

Pet Loss And Grief

A Reference For Those Who Have Lost A Pet

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Chance's Spot Pet Loss and Support Resources

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Pet Loss And Grief

Forward

Within these few pages I have attempted to create a reference for those who have, or know someone who has lost a pet. It is not meant as a "manual" on pet loss, as I feel there could be no such thing. Everyone will experience the loss of their beloved pet differently, and attempting to create a standard would be unjust.

Each of you will have different feelings at different times with regard to your loss. This is normal. Shaming or depriving yourself isn't healthy and should be avoided. If you feel as though it's too difficult for you to get through your grief alone, then by all means find someone who you feel comfortable talking with. There is a list of resources at the end of this publication if you would like to speak to someone trained in assisting you with your loss.

Most importantly, try to remember that you are not alone. There are thousands of pet lovers out there who have gone through the loss of a pet and who understand it. I've lost several of my own "fur babies" and it never gets any easier. However, I know that it is a part of life and always will be. I can't stop it, but I can also not let it stop me. This doesn't mean that I will ever forget my babies, but that I will carry their memory with me for all my days. And, when it's my time and when I cross the Rainbow Bridge, I'll have a herd of sloppy, wet kisses waiting for me.

Take care of yourself. Hugs.

Gail Heller, Founder
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Tribute To A Best Friend

Sunlight streams through window pane unto a spot on the floor...
then I remember, it's where you used to lie, but now you are no more.
Our feet walk down a hall of carpet, and muted echoes sound...
then I remember, it's where your paws would joyously abound.
A voice is heard along the road, and up beyond the hill...
then I remember it can't be yours, your golden voice is still.
But I'll take that vacant spot of floor and empty muted hall,
and lay them with the absent voice and unused dish along the wall.
I'll wrap these treasured memorials in a blanket of my love,
and keep them for my best friend until we meet above.

-Unknown

ALONE

Someone you love has left you. You've lost your friend, companion, your pet. There is a pain and emptiness that is felt every time you come home and there's no furry friend that rushes to greet you, or that shares your bed at the end of the day. You are alone.

Places and times that you shared with your pet are no longer a part of your routine. Special days like Christmas, or objects such as an empty dish, a chew stick or toy are reminders of that. At times you will probably find yourself still planning and calling for your pet as if they were still with you. And then, like a rush of waves, you will remember once again that they are gone.

SPEAKING OF LOSS

What should you do and who should you talk to about your loss? You may feel afraid of what others will think or how they will respond. After all, it was only a pet, right? Wrong. Some people will understand the love you shared with your pet, and they will be able to be more supportive than others. It's not that those who are not supportive care any less for you, but rather that they simply cannot understand the attachment you had with your pet. It's very important that you remember this when someone isn't able to respond to your loss in the way in which you hope they would.

The important thing is that you do talk to someone about your loss. However, you're the only one who knows who that person or people are. We all have friends who understand us better than others, and who we usually turn to in times of despair. These will be the people who we will want to share our pain with now, and who will want us to.

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A TIME TO GRIEVE

Most of us have heard of the Five Stages of Grief as they apply to loss. There are slightly varied names and sequences of the stages, and often times people do not experience them in any particular order. And, sometimes people may even experience some stages more than once. Basically however, they are as follows:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Guilt
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

DENIAL:

Denial is usually the first stage without a doubt. It can also include shock and disbelief.

ANGER:

Anger usually starts with the question: "Why?" "Why my pet, or why now?" Sometimes blame is placed on the veterinarian, and often times oneself.

GUILT:

Guilt usually happens when we begin to second guess our actions. In the event of a sudden death such as an accident, we often ask ourselves "What if?" "What if I had or hadn't done something?" It is a difficult stage, and it is important to remember that you did the best you could where your pet was concerned. No one knows what could have been. And it's certain that the love you gave your pet during it's life is much more important to remember now.

DEPRESSION:

Depression includes overwhelming sadness and grief over your loss. You realize your loss and mourn it. You may feel totally immersed in it some days, while other days it may seem less only to return again with great intensity. Frequent crying, often times "out of the blue" is to be expected. It may also seem at times that you will never be happy again.

ACCEPTANCE:

Eventually, you will be able to think about your pet without such pain. You will remember them and smile, and know that you had a wonderful life together no matter how long or short it seemed. Your moods will begin to stabilize once again, and you will heal.

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A TIME TO HEAL

As time passes you will begin to heal. While you will never forget your beloved pet, the pain of their loss will begin to soften. As it does, you will be able to deal with your pet's affects such as dishes and toys. Some people keep them as a remembrance or eventually allow a new pet to use them. You may decide it's too painful. Either decision is yours to make.

If your pet was buried in a pet cemetery or in your backyard, you may want to visit the grave. Maybe you had them cremated and have chosen to keep the ashes, or maybe you have a favorite spot to scatter them. Again, this is your decision, and you should listen to your feelings with regard to what to do.

Maybe you weren't able to bury your pet or have them cremated. This doesn't mean that you can't create something to remember them by as a part of the healing process. Photos, belongings and dishes can be used to create memorials, as can flower beds or rock gardens. Sometimes a little creativity is just what is needed to help yourself heal.

CHILDREN AND THE LOSS OF A PET

Children sometimes grieve a pets death differently than adults, mostly because they don't always completely understand it. They may feel fear and confusion due to their lack of understanding. They may need to be comforted, as well as give comfort to those around them.

It's best to include children in the loss of a pet. It is a natural part of life, and will be something they will experience over and over. Protecting them or putting off the truth may intensify their confusion, and could even create resentment. Listen gently to a child's questions and then answer them truthfully. However, do not speak in terms the child cannot understand. Younger children may be satisfied with "Fluffy is in Heaven," while older children may want more details. Try to go with how you usually talk to your child in explaining the death of a pet.

A TIME TO LOVE AGAIN

While some people prefer to get another pet right away, others wish to wait. Some never get another pet at all. This is another time when you should listen to your feelings with regard to what to do.

Try not to allow yourself to feel disloyal if you want another pet. Remind yourself that you are not trying to replace your loss, but that you are ready for a new furry friend. Depriving yourself of loving another pet would be depriving another pet of that love. Another pet who, probably like the one you lost, really needs you. However, if you truly would rather not have another pet, don't force yourself. Even if those around you feel differently, you know what's best for you.

Getting a new pet should be a family decision. Everyone involved in the pets care should be in agreement on whether or not to get a new pet. Since people grieve differently, this make take some time. Once decided however, be sure to include everyone in choosing a new pet.

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SURVIVING PETS AND GRIEF

Losing a pet is difficult for every family member, including other pets. Often, when we have more than one pet, they form the same attachment to each other as we do. Even if they are of an opposite species or did not seem the best of friends, it was probably comforting to them to have another animal around for companionship.

Some surviving pets may not appear to be affected by the loss, but this doesn't mean that they're insensitive or happy that their friend is gone. It may just be that he or she doesn't understand what has happened. With these types of pets, adjustment may seem smooth and uneventful.

For other surviving pets, their grief seems obvious. They may go to the window or door and wait for their friend or search the house and yard for them. They may show decreased appetite and disinterest in activities, or they may be anxious or restless. They may even seem depressed. Just as people react to loss, our pets may react in the same way.

It's important that you be observant and in tune to your pets behaviors after the death of a companion. If you feel your surviving pet is grieving, keeping your surviving pet's activities, meal times and environment familiar will provide security. While it's difficult to see your pet unhappy and grieving, don't encourage this behavior by comforting them. Allow him or her their space, and reward only healthy behaviors.

Keeping up with your pet's routine and rewarding healthy behavior, along with patience, will most often be the best medicine, but if you have any questions or concerns, it is best to contact your veterinarian. Especially if the pet is not eating.



Resources

If you feel as though you need to speak with someone immediately regarding the loss of a pet, please refer to the following toll-free, local and long distance pet loss support phone numbers, and web site support. In the event that you are unable to find assistance at these resources, please refer to your local phonebook for crisis intervention numbers.

Toll Free Listings

Center for Companion Animal Health at the University California at Davis

Phone: 800-916-752-4200

Monday-Friday, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. PST

Note: Summer/holiday hours may vary

Iams Pet Loss Support Center

Toll Free: 1-888-332-7738 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)

Iowa State University Pet-Loss Support Hotline

Toll Free: 1-888-478-7574

Washington State University

Phone: 866-266-8635

Local and Long Distance Listings

ASPCA Grief Counseling

Phone: 212-876-7700 ext. 4355

Chicago Veterinary Medical Association Pet Loss Hotline and Support Group

Phone: 630-325-1600

Support Group meets the 1st Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at the CVMA Offices, 120 East Ogden Avenue, Hinsdale. (No reservations needed, no charge, but donations are accepted)

Colorado State University-Argus Institute

Phone: 970-297-1242

Will provide you with reading resources, counseling, or support in many situations including how to talk to children about pet loss, body-care issues, or finding a support group.

Louisiana State University Best Friend Gone Project

Phone: 225-578-9547

Call for information or to speak with a counselor

Pet Loss Support Hotline, Cornell University

Phone: 607-253-3932

Pet Loss Support Hotline-Staffed by Tufts University veterinary students

Phone: 508-839-7966

Resources

Local and Long Distance Listings - Continued

Pet Loss and Human Bereavement Education Program
Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine
Phone: 614-292-1823

University of Florida at Gainesville, College of Veterinary Medicine
Phone: 352-392-4700

The Florida Pet Grief Support Hotline operates 24 hours per day and 7 days per week throughout the year. This Hotline operates both nationally and internationally.

University of Illinois CARE Helpline
Phone: 217-244-2273
Tuesday and Thursday, 7-9 pm

University of Michigan College of Veterinary Medicine
Phone: 517-336-2696

Consultation and call are free except for applicable long distance charges. When counselor returns a call, charges will be reversed. Offers pet loss support counseling. Hotline is staffed Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 6:30 to 9:30 pm EST, however messages can be left anytime.

University of Minnesota
Phone: 612-624-4747

University of Pennsylvania-Philadelphia
Phone: 215-898-4529

Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine
Phone: 540-231-8038
Tuesday and Thursday, 6-9 pm

Washington State University
Phone: 509-335-5704
Monday-Thursday, 7-9 pm and Saturday, 1-3 pm

Websites

Cornell University: <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/Org/PetLoss/>

Iowa State University: http://www.vetmed.iastate.edu/animal_owners/petloss/default.html

Pet Love & Loss network: www.alln.org

Pet-Loss: www.pet-loss.net

Resources

Websites - Continued

Tufts University: <http://www.tufts.edu/vet/petloss>

University of California, Davis: <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/petloss/index.htm>

University of Florida: http://neuro.vetmed.ufl.edu/alt_med/petgrief/petloss.htm



It takes us back to brighter years,
to happier sunlit days
and to precious moments
that will be with us always.
And these fond recollections
are treasured in the heart
to bring us always close to those
from whom we had to part.
There is a bridge of memories
from earth to Heaven above...
It keeps our dear ones near us
It's the bridge that we call love.

- Author Unknown

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