



The BrightHaven Guide to Animal Hospice: What is Animal Hospice?

The guidelines for hospice care for humans have been very carefully created over many years and form the foundation for animal hospice upon which we must all build:

- Hospice is a special philosophy of care designed to provide comfort, support and dignity to those dying and to their families during life-limiting illness
- The goal of hospice care is to enhance the quality of living while dying
- Hospice is about love, joy and devotion
- Hospice care can prolong life, but does not hasten death
- Hospice care often embraces both conventional and alternative medicine
- The hospice team comprises specially trained professionals, volunteers and family members
- Hospice addresses all symptoms of a disease, with a special emphasis on controlling pain or discomfort
- Hospice addresses daily emotional and spiritual needs of both the dying and their families
- Hospice offers a variety of bereavement and counseling services to families before and after death

The [International Association for Animal Hospice and Palliative Care](#) (IAAHPC) was the first animal hospice organization to form and includes members from all walks of life. BrightHaven Co-Founder Gail Pope was a founding member of this organization.



As we know, there is no place for euthanasia in the world of human hospice care. Therefore, many different viewpoints exist as to if and when euthanasia should be part of animal hospice. For example, many members of the veterinary profession see hospice as that special time in life before euthanasia is performed. Others feel that natural death is the primary goal barring unforeseen complications, and still others see natural death as the only option.



We strongly encourage anyone interested in learning about animal hospice to first read more about death and dying on many available websites including those of the [National Hospice Care and Palliative Organization](#) (NHPCO) and the [Hospice Foundation of America](#) (HFA).



Here are a few important definitions from human hospice that are applicable to our animal hospice discussion:

Hospice Care -- NHPCO's definition is considered to be the model for quality, compassionate care for people facing a life-limiting illness or injury: Hospice care involves a team-oriented approach to expert medical care, pain management and emotional and spiritual support expressly tailored to the patient's needs and wishes. Support is provided to the patient's loved ones as well.

At the center of hospice and palliative care is the belief that each of us has the right to die pain-free and with dignity, and that our families will receive the necessary support to allow us to do so.

Palliative Care is a misunderstood service most often associated with death and dying. In reality, palliative care can give people a longer quality of life during any stage of life, a subtle nuance that many people may not understand.

Palliative care is specialized medical care for those with serious illnesses. It is focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of a serious illness. The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and the family.

End of Life Care is the care provided to an individual in the final stages of life.

BrightHaven's Animal Hospice Perspective

BrightHaven's approach to hospice care is definitely aligned with hospice care for humans where love, comfort, dignity and quality of life are of the highest importance, and the spiritual aspect of the journey is deeply honored.

We strive to not hasten or postpone death, but to work within the bounds of nature and the best of medical care.



Joey & Sammi

Our Guiding Statement

At BrightHaven when an animal enters hospice care our expectation is that the animal will have a painless, loving, peaceful journey followed by a painless, loving, peaceful and natural death.

If a place is reached during that journey where the caregiver, the veterinarian and the animal believe that the animal is in need of critical assistance, then euthanasia will be used.

BrightHaven's Unique Approach to Animal Wellbeing

BrightHaven is unique because of the way we work and the results we get. Our [Menu for Healing](#), which is the foundation of our work, focuses on the best quality of life at all stages, all the way to the most peaceful and loving dying process. The goal is to achieve optimal balance of body, mind and spirit.

Once you learn how our animals live well before and during hospice care, you will better understand how they die painless, loving and peaceful deaths.

We've supported over 600 animals through the dying process and have euthanized only 20 over the years – the last euthanasia was about 180 deaths ago.

Animals approach the end of their lives with the same wisdom and grace with which they have lived. They are very conscious of the value of all stages of life and excel in the ability to live in the moment and find the sacredness in all experiences.

We at BrightHaven have been taught to honor the circle of life and death and have come to respect the process of transition as natural as that of birth itself, the circle of life thus becoming complete. There is nothing more sacred than to care for a beloved friend during his or her final time with us on earth.



**BrightHaven Co-Founders
Gail & Richard Pope with Bailey**

Death is not the extinguishing of the light...It is the putting out of the lamp because the dawn has come. ~Rabindranath Tagore

BrightHaven provides leadership and education in the development and application of animal hospice and its philosophy of care. We are dedicated to improving the care and support of animals with a serious or end-of-life illness. We foster respect and awareness for animals as sentient beings and promote an understanding of death as a natural part of life.

A Note from Gail & Richard Pope

This material represents BrightHaven's approach to healthcare, animal hospice and natural dying. There are many different opinions and approaches regarding these sensitive issues. We honor individual choice.

We encourage you to explore what works best for you and your animal, which is a discussion to have with your vet.

You may also wish to contact individuals specializing in animal hospice work to discuss questions or concerns regarding hospice care, natural dying vs. euthanasia and more.

Here are a few resources:

- BrightHaven: Book an animal holistic care or animal hospice consultation with Gail Pope by sending an email to consultations@brighthaven.org
- The Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets: www.pethospice.org/
- Spirits in Transition: www.spiritsintransition.org/
- Sheilagh O'Sullivan--Sheilagh has extensive experience with animal and human hospice and is a Registered Psychotherapist with specialized training in Hospice and Palliative Care: <http://osullivanpsychotherapy.com/>
- International Association of Animal Hospice & Palliative Care (IAAHPC): www.iaahpc.org