

Dealing with the Loss of a Pet



The Pet Lover's Code

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The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

You have the right to grieve the death of a pet.

You loved your pet. Your pet loved you. You had a strong and profound relationship. You have every right to grieve this death. You need to grieve this death. You also need to mourn this death (express your grief outside yourself).

You have the right to talk about your grief.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk about your grief. Other pet lovers who have experienced the death of a pet often make good listeners at this time. If at times you don't feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.

You have the right to feel a variety of emotions.

Confusion, anger, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey after the death of a pet. Feelings aren't right or wrong; they just are.

You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.

After the death of a pet, your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel like doing.

You have the right to experience "griefbursts".

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural.

You have the right to make use of ritual.

After a pet dies, you can harness the power of ritual to help you heal. Plan a ceremony that includes everyone who loved your pet.

You have the right to embrace your spirituality.

At times of loss, it is natural to turn to your faith or spirituality. Engaging your spirituality by attending church or other place of worship, praying, or spending time alone in nature may help you better understand and reconcile the loss.

You have the right to search for meaning.

You may find yourself asking, "Why did my pet die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. Ask them anyway.

You have the right to treasure your memories.

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of a special companion animal. Instead of ignoring your memories, find ways to capture them and treasure them always.

You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.

Reconciling your grief after the death of a pet may not happen quickly. Remember, grief is best experienced in "doses". Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of a beloved pet changes your life forever.

Recommended Reading

1. When Your Pet Has Died-Alan Wolfelt, www.enterforloss.com
2. A Path Through Loss-Nancy Reeves
3. Pet Loss and Human Emotion-Cheri Barton Ross & Jane Sorenson
4. When Your Pet Dies-Christine Adamec
5. Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of a Pet-M. Anderson
6. Grieving the Death of a Pet- Betty J. Carmack
7. The Human-Animal Bond and Grief-Laurel S. Lagoni
8. Diary of a Very Special Love-Martin S. Kosins
9. Good-Bye My Friend: Grieving the Loss of a Pet-Herb & Mary Montgomery

Helpful Websites

1. Pet Loss Canada at <http://petlosscanada.com/resources/>
2. Center for Loss and Life Transition, www.conterforloss.com
3. Pet Loss Grief Support Website at www.petloss.com

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