

## Ways to Keep Your Pet in a Difficult Economy

Each of us has been adversely affected in some way or another by the seemingly endless troubled economy. Jobs have become more scarce, and for many simply not available. For many families, income has decreased significantly. Thus, many of us are spending less and carefully budgeting our finances to accommodate our own and our family's most vital, immediate, and significant needs – food and shelter. How does a family pet fit into this equation?

As a Grief Recovery Specialist, I come into contact with a great number of people from all walks of life that dearly love their pets and regard them as family members. Most of the people I counsel are mourning the loss of a beloved animal companion and are seeking help coping with and recovering from their grief. It is only within the past few years that I have counseled an ever-expanding number of people suffering from financial hardship and deep emotional stress and who are wondering how they can afford to keep their pet.

I personally regard pet “guardianship” as a lifetime commitment. Once you have made the decision to incorporate a pet into your life, he is to be loved and treated as a family member or child. He is not to be discarded during times of emotional or financial duress. You would not “surrender” your human child to a welfare organization – why consider disposing of a beloved animal companion – particularly one who is older and is likely to be euthanized if owner-surrendered to an animal shelter or welfare organization? I think it is important to plan ahead to the best of your abilities. The unconditional love and loyalty of an animal companion can actually sustain and lift your spirits during difficult times. Don't add to the emotional stress you are experiencing over finances by giving up your pet – the one who loves you no matter what!

I have some suggestions that may help you to be able to keep your pet.

- 1). Do not be afraid or embarrassed to let friends, family members, neighbors, co-workers, fellow church or synagogue members, other members of the community know of your circumstances and ask for help.
- 2). Contact both local and national animal welfare and rescue organizations and ask them if they know of low-cost veterinarians, food pantries for pets (many rescue organizations receive help and donations from stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, PetSmart, Petco or dog and cat food manufacturers) and offer pet food to those who need it. Check with local pet product stores and see if they will sell you pet food from torn, damaged or extra pet food bags or cans
- 3). Discuss your situation with your veterinarian and seek health care for your pet that is truly essential and critical to your pet's health and well-being.

- 4). Ask your vet for a viable and affordable payment plan. If your vet is unwilling to provide a reasonable payment plan, seek referrals from animal welfare or rescue organizations for reputable, low cost veterinarians.
- 5). Limit or curtail spending on unnecessary toys or accessories for your pet. Often a pet's favorite toy is a tennis ball, Frisbee or cardboard box – something extremely inexpensive and simple.
- 6). Rather than paying for pet grooming, groom your pet yourself. If you are unable or unwilling to do this, contact a local animal shelter or rescue organization and find out if a volunteer can provide this service for a reduced fee.
- 7). Scale down whenever it is possible. Rather than hiring a pet sitter or taking your pet to doggie/kitty day care, ask animal loving friends, neighbors and/or family members to do the job.
- 8). Check with your local Meals on Wheels to find out if pet food is available through this organization.
- 9). Keep your pet safe and healthy by providing him with clean water, nutritious food and exercise so that he is less likely to become sick. In cold and hot weather, keep him primarily indoors.
- 10). Keep on keeping on, and take it one day at a time. Although it may involve some intricate financial juggling on your part, do your best to obtain help and advice from as many resources as you can.

There are many people who love their pets and organizations that care for and support our animal companions. They may be willing to assist you. Try not to become discouraged. Persevere! Locate and contact as many potential resources as you can. Most importantly, don't give up your best friend.