

Helping Children Cope

The bond between a child and his or her pet companion is something magical! They delight in each other's company and give love unconditionally. When a pet dies, a young child may not understand what has happened or why they cannot play with their companion anymore. This may be a child's first experience with death. Some children may ask questions, some may not. They may withdraw into themselves, or they may lash out in anger and frustration. Some children may even wonder if they did something to cause their pet's death.

Unfortunately, as we deal with our own grief, we often neglect to consider the pain and confusion of the younger members of the family. It is important that we allow our children to be a part of the grieving process. Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Answer their questions simply and honestly, giving them only as much information as they want. Allow them to comfort you. Sharing the experience can bring your family closer together in a way you may not have experienced.



Will My Other Pets Grieve?

Pets observe every change in a household, and are bound to notice the absence of a companion. Pets often form strong attachments to one another, and the survivor of such a pair may seem to grieve for its companion.

You may need to give your surviving pets a lot of extra attention and love to help them through this period. Remember, the love of your surviving pets can be wonderfully healing for your own grief.

Acquiring a New Pet

After suffering the loss of a much loved companion, it is natural to have mixed emotions about acquiring a new one. You may long for the companionship of another dog or cat, but feel guilty for wanting to replace your lost one. Wanting to give your affection and devotion to another creature is nothing to feel guilty about. You know in your heart that you could never replace the pet you lost, but now you are ready for a new relationship.

Perhaps you have decided that you would rather not have another companion. That is okay too, and your friends and family should respect your wishes. They may have the best of intentions, but **only you should decide when and if you want to begin again with a new pet companion.**

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PET HEAVEN MEMORIAL PARK

Coping with the Death of a Pet Companion



SAYING GOODBYE WITH DIGNITY

The Five Stages Of Grief

When we suffer the loss of a loved one, our family and friends are there to comfort and support us as we go through the grieving process. The death of a beloved pet companion can be just as devastating for some, but often others do not understand this.

Whether you are grieving or consoling others in their grief, it is important to understand that healing is a process that takes time. There are five recognized stages of Grief—Denial, Anger, Guilt/Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. It is important that we allow ourselves, and others, the freedom to experience each stage at our own pace, and in our own way.

I. Denial

After the death of a pet companion, it may take weeks or even months for the full extent of the loss to be realized. You come home at the end of a long day anticipating the excited welcome you have come to expect from your cherished friend. But there is no such welcome. You are greeted only by silence, and the pain of your loss stabs at your heart as you swallow hard to fight back the tears.

Tears and sorrow are a normal, healthy response to the loss of a dear friend. Don't feel guilty or foolish for the emotions you are experiencing.

Expressing your thoughts and feelings will help you put things in perspective. Talk about your loss with other people who love animals as much as you do, or keep a written journal of your thoughts. Remembering the moments you shared with your pet companion can sometimes be painful, but it is the first step in the healing process.

II. Anger

Anger is a natural emotion at the time of loss, but it can also be a destructive one. It is important for you to address your anger without directing it at yourself or at other people. Try not to blame yourself for the death of your pet companion. You loved your pet very much, and you would never have intentionally done anything to harm your companion. Anger towards loved ones is also common. You may feel betrayed by your pet's death or feel that because others aren't showing visible signs of grief, they didn't care.

III. Guilt/Bargaining

If only. Two powerful words! If only you could have a second chance. You would be more patient and more loving; less critical and less demanding. The hair on your clothes, the accidents on the floor, the chewed-up shoes all seem so unimportant now. You would gladly put up with these little irritants if only you could have your precious companion back with you again.

Such thoughts of regret are normal, but remember, the good times you shared with your pet far outnumber the bad. No one is perfect; we have all made mistakes.

Your pet forgave you. Now you must learn to forgive yourself!

IV. Depression

The deep, aching sadness known as depression often follows closely on the heels of anger and guilt. The place in your heart and in your home that was once filled by your pet companion is now an empty void. The days drag on and the nights seem endless. Regular exercise, fresh air, and time spent with family or friends can help relieve stress and fill some of the lonely hours you used to share with your companion, but there are times when you wonder if you will ever feel happy again.

Although you will never forget your pet, there will come a time when the pain will be less severe, and the memories of your times together will bring joy rather than sorrow. As time passes, you will dwell less and less on your loss, and you will again look to the future.

V. Acceptance

During the grieving process, it is natural to avoid making decisions about your companion's personal belongings. But, eventually, when the time is right, you must address this issue. Do you want to keep a special toy or blanket as a memento? What about your pet's collar and leash? Maybe you would rather not have these painful reminders around. The choice is a highly personal one and there is no right or wrong thing to do. Do what feels best to you.