



# Animal Rescue League of NH North

## Frequently Asked Questions About Euthanasia

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Euthanasia is a very difficult but necessary part of animal welfare. It is a topic which brings out strong emotions in any animal lover and something that anyone who cares about animals will likely benefit from understanding.

In this document we have tried to provide the answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about euthanasia. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact us at any time for a more in-depth conversation. Thank you for investing the time to learn about this issue.

**Q: What is euthanasia?**

**A:** The word "euthanasia" comes from the Greek -- *eu*, meaning goodly or well, and *thanatos*, meaning death. In general it means experiencing an easy and painless death.



**Q: What is the League's policy on euthanasia? Has it changed since your affiliation with the Bedford shelter?**

**A:** The League's policy has not changed. **We still follow a "no-kill" operating philosophy, which means that we will never euthanize an animal for time or shelter space.** We will, however, euthanize an animal that can not be responsibly adopted into the community for reasons of health, behavior or aggression.



**Q: How do you determine whether an animal needs to be euthanized?**

**A:** Each animal receives a thorough medical and behavioral assessment. If an animal has a medical or behavioral condition that would make it unadoptable, it is a candidate for euthanasia. It is important to remember that most animals, especially dogs, are stressed in a kennel situation, so living years in a shelter would not be a humane outcome. Also, if an animal has no real chance of being adopted, in addition to the stress and unhappiness years of kenneling would cause that specific animal, it would also take up space that could be used to save another animal that is a good adoption candidate. Whenever an animal is "on the borderline", we will err on the side of giving it a chance, and defining a program of behavior modification to enhance adoptability.

Detractors of euthanasia often focus on issues of behavior rather than medical problems as they are a "grayer" area. We do extensive professional assessment, particularly in the area of aggression in dogs. One tool on which we rely is the SAFER test. SAFER (an acronym for Safety Assessment for Evaluating Rehoming) was created by the ASPCA's Senior Director of Shelter Behavior Programs, Dr. Emily Weiss, to provide shelter professionals with the ability to help identify certain behaviors such as: aggression in relation to handling, arousal and other dogs; fearfulness during handling or escalated activity; and guarding food or other resources. By completing this test, shelters are able to identify areas of concern in dogs which can assist in determining the best future for the dog and the potential adopters. **The SAFER test has proven to be a good predictor of future behavior and focuses on a dog's body postures and behaviors in response to specific interactions.**

**Q: *Do you ever look for other options?***

**A:** Absolutely! In some cases an animal has behaviors that aren't appropriate to place in a home with children, but would be fine in an adult-only home so we will adopt to a home that meets the criteria and understands the importance of keeping the pet away from children. Sometimes we are able to find a breed rescue to take an animal so that it will be placed with someone experienced in managing a dogs issues commonly seen in a given breed.



**Q: *Why don't you just send animals to a sanctuary?***

**A:** While sanctuaries sound great in theory, they are rarely an appropriate solution in practice. Most sanctuaries are underfunded, fill to capacity quickly, and result in animals that are "warehoused" for the remainder of their lives, often in substandard conditions. While we have explored sanctuaries as a solution, we have not yet found one that we believe was a humane solution in the best interest of an animal.



**Q: *Is euthanasia painless for the animal?***

**A: Yes!** One of the reasons euthanasia is known as being "put to sleep" is because when it is done by injection (as we do it) is because the animal is quickly rendered unconscious before any vital processes cease. As such, the process is swift (~30 seconds) and painless.



**Q: *I know some community members are against euthanasia for any behavior reasons and are waging a campaign to detract support for the shelter – what are you doing about that?***

**A:** We believe that our responsibility to act in the best interests of the animals and to protect the community outweighs the personal discomfort caused by detractors spreading inaccurate rumors, and that education on the facts is the best approach. We believe that good will always prevail, and that once people are given the facts in an environment of transparency and integrity, that anyone who truly has an animal's best interests at heart will immediately see the need for euthanasia in the circumstances we've described.

Frankly, our biggest concern is for staff members who are asked to carry out this difficult task. It is hard for someone who has dedicated their lives to saving animals to end a life, even when it is clearly the right thing to do. We try to provide the technicians and veterinarians who perform our euthanasia with a supportive and understanding environment and to express our gratitude to them for performing this essential and sad service.



**Q: *Who can I contact for more information?***

**A:** You are welcome to contact our Director, Virginia Moore, at [vmoore@conwaysshelter.org](mailto:vmoore@conwaysshelter.org) or 603.447.5605 or our President & CEO, Caroline Boyd, at [caroline@rescueleague.org](mailto:caroline@rescueleague.org) or 603.472.5710 at any time.