

## Encouraging Clients to Keep “Links” to Their Pets

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For some pet owners, it’s meaningful to have an item that links them to a pet who has recently died. A “link” can be any item that connects grievers to their pets in a comforting way and assists them with maintaining positive memories. “Link objects” help us maintain the awareness that the love we receive from our pets 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 a ClayPaws<sup>®</sup> print decorated with a beloved pet’s name.

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 objects. You might even provide the link yourself. For instance, you might help clients clip a bit of their pet’s fur immediately following a euthanasia or make a ClayPaws<sup>®</sup> print for them when their pets die.

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 asked to provide items you have concerns about, 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:

- firmly, but respectfully, refuse “unusual” requests.
- 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.
- refer clients to other businesses like taxidermists who may be willing to grant their requests.

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.

For more information, visit our Resource Center at [www.veterinarywisdom.com](http://www.veterinarywisdom.com).