



Helping Children Cope

The loss of a pet companion may be your child's first experience with death and your first opportunity to teach them about coping with the grief and pain that inevitably accompanies the joy of loving another living being. The way you choose to explain this event can lay the foundation for your child's view of death.

Here are some tips for helping a child cope with the loss of a pet companion:

- Always be honest with your child. Pretending the animal ran away, or "went to sleep," can leave a child feeling even more confused, frightened and betrayed when they finally learn the truth.
- Encourage your child to talk about his/her feelings and allow yourself to be honest with your own feelings.
- Read a book with your child that addresses pet loss. There are a number of beautiful books written just for children experiencing loss.
- Emphasize the fact that nobody is to blame for the death/loss of your pet. Children tend to think in concrete terms and often wonder if they are somehow responsible.
- Give the child an opportunity to create a memento for the pet. This could be a special photograph, or a plaster cast of the pet's paw print.
- If possible, give children an opportunity to say goodbye. Holding a funeral or creating a memorial for the pet can help your child express their feelings openly and help process the loss.

Will my other pets grieve?

It is unclear if animals feel the loss of another animal the same way we do; however, it is clear by their actions that they do respond to the absence of their companions. It is possible you may see changes in their eating and sleeping habits, they might appear depressed, or may constantly search for their missing companion. In this case, showing them more affection and giving them more time would help them adjust into their new life a little easier. Even though we don't know the depth of their sadness, we can help them get through the experience just like they would help us.

Acquiring a New Pet

After suffering the loss of a pet companion, it is natural to have mixed emotions about adopting or acquiring a new one. There are many wonderful reasons to once again share your life with another animal, but the decision is a very personal one. It may be tempting to rush and fill the void left by your pet's passing by immediately getting another pet, but in most cases it is better to wait until you are emotionally ready to open your heart and your home to a new pet companion.

If you choose to get another pet it is important to remember that each pet companion is different and trying to duplicate your old pet will likely result in frustration and disappointment. A new pet should be appreciated fully for its own sake, not as a direct replacement.



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COPING WITH THE LOSS OF A PET COMPANION



SAYING GOODBYE...

Coping with Pet Loss

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.



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. Denial makes it difficult to accept that your pet companion is really gone. It is hard to imagine that your best friend will no longer be greeting you when you come home, or that he/she doesn't need an evening snack. Some pet parents carry this to extremes, and fear their pet companion is still alive and suffering somewhere. Others find it hard to get a new pet for fear of being "disloyal" to the old one.

Anger

Anger is a natural emotion at the time of loss, but it can also be a destructive one. Your anger may be directed at the illness that took your pet companion, the driver of the speeding car, or the veterinarian that couldn't prolong your pet's life. 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 because you loved your pet very much, and you never have intentionally done anything to harm them.

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 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 companion far outnumber the bad. No one is perfect; we all have made mistakes.



Depression

The deep, aching sadness known as depression often follows closely on the heels of anger and guilt. Depression is a natural consequence of grief, but can leave you powerless to cope with your feelings. Extreme depression robs you of motivation and energy, causing you to dwell upon your sorrow. 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 pet 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.

Acceptance

During the grieving process, it is natural to avoid making decisions about your companion's personal belongings. You are the only one who will know when the right time to address this issue will be. Do you want to keep a special toy or blanket as a memento? What about your pet's collar or 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.