



Pet Loss

Information on Grieving a beloved Pet

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Animals hold a special place in our hearts and our lives.
Caring for and seeking companionship from animals is part of what defines our humanity, and can be traced back to ancient history.
For some, the death of a pet will be one of the greatest sorrows of their life.

“Grief for a pet is not inferior or less than any other grief. It is what it is. If you feel it deeply and profoundly, then the loss is deep and profound for you and, as with any grief, it is a result of the deep and profound love you felt for the pet that died”

Alan Wolfelt

When Your Pet Dies

The loss of a pet can be as devastating as the loss of a person.

People may be surprised at the depth of their grief when a pet dies, yet there is a realization that this is a reflection of love for this animal being. It may be a dear pet, a farm animal or a wild creature that you have loved. The more profound your attachment, the more profound your grief is likely to be. This is normal and natural. It hurts when we lose someone we love.

For many, caring for animals is part of our daily routine and part of our family life. Our hearts can open in a special way to our animal companions that is not experienced with our human relationships. They teach us about unconditional love, being in the present moment, how to be responsible for another being, how to give and receive, how to play, how to be patient, be joyful..... the list goes on.

Society in general does not give bereaved pet owners "permission" to grieve openly. Friends, family members and workplaces may not recognize the depth of your loss. Others may minimize your feelings. People can feel isolated and alone.

Please know that grief is the normal response to any important loss in life and psychologists have long recognized that the grief suffered by people after their beloved animal dies is the same as that experienced after the death of a person.

Healing

- Give yourself permission to grieve. Only you know what your pet meant to you.
- Memorialize your pet with a ceremony. It helps make the loss real and allows you to express your feelings, pay tribute and reflect. It also draws in social support from family or friends.
- Get lots of rest, good nutrition and exercise.
- Surround yourself with people who understand your loss. Try to let others care for you.
- Learn all you can about the grief process - it helps people realize that what they are experiencing is normal.
- Accept the feelings that come with grief - talk, write, sing, or draw.
- Indulge yourself in small pleasures.
- Most of all, be patient and kind with yourself. Trust that your heart will mend with tender care and the time that is needed.

Pet Loss and Children

The death of a pet is often the first significant loss for a child. Many people do not realize how traumatic and confusing death can be for a child.

The adults in their life have this opportunity to respond in ways that empower a child to grieve and mourn in a healthy way, teaching them grieving skills that will help them deal with the losses in their lives yet to come.

Although children tend to grieve in shorter bursts of time, their grief is no less intense than that experienced by adults. Children also tend to come back to the subject repeatedly; so patience is required when dealing with the grieving child.

Helpful Tips

- Give the child permission to work through their grief at their own pace.
- Have a memorial service, funeral or ceremony to acknowledge and pay tribute to this loved one who died.
- Create a memorial in memory of this pet: collage, photo video, a grave marker, a memory box. Whatever feels right.
- Tell their teacher about the pet's death.
- Encourage the child to talk freely about the pet.
- Give the child plenty of hugs and reassurance.
- Discuss death, dying and grief honestly and in an age appropriate way.
- Do not say things like "God took your pet," or the pet was "put to sleep." The child may fear that God will take them, their parents or their siblings or the child may become afraid of going to sleep themselves.
- Encourage the child to express themselves with art, writing, letters to their pet.
- Include the child in everything that is going on.
- Explain the permanency of death, children's books can be helpful.
- Do not attempt to replace the pet. Allow the child to work through their grief and healing. Trust that the time will feel right to invite in a new pet.
- Be aware the child may revisit the loss several times as they grow older, integrating the experience in a new way as they become more mature.

Do Animals Grieve?

Pets observe every change in a household.

Pets often form strong attachments with other animals as well as with people. When a beloved person, or animal friend dies, a pet may certainly grieve for their friend and companion. They may search for the other, call or howl for them, hide or spend more time alone, have a change in appetite or act out with unpredictable behaviours.

Helpful Tips

- Try to maintain your pet's routine to provide a sense of structure and familiarity.
- Offer extra care, reassurance and patience to your pet.
- Do not punish your pet for grieving behavior, but do keep clear boundaries.
- Allow them, your household and yourself time and support to grieve and heal in your individual ways.
- See your veterinarian if you have concerns.

Books, resources, education and grief support around pet loss for adults and children are available at Hospice Yukon.



Compassionate end-of-life and grief support for Yukoners

Hospice Yukon offers support for individuals and families facing death and grief. Our services include counselling (in person, by telephone, or online), Healing Touch, a variety of grief groups, educational workshops, and a lending library. Please contact us for information about current offerings.

Hospice Yukon is open

Monday to Friday

11:30am - 3:00pm

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