

Tips for coping with the grief of pet loss

Sorrow and grief are normal and natural responses to death. Like grief for humans, grief for animal companions can only be dealt with over time, but there are healthy ways to cope with the pain. Here are some suggestions:

- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel,** and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.
- **Reach out to others who have lost pets.** Check out online message boards, pet loss hotlines, and pet loss support groups. If your own friends, family members, therapist, or clergy do not work well with the grief of pet loss, find someone who does.
- **Rituals can help healing.** A funeral can help you and your family members openly express your feelings. Ignore people who think it's inappropriate to hold a funeral for a pet, and do what feels right for you.
- **Create a legacy.** Preparing a memorial, planting a tree in memory of your pet, compiling a photo album or scrapbook, or otherwise sharing the memories you enjoyed with your pet, can create a legacy to celebrate the life of your animal companion.
- **Look after yourself.** The stress of losing a pet can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time. Eat a healthy diet, get plenty of sleep, and exercise regularly to release endorphins and help boost your mood.
- **If you have other pets, try to maintain your normal routine.** Surviving pets can also experience loss when a pet dies, or they may become distressed by your sorrow. Maintaining their daily routines, or even increasing exercise and play times, will not only benefit the surviving pets but may also help to elevate your outlook too.