

Your Pet Loss Guide

a personalized tribute to your pet



In memory of

who left us this day



Our pets are a very important part of our lives. They are friends, companions and partners in life. They often know us better than anyone else. We hug them when we are feeling sad and make us laugh with all the silly things they do. We provide for them in sickness and in health, and they are there for us as we pass through the stages of our own lives. Our bond with them is undeniable. It can only be expected that their loss will affect us deeply.

This booklet is here to aid you in the loss of your pet. We invite you to use it as a personalized tribute and look back upon it anytime you need.



Common Feelings After the Death of a Beloved Pet

Although each of us experiences grief in different ways, there are common signs. It's important to understand that your feelings are normal and ok. The loss of a pet is the closing of a chapter in life and you may feel however you want. Some people may take these feelings on quickly, while others may not experience them for some time. Please reach out to our staff if you need help in any way.

- ♥ Shock and disbelief
- ♥ Disorganization and confusion
- ♥ Anger and resentment
- ♥ Sadness and depression
- ♥ Relief and release

Factors That Can Complicate Grief

Our lives are shaped by events and circumstances around us. Grief will be related to the relationship you had with your pet, your unique personality, and perhaps other stresses going on in life. How you will move forward into your mourning will depend on many factors like the ones listed below.

- ♥ Another recent loss
- ♥ A history of multiple losses at the same time
- ♥ Little support from family and friends
- ♥ No prior experience with significant loss
- ♥ Feelings of guilt or responsibility concerning the death
- ♥ Witnessing a traumatic death

There are likely other factors both big and small affecting your grief journey. Take some time to think about what they are.

Taking Care of You

Caring for your pet as they reach the end of life can be very stressful. You may focus so much of your energy on your pet that you neglect yourself and your own health.

When your pet dies, you will grieve. Grief is an emotionally and physically exhausting experience that can take a toll on an already exhausted you. During this time, it is important to take care of yourself. Here are some ideas to help:

- ♥ Engage with supportive friends and family who understand the relationship you shared with your pet. If you meet people who do not understand, have faith in knowing that someday they will.
- ♥ Give yourself time and space to grieve. Keeping busy and putting it off will only complicate things. You don't have to face it all at once, but make sure you allow yourself time to cry and simply be sad.
- ♥ Reach out to your spiritual faith. Take strength in it.
- ♥ Surround yourself in nature. A daily walk, sitting on a park bench, and viewing the earth's beauty is very soothing. Find time for calmness.
- ♥ Exercise may help to clear your mind and rejuvenate the body. It does not remove our grief, but supports the healing process.
- ♥ Let others assist you during this difficult time. Seek out a support group or a mental health professional if needed.
- ♥ Eat and drink. This may sound silly, but many people in grief forget the basics. Provide yourself with healthy foods and plenty of water. Keep up your strength to fight off illness. Make sure any other remaining companion pets do the same.

Celebrating Your Pet's Life

There are many ways you can celebrate the life of your pet. Ceremonies and tributes can be large or small such as saying a few heartfelt words in remembrance. Here are a few ideas:

- ♥ Create a memorial table. You can display items that were special to your pet and you: food dishes, collars and leashes, brushes, toys, photos, and more. You can also make it a special place to hold any cremated remains, special keepsakes, or sympathy cards. Places like this can remain up for a short period of time or forever. Children tend to really appreciate these special places of remembrance.
- ♥ Gather at your pet's favorite place like the park, down by the lake, etc and reflect on your life together. Invite friends and family to share in the experience. You can tell stories, give a memorial reading, spread cremated remains, and more.
- ♥ Have a candle-lighting ceremony. You can place a large candle on a table surrounded by photos of your pet (and others). Invite loved ones to bring smaller votive candles of their own too. When a story is shared, the candle can be lit in honor.
- ♥ Create a memory scrapbook or box. So many of us take pictures of our pets over the years. Why not put them all together in a memory book or photo collage? You can chronicle your pet's life journey from beginning to end. If you have children, they may want to include a hand-drawn illustration too.
- ♥ Plant a tree, bush, or flowers. This space can be a beautiful place to visit and look upon in remembrance.
- ♥ Make a donation in memory of your pet. There are many organizations that support animal-related causes and all of them would welcome your gift. Many will post your pet's name on their materials in gratitude and share your pet's story with members of their staff.
- ♥ Have a funeral. Just like for humans, pets can be honored the same way. You can have a funeral at your own home or one can be arranged for you at another location. Funerals can be small and intimate to more involved including invitations, chaplains, newspaper announcements, balloon releases, and more. The important thing to remember is that funerals can happen anytime following the death itself, even after cremation or burial has taken place.

Whatever you choose to do, the reason behind it is to help you and those who loved your pet to feel closer to them. By remembering, we can move forward and heal. No gesture is too big or too small if it feels right in your heart.

Memorial Readings

May I find the strength to mourn with dignity.

May I find the strength to mourn in peace.

May I find the strength to mourn without shame or embarrassment.

May I find the strength to mourn out loud and cry until my crying is done.

May I find the strength to mourn with patience and be tolerant to move through this at my own pace.

May I find the strength to accept that I am in mourning and be at peace with that while my heart mends.

May mine be a good mourning, one that cleanses my heart and renews my inner being.

May my memories of my beloved _____ comfort me so that I may be ready to love again.



Through _____, we learned compassion.

Through _____, we learned patience.

Through _____, we experienced joy.

Through _____, we learned to think about someone other than ourselves and we learned both giving and forgiving.

Through _____, we learned about friendship and loyalty.

Through _____, we learned about innocence and humility.

Through _____, we were given the greatest gift of all, unconditional love.

Through this beloved animal, we were shown the best qualities of humankind and found that the highest virtue of all is kindness to others. As we go forth from this day, may these important lessons be within our hearts. It is in sharing them with others that we truly honor the memory of _____ and keep his/her spirit in our lives.



In the rising of the sun and in its' going down, We will remember.

In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, We will remember.

In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, We will remember.

In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn, We will remember.

When we are weary and in need of strength, We will remember.

When we are lost and sick at heart, We will remember.

When we have joys we yearn to share, We will remember.

So long as we live, our companions, too, shall live for they are ever a part of us.

We will remember.

The Pet Lover's Code

Ten inalienable rights after the death of a special companion animal

Taken from 'When Your Pet Dies: A guide to mourning, remembering, and healing.'
By Dr. Alan Wolfelt • Center for Loss and Life Transition • Fort Collins, Colorado

Though you should reach out to others as you journey through grief, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain “rights” no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. You have the right to grieve the death of a pet. You loved your pet. Your pet loved you. You have every right to grieve this death. You need to grieve this death. You also need to mourn this death (express your grief outside of yourself).
2. You have the right to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk about your grief. Other pet lovers who have experienced the death of a pet often make good listeners at this time. If at times you don't feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.
3. You have the right to feel a variety of emotions. Confusion, anger, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey after the death of a pet. Feelings aren't right or wrong; they just are.
4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. After the death of a pet, your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel like doing.
5. You have the right to experience “griefbursts.” Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural.
6. You have the right to make use of ritual. After a pet dies, you can harness the power of ritual to help you heal. Plan a ceremony that includes everyone who loved your pet.

7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality. At times of loss, it is natural to turn to your faith or spirituality. Engaging your spirituality by attending church or other place of worship, praying, or spending time alone in nature may help you better understand and reconcile your loss.
8. You have the right to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, “Why did my pet die? Why this way? Why now?” Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. Ask them anyhow.
9. You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of a special companion animal. Instead of ignoring your memories, find ways to capture them and treasure them always.
10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief after the death of a pet may not happen quickly. Remember, grief is best experienced in “doses.” Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of a beloved pet changes your life forever.

Also by Alan Wolfelt

Understanding Your Grief:

Ten essential touchstones for finding hope and healing your heart.

ISBN 978-1-879651-35-7, 176 pages

The Journey Through Grief:

Reflections of healing, 2nd Edition.

ISBN 978-1-879651-11-1, 176 pages

Healing Your Grieving Heart:

100 practical ideas.

ISBN 978-1-879651-25-8, 128 pages



Pet Grief

When a pet dies, owners will often notice some changes in their other pets, including dogs, cats and other species. They may become aloof or lethargic. Some may stop eating or become clingy. Based on these outward signs, it appears that pets do grieve when their friend dies. Let's explore what may be normal or abnormal.

An animal that is experiencing the loss of another animal companion may react similarly to human grief. It is normal to see changes in eating patterns, they can appear to lose focus and direction, and act very differently. Pets can become depressed when they lose a member of their family. They may lose interest in favorite activities and sleep more than usual. Some pets actually become more loving. There may also be a change in dominance hierarchy within the home.

Stress over the loss of a canine companion can lead pets to become ill. Symptoms like tummy upset, loss of appetite, and infections can present. Pets may distance themselves from the family when they are sick. If you see something of concern, consult with your veterinarian. They may also direct you to a behaviorist who can support emotional well-being. Maintaining routine during the grieving period is useful. It will help you identify when something is not right.

Behavior patterns may or may not change during pet grief. Some pets may vocalize more or become quieter. Pets have been known to change where they sleep, how they interact with other members of the household, and their overall interest in play and human interaction.

If your pet shows signs of grieving the loss of an animal or human family member, provide them with more attention and affection. If they enjoy human company, invite friends to visit and spend time with them in novel and fun ways. Use environmental enrichment such as toys and food seeking games.

If the behavior that's being exhibited is not desired such as vocalizing or becoming destructive, it's important to avoid unintentionally reinforcing the behavior. Give attention at a time when the pet behaves in a manner you like such as when they are resting quietly, snuggling or grooming. As the pain of the loss begins to subside, so should odd behaviors as long as it is related to the grieving process.

If you are thinking about adding another pet, wait until you and your surviving animals have adjusted to the loss. Forcing them to get to know a newcomer will add stress to their already anxious emotional state. And be patient. Your pet may miss their companion as much as you do.

Recommended Readings

(Children) The Rainbow Bridge. Paul C. Dehm, Running Tide Press, 1997

(Children) A Special Place for Charlee: A Child's Companion Through Pet Loss. Debbie Morehead, Partners in Publishing LLC, 1996

(Children) Cat Heaven and Dog Heaven. Cynthia Rylant, The Blue Sky Press, 1995 and 1997

Animals Make Us Human. Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009

The Human-Animal Bond and Grief. Laurel Lagoni, Carolyn Butler, Suzanne Hetts, W.B. Saunders Company, 1994

Grieving the Death of a Pet. Betty J. Carmack, Augsburg Books, 2003

The Last Walk: Reflections on Our Pets at the End of Their Lives. Jessica Pierce, The University of Chicago Press, 2012

Beezer and Boomer: Lessons on Living and Dying From my Canine Brothers. Doug Koktavy, B Brothers Press, 2010

Recommended Websites

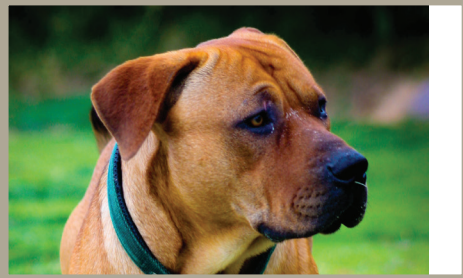
The Association of Pet Loss and Bereavement
www.aplb.org

The International Association for Animal Hospice and Palliative Care
www.iaahpc.org

Lap of Love
www.lapoflove.com

Pet Loss Grief Support and Candle Ceremony
www.petloss.com

Pet Loss Support Page
www.pet-loss.net



“We may not be together
In the way we used to be
We are still connected by
A cord no eye can see
So whenever you need to find me
We’re never far apart
If you look beyond the horizon
And listen with your heart”

- *Anonymous*

A Most Sincere Thank You

Thank you for the love and commitment you shared with your companion. We understand how special they were and how deeply this loss affects your life.

Our animals teach us so much and we carry these lessons with us forever. Over the years, we have been blessed to meet so many wonderful people like yourself and hear stories of great adventures and of beautiful friendships. All of us are better for it. We have been honored to assist your family during this most sacred time.



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