

The death of an animal companion can be a devastating loss. Adults, children and other pets in the family may each have their own unique difficulties in coping. Although in our culture it is common for pets to be viewed as "furry children," pet owners often feel alone in their grief when others minimize the loss.

Most people need three things in order to cope and to recover:
Skills, Support...and Time.

We want you to know that others understand and care.



We who choose to surround ourselves with lives even more temporary than our own live within a fragile circle, easily and often breached. Unable to accept its awful gaps, we still would live no other way. We cherish memory as the only certain immortality, never fully understanding the necessary plan.

*- Irving Townesend
from The Once Again Prince*

Sources of support

In addition to this brochure, Friends of Pets offers a free grief resource packet which contains further information and a list of recommended reading on pet loss and grief.

Internet—A search on the phrase "pet loss" yields hundreds of websites with information and support. Here are a few places to start.:

Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement
www.aplb.org

Pet Loss Grief Support
www.petloss.com

Pet Loss Support Page
www.pet-loss.net

Lightning Strike Pet-Loss Support
www.lightning-strike.com

If you are experiencing a level of grief and sadness that is seriously affecting your ability to sustain daily activities, please seek the services of a professional counselor to assist you through this difficult time.



*I shall fill my days,
but I shall not, cannot forget.
Sleep soft, dear friend,
For while I live, you shall not die."*

-May Eustace



paws in passing



Coping with pet loss and grief



P.O. Box 240981
Anchorage, AK 99524

Info Center (907) 562-2535
Adoption Hotline (907) 561-3677

www.friendsofpets.org

It's all right to cry

When an animal companion dies, we may have any or all of the emotional and physical reactions that come with shock and loss. Tears are normal, but it's also normal to feel numb and unable to cry or express your feelings. This is an intimate and individual part of the grief journey.



How did your animal companion die?

The circumstances of your pet's death may affect your feelings afterward. If your pet was lost, you may feel like you failed her. If she was killed, you may feel guilty that you were not present or not able to protect her. If you witnessed that death, you may find yourself reliving it over and over.

If your pet was euthanized, you may wonder whether it was too soon, or not soon enough. Such questions are part of the responsibility we bear for our animal companions—to make the best decisions we can with the information at hand, in our pet's best interest.

If your pet was ill for a long time, you may even feel relief that the struggle is over. There's no need to feel guilty about this—it is a natural response when an ongoing worry in life is lifted. It doesn't mean you loved your pet any less.

Were you able to say goodbye?

If you were absent when your pet died, you may feel a sense that things are incomplete. If you chose not to witness your pet's euthanasia, you may later question that choice. There may be other decisions you made at the end of your pet's life that trouble you now. Remember there is no right or wrong way with such personal choices. Please try to be gentle with your regrets about things you cannot change. You may choose a different path in the future, but your animal friend is at peace now.

The stages of grief in pet loss are much the same as in the loss of a human family member. Emotions may range from denial to anger to depression, until there is a final acceptance of the loss. You may move from one stage to another, and back again. It may take days, weeks, or months to come to terms with your grief. Give yourself permission to grieve in your own way so that you can finally heal.

From grief...to healing

Dealing with the reactions of others

Seek out people who share your love for animals and understand your loss. Ignore critical or judgmental comments—you are already wounded. Don't be hurried by well-meaning advice to focus on the good times and forget your present pain. That time will come.



Daily ways to cope

Routines and habit are so much a part of our lives with animal companions, that the loss of these small anchors in daily life can be profound.

Treat your body well, with good nutrition, physical activity, and adequate sleep. If you walked every day with your pet, it may be painful to do this alone, but the exercise and routine are healing. You might compromise by walking at the same time each day but in a new location—or you may actually find comfort along the old familiar paths. If you had a goodnight routine, there's no reason that can't continue. Instead of a bedtime treat, it might be comforting to light a candle, look at your pet's photo, or make some other small ritual to help fill that space. Your pet is gone, but the love you shared has not ended. In time, that truth will begin to help you smile through your tears. That wonderful source of joy enriched your life. *You do not have to give that up.*

Grief and depression in other pets

Other animals in the home may show grief symptoms such as lack of appetite or disinterest in regular activities. This should pass with time. Be loving and attentive, and contact your veterinarian if symptoms are severe or persistent. Behavior problems may also arise due to grief and disruption. Friends of Pets can offer information and advice.

Helping children to understand



Losing a pet may be a child's first experience with death, and it's best to talk to children in simple but honest terms. Don't lie about where the pet has gone; answer questions gently but directly. Avoid the phrase "put to sleep" when describing a pet's death. Be truthful about your own sadness, and reassure your child that you will heal together. There are a number of beautiful books written just for children experiencing loss. Art projects or working on a memory book can help a child to share feelings.

It's all right to celebrate

Gestures which honor the life of your animal companion can provide a lasting sense of connection. You may want to hold a memorial service, or scatter your pet's ashes at a time and place that holds special meaning. There are many products available—memorial markers, cremation urns, artwork, jewelry, and keepsakes—designed to bring comfort and closure. Making creations of your own can be deeply meaningful. Displaying your pet's collar and tags or other belongings may be a comforting reminder of her presence in your life. A memorial donation to an animal charity is a positive gesture to help other pets in need.