin, OH 43017  
**614-889-8070**

Frank Stanton Veterinary Spectrum of Care Clinic  
655 Vernon L. Tharp St. Columbus, OH 43210  
**614-292-1573**



## Owners living with an animal with special behavioral needs

Those that choose to keep their pet will likely need to make changes in their lifestyle to support the pet's needs. Lifestyle changes can include keeping your pet's bubble small or limited solely to family members. Having visitors may not be enjoyable or even safe. For reactive animals, it may be necessary to exercise your pet early in the day, late at night or in specific areas in order to limit their exposure to other animals or people. Others may live with multiple animals that cannot be together and are separated in their own rooms or by baby gates throughout the house. You may have to manage medications, sometimes multiple times per day or before stressful events. We often can't predict these stressful events.

These lifestyle changes may be difficult (emotionally or logistically) to implement and there may be better days than others. Inevitably, management has limitations and, unfortunately, there will be failures at times.

The following resources are for owners living with an animal with special behavioral needs:

[Loving a Pet with Behavior Problems](#)

[Living with and Loving a Pet with Behavior Problems](#)

[Falling short: Life and love with an imperfect dog](#)

[Living with and loving a pet with behavioral problems: Pet owners' experiences](#)

[The emotional toll of a reactive dog](#)

[Sometimes it is the dog, not the owner](#)

[Living with a Difficult Dog: Coping Strategies for when you get "more dog" than you bargained for](#)

Some owners may decide that re-homing their pet with behavior issues may be the best option. For example, a dog who growls over food or toys may be more safely managed in a home without young children. This choice is not easy and is an amazing sacrifice. Even though it may not be living with you, the animal will have the opportunity to live its best life.



## Owners considering euthanasia for their animal with special behavioral needs

Sometimes, neither keeping the pet in the home nor re-homing is a safe or viable option. As difficult as it may be to consider, sometimes the kindest option for the animal is euthanasia. This option is often something that has never crossed the mind of an owner. It is hard to wrap our heads around the idea of euthanasia for an animal that looks physically healthy.

Realistically, the way that these animals behave is not healthy or normal. They may not have an illness that can be seen, such as cancer or heart disease, but they are suffering from an invisible illness. In choosing to euthanize your pet, you have given them peace and allowed them to say goodbye humanely and without suffering. The decision whether or not to euthanize due to behavioral issues is extraordinarily difficult and personal.

The following resources are for owners considering euthanasia for their animal with special behavioral needs:

[Euthanasia for behavioral issues:  
A complicated and difficult decision](#)

[Falling short: Lessons in letting go](#)

[When Bonnie Came Home](#)

[Making the decision to euthanize our problem behavior dog](#)

[Euthanizing aggressive dogs: Sometimes it's the best choice](#)

[When is it time to put down a dog who is aggressive to people?](#)



## Owners that have euthanized an animal with special behavioral needs

If you have already euthanized an animal for behavioral issues, some of the articles above may still be helpful. Many owners feel a great sense of relief after euthanizing and, in turn, feel immense guilt for feeling relieved. Please know that those feelings are normal, and it is okay to feel both these emotions at the same time. Just because you feel guilty does not mean that you made the wrong decision, nor does it mean that it is wrong to feel relief.

The following are resources for those that have euthanized an animal with special behavioral needs:

[Falling short: Reckoning with loss and imperfection](#)

[Losing Lulu Facebook Group](#)

This group is closely moderated to ensure that it remains a safe place for those owners that have made a terribly difficult decision to let their beloved animal go through humane euthanasia.

[Coping with the Loss of a Pet: A Guide for Adults, Children and Surviving Animals](#)

Regardless of your choice to keep, re-home or euthanize, you may feel guilty for some time. Many pets with behavioral issues must be so carefully managed that you may not realize the emotional toll until you no longer have to manage them. You may feel a sense of relief, which may also cause you to feel more guilt. This is a normal emotional response and does not mean that your choice was wrong.

