



Coping with the Loss of a Pet

1) **Why am I hurting so much?**

Intense grief over the loss of a pet is normal and natural. A pet is a significant and constant part of your life. They are a source of unconditional love and companionship. You may feel devastated over the loss of the relationship, and that feeling is valid.

2) **What can I expect to feel?**

Different people experience grief in different ways, it can come in the form of guilt, denial, anger, and/or depression.

3) **What can I do about my feeling?**

Do not deny your pain. It is important to be honest about your feelings. You have a right to feel pain and grief! Someone you loved has died, and you feel alone and bereaved. Acknowledge your feelings and express them freely. Avoiding grief can make things worse and harder to process. Try reminiscing about the good times. Some find it helpful to express their feelings and memories in poems, stories, or letters to the pet. Other strategies including rearranging your schedule to fill in the times you would have spent with your pet; preparing a memorial such as a photo collage; and talking to others about your loss.

4) **Who can I talk to?**

Working through your feelings with another person, such as a family member or friend, is a great way to put your feelings into perspective and find ways to handle them. You can also ask your veterinarian to recommend a pet loss counselor or support group. Remember, your grief is genuine and deserving of support.

5) **What should I do next?**

Deciding what to do with your pet's remains can be difficult. Discuss with your veterinarian what options are available to you. They will be able to provide you with information regarding cremation, private or group, and cemetery burial. Consider family members and those who were close to the pet when making your decision as it can have a profound impact on how you deal with the loss.

6) **What should I tell my children?**

You are the best judge of how much information your children can handle. Honesty is important. Make sure your children know about death and that the pet is not in any pain. Never tell your children that the pet "went away", this can lead to anguish or its return or left wondering what they did to make the pet leave. Allow your children to go through the grieving process without criticizing for crying or not being "strong".

7) **Will my other pets grieve?**

Pets observe every change in the household and seem to grieve over the absence of their companion. You may want to give your other pets extra attention during this time. This will be beneficial to your own healing as well.

8) **Should I get a new pet right away?**

Ideally a person should process the grief and loss of the recently deceased pet before trying to build a relationship with a new pet. A new pet should never take the place of an old pet. When you do decide to get a new pet, never expect them to be just like the one you lost, allow them to develop their own personality. Never feel like you are being disloyal to your previous pet for building a long, loving relationship with a new pet.