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GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A PET

Just yesterday your pet had endless energy, climbing the curtains, chewing the furniture . . .today, you are grieving the loss of that pet...

The loss of a pet can be a traumatic event. Recognizing the grief process and allowing yourself to move through it is critical. The resulting feelings of *guilt* (“did I do enough,” “did I make the right decision to have my pet put down”), *denial*, *anger* and *depression* (“this has not really happened,” “I feel like I am in a fog,” “my daily routine is in a tailspin,” and/or being “mad” at others) are often difficult to shake. It may seem as if there is no one to turn to and that no one understands the pain. Usually, these intense feelings move to a period of *acceptance* of life without the pet

- Listed below are four tips for coping with the death of one’s pet:

1) Allow yourself time to **heal**. Losing a pet is often like losing your best friend. The good news is that living with a pet’s death gets easier. It’s hard and painful and it seems like no time will heal. Time **does** eventually heal, and that tends to be the best antidote for the loss.

Exactly how much time is needed depends on the person. The average grieving period may last from as little as six weeks to as long as several months. In the event that your pet is euthanized, you should remember it is not uncommon to question your decision.

2) Don’t talk about **replacement** just yet.

Many people react with, ‘When I get a new/another pet, it will help me get through this.’ This is not true for everyone.

Though getting a new pet may help lessen the effects of the loss for some people, this is not always the case and should not be considered a remedy. Each of our pets is special to us for a different reason. This is why it is important to allow ample time to grieve your loss and come to terms with it before considering new ownership. Therefore, in the event you do get another pet, you can remember the good qualities of your former pet while being able to appreciate the personality and differences of a new one. Your new pet will never replace the old, but it can still bring an equal amount of joy.

3) **Memorialize** your pet. As a way of remembering all the happiness your pet brought to your life, commemorate something special. This can be anything from planting a tree to keeping a photograph on your mantel or nightstand. Cremating the pet and keeping or scattering the ashes, the pet’s paw print cast in plaster, or clipping a lock of fur. Such practices are beneficial because they honor the deceased pet AND are therapeutic for the grieving owner.



4) Another way of dealing with emotionally trying times is to **write** them down. Writing a story about your pet and what it meant to you can help. This way, you can always remember your pet and the feelings that you had for him or her at such a sensitive time. Then once the pain heals, you can go back, read and remember the strong memories that you had at that difficult time. Another way of releasing strong emotions is through poetry. Whether you write it yourself or read the work of others, the end result can be therapeutic. Finally, **talk** to others, who are sympathetic with your situation. Similar to writing down one's thoughts and feelings, vocalizing them can also be beneficial. Find someone who has lost a pet in the past or anyone who you know is a good listener.

The relationship between animals and people is pretty powerful and the loss of those pets is a lot stronger than sometimes we even realize.

RESOURCES

www.pet-loss.net

www.griefhealing.com/petlossarticles.htm