



The Grieving Animal Lover's Bill of Rights

The Grieving Animal Lover has the right:

To feel the pain of grief when the bonds with our pets are broken. The bonds we have with our companion animals are deep and strong; the pain we feel when those bonds are broken is real and worthy of our grief.

To feel shocked and overwhelmed by the intensity of our grief. Since our animals' life spans are so much shorter than our own, it is inevitable that eventually we will experience the loss of our beloved animal companions. The grief we feel at such times can be far more intense than we ever expected, no different from that of losing another special family member or cherished friend.

To understand our grief reactions, feelings and behaviors as normal. Grief is a natural, spontaneous response to the loss of a significant relationship.

To express our grief in our own unique way, within our own time frame. The course of grief is unpredictable and uneven, with no specific time frame. How we express our grief will vary among individuals, but we all get through it in personally meaningful ways.

To have our grief recognized by others as significant and legitimate. Since grieving over animals isn't generally accepted in our society, we may feel uneasy or embarrassed, as if we have no right to feel or express our grief because our loss is not significant enough. But we're not grieving "just an animal." Since we're the only ones who know how much our animals meant to us, when they're gone we're the only ones who can measure how very much we've lost.

To feel supported by others in our grief. When our companion animals die, there are no formal, public rituals where we can express and share our sorrow, talk about our loss and obtain the sympathy and support of others. At the very time when we need to be with others who understand, we feel isolated and alone. We need to find someone with whom we can openly acknowledge our feelings, express and work through our pain, and come to terms with our loss.

To honor the memory of our pets in whatever way we see fit. To memorialize our beloved companion animals is to honor and acknowledge the important role they played in our lives, to bring comfort to ourselves and to help us keep their love and presence in our hearts. Among other things, we can memorialize our pets by writing about them, making an album or a scrapbook, planting a living memorial in our garden, having a meaningful memorial service, funeral or ritual, or making a donation to a charitable animal organization in our pet's name.