Animal welfare is a key concept in applied ethology and modern veterinary medicine. It refers to the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies. According to the definition proposed by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), animal welfare refers to "the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies."

This notion is based on the assumption that animals are sentient beings, capable of experiencing positive and negative emotions, and that we have a moral responsibility to ensure their welfare. As the famous philosopher Jeremy Bentham declared in the 18th century, the question is not "Can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But, can they suffer?".

Animal welfare encompasses several complementary dimensions:
- Physical health: The animal should not suffer from illnesses, injuries or chronic pain. It should receive suitable nutrition, have access to clean water and shelter from the weather.
- Emotional comfort: The animal should be able to express behaviors specific to its species, have opportunities for play and exploration, and not be subjected to chronic stress or prolonged negative emotions such as fear or frustration.
- Mental health: The animal should have a stimulating and enriching environment, allowing it to exercise its cognitive capacities. It should be able to interact positively with its peers and/or with humans, and not suffer from behavioral disorders or stereotypies.

To evaluate an animal's welfare, researchers and professionals have developed different tools, such as the five freedoms defined by the British Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1979:
1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease

4. Freedom to express normal behavior
5. Freedom from fear and distress

More recently, the five domains model proposed by David Mellor in 2016 provides a more comprehensive conceptual framework for assessing animal welfare, taking into account the positive and negative subjective experiences of animals. The five domains are: nutrition, environment, health, behavior and mental state.

In the context of pets, welfare comes through a harmonious and respectful relationship with their owners. This involves being aware of the specific needs of one's pet, providing appropriate care, balanced nutrition, opportunities for physical and mental exercise, and lots of affection. A happy pet is a pet that feels loved, safe, and stimulated daily.

Unfortunately, the welfare of pets is not always respected. Shelters are full of abandoned, abused or neglected animals. Some common behavioral disorders, such as aggression or uncleanliness in dogs, may be signs of chronic discomfort related to inappropriate living conditions. It is the responsibility of owners, but also of society as a whole, to ensure the welfare of domestic animals.

For Grief Coaches specializing in pet loss, the concept of animal welfare is fundamental. Indeed, most bereaved people had a very strong bond with their departed companion, based on mutual love and respect. They often feel like they have lost a family member, with whom they shared a unique and privileged relationship.

By understanding the principles of animal welfare, the Grief Coach can better validate the emotions of the bereaved person and help make sense of this special relationship. They can also offer practical advice to honor the memory of the animal, for instance by engaging in animal protection actions or adopting a new animal in need.

Finally, the concept of animal welfare can also help the Grief Coach gently approach the sensitive issue of euthanasia. Many owners are faced with this difficult decision when their pet is at the end of its life or suffering from an incurable disease. By reminding them that euthanasia can be an act of love and compassion, aimed at relieving the animals' suffering, the Grief Coach can help the bereaved person move towards acceptance and alleviate any potential guilt.

Key takeaways:

1. Animal welfare is a key concept in applied ethology and modern veterinary medicine, which considers animals as sentient beings capable of experiencing positive and negative emotions.

2. Animal welfare encompasses several complementary dimensions: physical health,

emotional comfort, and mental health.

3. To evaluate animal welfare, researchers and professionals use different tools, such as the five freedoms and the five domains model.

4. In the context of pets, welfare involves a harmonious and respectful relationship with their owners, who must be familiar with the specific needs of their pet.

5. The concept of animal welfare is fundamental for Grief Coaches specializing in pet loss, as it allows them to validate the emotions of the bereaved person and make sense of the unique relationship they had with their departed companion.

6. The Grief Coach can offer practical advice to honor the pet's memory, such as engaging in animal protection actions or adopting a new pet in need.

7. The concept of animal welfare can help the Grief Coach gently address the sensitive issue of euthanasia, by reminding that it can be an act of love and compassion aimed at relieving the animals' suffering.