

Behavioral Euthanasia Discussion Guide

Goals

This tool guides pet guardians, veterinarians, and behaviorists (the Care Team) in discussion of the ethical and practical aspects of behavioral euthanasia. The goals of this tool are to:

- 1) Reduce moral stress in decision makers and adjacent staff/family
- 2) Consider the well-being of all animals and humans involved
- 3) Provide an ethics and responsibilities check

About this Guide

Discussion questions are grouped into eight assessment domains, A-H, which may contain items that are ethical factors, pragmatic factors, or professional and/or responsibility checks.

Ethical Domains

A. Animal, B. Guardian, C. Family, D. Society, E. Human-Animal Relationship

These domains consider ethical and moral justifications for or against euthanasia. Behavioral euthanasia may be morally supported by response marks in the shaded (red color) response boxes.

Pragmatic Domains

E. Human-Animal Relationship, G. Pragmatics

Domains E and G consider pragmatic explanations for or against euthanasia. Such explanations are not moral justifications; they are non-moral reasons. However, these explanatory factors may be compelling real-world factors at times. They may influence moral factors in the future if they prevent fulfillment of ethical duties. If improvements cannot be made in these factors, responses in the shaded (orange color) response boxes indicate risk factors for behavioral euthanasia.

Professional/Responsibility Check Domains

E. Human-Animal Relationship, F. Behavior Modification / Due Diligence, H. Professional Responsibility

Domains E, F, and H are professional and responsibility checks that should be fulfilled whenever possible. Consider alternatives to behavioral euthanasia if some of the shaded (purple color) response boxes are not filled.

Directions

The Care Team should discuss each item and place a check mark in the appropriate response column "Yes", "No", or "Unsure". The team may also decide to weight some items more (or less) heavily, which can be indicated in the response column "Wt". The team may choose to use numbers or words in the weight column.

This Guide will not compute an absolute score that correlates to a decision. The response columns are guideposts to track your path. The product of this tool is the discussion itself.

Assessment Domains	Yes	Unsure	No	Wt
A. Animal				
Are the animal's basic physical needs met with respect to food, water, and sleeping area?				
Does the animal get sufficient and species-appropriate exercise?				
Is it possible to perform basic and necessary health and grooming procedures?				
Is it possible to administer any required medications?				
Is the animal's behavioral quality of life acceptable?				
Does the animal live free of worry and fear?				
Can the animal engage in species-appropriate activities?				
Does the animal have appropriate social partners?				
Does the animal injure itself?				
Does the animal threaten to, or injure others?				

Assessment Domains	Yes	Unsure	No	Wt
B. Guardian				
Is the guardian's behavioral quality of life acceptable?				
Does the guardian live free of worry and fear?				
Can the guardian engage in appropriate personal, social, and familial activities?				
Can the guardian maintain appropriate social and familial relationships?				
Is the risk posed to the guardian acceptable?				
C. Family				
Is the quality of family life acceptable?				
Do other people or animals in the home live free of worry and fear?				
Is the risk posed to other people or animals in the home acceptable?				
Can the family / other animals regularly engage in species-appropriate activities?				
Does the animal threaten to, or injure other members of the household, either human or animal?				
D. Society				
Is the risk posed to the community acceptable?				
Do the neighbors live free of worry and fear?				
Can the neighbors engage in regular, normal activities?				

Assessment Domains	Yes	Unsure	No	Wt
Does the animal's behavior significantly disrupt the relationship between the community and the pet guardian?				
Does the animal threaten to, or injure, others in the community?				
E. Human-Animal Relationship				
Does the guardian have reasonable expectations for an animal, generally speaking?				
Does the guardian have reasonable expectations for this particular animal?				
Is the human-animal relationship of acceptable quality and character?				
Does the guardian emotionally benefit from the relationship with the animal?				
Does the animal emotionally benefit from the relationship with guardian?				
Does the guardian have any resentment toward the animal?				
Does the guardian have any regrets about getting the animal?				
Does the animal threaten to, or injure, the guardian?				
Does the guardian threaten to, or injure, the animal?				

Assessment Domains	Yes	Unsure	No	Wt
F. Behavior Modification / Due Diligence				
Was, or is, this animal under the care of a qualified behavior professional?				
Did the animal participate in a management and behavior modification plan for a reasonable amount of time?				
Did the guardian follow the professional's management plan to the best of their abilities?				
Did the guardian follow the professional's behavior modification plan to the best of their abilities?				
Did the guardian change the animal's environment to the best of their abilities, as recommended by the professional?				
Did other members of the household follow the management and behavior modification plan to the best of their abilities?				
Did the guardian make significant progress changing their own behavior per the behavior modification plan?				
G. Pragmatics				
Does the guardian have the finances to continue and/or maintain the management and behavior modification plan?				
Can the guardian provide a long-term, suitable living environment for the animal?				
Is adhering to the management and behavior modification plan a reasonable indefinite request?				

Assessment Domains	Yes	Unsure	No	Wt
Is the guardian emotionally and personally willing to continue and/or maintain the management and behavior modification plan?				
Is rehoming the animal a reasonable solution?				
H. Professional Responsibility				
Does the professional team have the education and experience requisite for this case?				
Did the behavior professional consult with other professionals, work with a case mentor, and/or refer to another professional?				
Are there any conflicts of interests that are influencing decisions? (Financial gain, reputation, case notoriety, etc)				

Response Assessment

Questions

1. Have we met all professional and responsible duties? (All purple boxes are checked?)
2. Can we find solutions for or make improvements in any pragmatic risk factors? (Can we make changes so that checked orange boxes can be unchecked?)
3. Do we have a significant number of moral reasons for behavioral euthanasia? (Are there are large number of red boxes checked, or a few number of red boxes that have high weight?)

A Note About Rehoming

Rehoming or surrendering an animal is not always a feasible or humane solution. Usually rehoming is considered or attempted before this Guide is employed. For assistance with thinking through rehoming scenarios, an experienced behaviorist can be a great help.

A Note About Safety

Safety is a critical consideration that may carry much heavier weight than other items.

More Resources

A written companion guide and live and recorded training modules for this matrix are currently under development. These resources explain in detail: how to use the Guide, how to conduct a discussion session, and how to understand the ethical components that both underpin this document and influence personal decision making. Understanding the moral and ethical foundation will not only help you to use this tool more effectively, but also help you understand and empathize with your staff and clients. Please contact the author for more information or to schedule a training.

Feedback and Research

This Guide is in ongoing development. Your feedback and participation in reliability and validity studies is greatly appreciated. Please contact the author for more information.

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