
Tips for working through grief:

From

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grieving_pets.htm

There is no one way to work through grief. Different people deal with loss in different ways, and may need different lengths of time to feel better.

Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

Reach out to others who have lost pets. Check out online message boards, pet loss hotlines, and pet loss support groups. If your own friends, family members, therapist, or clergy do not work well with the grief of pet loss, find someone who does.

Rituals can help healing. A funeral can help you and your family members openly express your feelings. Ignore people who think it's inappropriate to hold a funeral for a pet, and do what feels right for you.

Create a legacy. Preparing a memorial, planting a tree in memory of your pet, compiling a photo album or scrapbook, or otherwise sharing the memories you enjoyed with your pet, can create a legacy to celebrate the life of your animal companion.

Look after yourself. The stress of losing a pet can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time. Eat a healthy diet, get plenty of sleep, and exercise regularly to help boost your mood.

Try to maintain your normal routine. Surviving pets can also experience loss when a pet dies, or they may become distressed by your sorrow. Maintaining their daily routines, or even increasing exercise and play times, will not only benefit the surviving pets but may also help to elevate your outlook too.

Try to find new meaning and joy in life. Caring for a pet previously occupied your time and boosted your morale and optimism. Try to fill that time by volunteering, picking up a long-neglected hobby, taking a class, helping friends care for their pets, or even by getting another pet when the time feels right.

Stay connected with friends. Pets may have helped you meet new people or regularly connect with friends and neighbours while out on a walk or in the dog park. Having lost your pet, it's important that you don't now spend day after day alone. Try to spend time with at least one person every day. Regular face-to-face contact can help you ward off depression and stay positive. Call up an old friend or neighbour for a lunch date, or join a club.

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coping with the loss of a pet

Client information series

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Coping with the loss of a pet

'One of the family'

For many of us, animals are not just pets, but companions, friends and family members. The bond between a person and an animal can be incredibly deep. It is normal to experience strong feelings of grief and loss when your pet passes away. The support of family and friends can be a comfort at this time. However, some people feel they need to speak to a counsellor to help them move through the grieving process. The following contacts may also be of help:

The Australian Centre for Companion Animals in Society operates a national pet loss grief hotline, available from 7pm-9pm. Call 1800 704 291.

LifeLine 13 11 14

Salvo Care Line 1300 363 622

Online forums:

www.hovforum.ipbhost.com

www.alt.support.grief.pet-loss

Dr. David Foote BVSc is a Sydney veterinarian and counsellor who works with vets and clients in cases of grief and pet loss. Call 0425 281 424 to arrange an appointment or <http://davidfoote.com.au/bio.htm>

See also **Newcastle Pet crematorium** www.newcastleandhunterpetcrematorium.com for memorial suggestions for your pet.

Families with children

The loss of a pet may be a child's first experience with death. Just like adults, children often experience deep sorrow at the loss of a pet. The age of the child will affect how much they understand and their behaviour in their grief.

- Be open and honest with your children about what has happened to your pet.
- Talk to them about the way they are feeling and show them that it is OK to grieve.
- Make sure to tell the child that the death of the pet is in no way their fault.
- Allow them to help memorialize your animal by drawing pictures, or plant a tree in the garden.

Please ask for our handout on Helping Children Cope With The Loss of A Pet for more information.

Grieving of other pets

Other pets may also mourn the loss of their companion. They may search for the deceased pet. Sometimes they may have a reduced appetite, appear lethargic and withdrawn, or vocalize more. Some animals may develop signs of severe anxiety. Cats may start to urinate outside litter trays or groom excessively. Dogs may become fearful of being left alone and bark or chew furniture.

- Maintain routine as much as possible, with 3-4 things that your pet enjoys each day (e.g. walks, feeding, patting).
- Use positive reinforcement methods to teach pets new skills.
- Use pheromone collars, sprays or plugins for cats (Feliway) and dogs (Adaptil) to reduce anxiety.
- Getting a new pet is not always a good solution. If it's not the right time for you to get another pet, don't get one.
- Do not punish the animal for signs of distress like barking or urinating in the wrong spot.
- Instead, see your veterinarian for help if your pet is showing any signs of anxiety.