



Dealing with the Loss of Your Pet

The loss of a beloved pet can be very painful. Pets are part of our families and a source of unconditional love. When they die we experience feelings much like those when we lose a human family member or friend. Understanding the grieving process and knowing that it is acceptable—and often necessary—to grieve for your pet will help you to process your feelings of loss and adapt to life without your pet.

Grieving for Your Pet

It is important to give yourself permission to grieve the loss of your pet. Grief is a process that is experienced differently by each person and at an individual pace. If you find yourself “stuck” in any one phase, it may be helpful to seek counseling or the support of others who have experienced the loss of a pet. Usually the grief process includes:

- ▶ *Shock and denial:* A phase where the pet’s death does not seem real.
- ▶ *Anger and guilt:* The bereaved may lash out at family, God, or the veterinarian, blaming others or themselves for the pet’s death.
- ▶ *Bargaining:* The bereaved may try to make a deal with God or the veterinarian in hopes of bringing their pet back.
- ▶ *Depression:* As a reaction to the life change created by the loss, the bereaved may feel sad, hopeless, confused, guilty, drained, and helpless. All of these feelings are normal; however, if depression lingers, you may want to see a physician for an evaluation.
- ▶ *Acceptance and resolution:* Acceptance and resolution occurs when the loss is integrated into the bereaved’s life. It does not mean forgetting about the pet.

The Healing Process

Honoring and memorializing your pet is an important part of the grieving and healing process. You might consider making a donation to an animal-related organization in memory of your pet, carrying out a ritual such as lighting a candle for your pet or having a memorial service with family and friends, making a scrapbook of your pet’s life, writing about your special memories of your pet, or talking to others who have experienced a similar loss such as in a support group. You should only get another pet when you feel that you are ready. Some bereaved are ready soon after the loss of their pet, others may want to wait until they have completed the grieving process.

Making the Decision to Euthanize Your Pet

The decision to euthanize your pet is often difficult and overwhelming. Talk to your veterinarian about your pet’s health and treatment options. You will want to consider your pet’s quality of life as well as your family’s, his level of pain, and his ability to do the things he once enjoyed. Feelings of guilt are common, but it is important to remember that as caregiver the decision to euthanize is often the kindest and most unselfish decision you can make for your sick or injured pet.

RESOURCES

www.petloss.com

www.deltasociety.org

www.dovelewis.org

www.aplb.org

www.avma.org

www.winterspring.org

www.aspca.org

ASPCA NATIONAL PET HOTLINE

24-hour support message line

(800) 946-4646,

then 140-7211

+ your phone number

