



# Veterinary Wisdom®

for practice teams

## Encouraging Clients to Keep Linking Objects

Laurel Lagoni, M.S.

For some pet owners, it's meaningful to have an object that links them to a pet who has recently died. A 'linking object' is any physical item or image that connects grievers to their pet in a comforting way. Linking objects assist bereaved pet owners in maintaining positive memories, as well as with awareness that love received from a pet never really dies.

A 'linking object' may be something that belonged to or was used by a pet, such as a collar, a toy mouse, a bed, a special blanket, or even a food or water dish. The object may also be part of the actual animal, such as a feather, a clipping of fur, the wool of a llama, part of a horse's mane or tail, or even a paw print set in clay.

As part of your clinic's grief education protocol, it's helpful to tell your clients about the comfort they may find in a linking object and to even provide that object yourself. For instance, you might help clients clip a bit of their pet's fur immediately following a euthanasia or make a ClayPaws® print when a patient dies.



ClayPaws® Kits can be purchased from World by the Tail, Inc.

When discussing linking objects with your clients, it's helpful to:

- reassure clients that there is nothing 'morbid' about keeping linking objects with them or in plain view if they are comforted by them. Too often, pet owners are advised to get rid of things that belonged to their pets so they aren't constantly reminded of their loss. However, research and clinical experience proves many clients receive tremendous comfort from their "linking objects" and feel regret when discarding reminders of their pets too quickly.
- caution clients to choose linking objects that help them deal with the *reality* of loss rather than helping them "*pretend*" a loss has not occurred. This is why body care options that allow pet owners to keep life-size replicas of their pets (freeze drying, taxidermy) are not usually encouraged by grief experts.

If you decide to offer linking objects to your clients, be aware that you may be occasionally asked for items you question, like teeth, inner organs (a pet's heart), or even entire pelts or hides. It's helpful to have a practice philosophy regarding how (and if!) you wish to handle these requests. For instance, you might decide to:

- A) simply refuse "unusual" requests.
- B) maintain a non-judgmental attitude and grant the request despite your own personal response to it.  
*Note: You may consider charging an extra fee for any additional surgical work or staff time required.*
- C) refer clients to other businesses like taxidermists who may be willing to grant the request.

There is no right or wrong answer to dealing with requests for unusual linking objects, but it does help to be prepared with an answer! Whatever you decide, sending clients home with a meaningful link to a beloved pet who has just died can help ease their grief and create a lasting bond with you and your clinic.