



## **Pet Loss -**

### **Navigating the HeartAche**

We spin tales of colossal dreams and whisper our secrets when it is only us and them. We divulge our transgressions; we cry into their fur, and we share our broken hearts. We pace, rant, and vent while they give us silent permission to spew our frustrations. We find comfort and joy in their presence.

Our furred, feathered, scaled, and finned family members give unconditional acceptance. They allow us moments to simply be ourselves - at our worst and our best - without judgment. They

provide us with needed the puzzle pieces of our lives that we don't seem to find in the human realm.

Pets are companions, best friends, and family members. The loss of a pet can be devastating. Dealing with loss is a uniquely personal experience. There is no road map, no following of steps to a consistent result in a specific time frame.

The loss disrupts our lives; grief affects us emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. We may feel completely lost, gut-wrenchingly sad, depressed, angry, guilty.... Hundreds of other emotions come and go making us wonder if we have truly come unglued.

The good news is – all those feelings are perfectly normal. Each of us experience loss in our own way. We need to give ourselves, and others that have experienced the loss of a pet, permission to feel whatever it is we are feeling.

Loss of a treasured relationship is one of the toughest parts of life. We assume responsibility for our pet's health and happiness, often extending that responsibility to believing we should have been able to prevent their death. Wondering if there was more we could've done is normal.

Losing a pet can disrupt the 'routine' of our lives making us feel the loss even more acutely. Our companion that made getting out of bed a joy, accompanied us on our walks, sat in the backseat joining us for errands, ate dinner beside us, and cuddled up close in the evening while we relaxed is no longer there. We begin to put food in their bowl, we start to talk to them, we expect them to be there; only to feel the loss all over again.

Our house feels dark and cavernous as deafening silence echoes against our heart.

Guilt, depression, and deep sorrow are all normal emotions to experience. Allow yourself time to grieve. Realize others have felt similar grief; if you need someone to talk to, reach out to friends, family, or pet loss support groups.

Colleges and universities that offer veterinary medicine degrees often have pet loss support groups. Many of these groups have articles and other resources available on their website.

(links provided below)

## HEALING

Expressing your grief is the first step to healing. Consider writing a story, or poem expressing your feelings. Making a scrapbook or photo album enables you focus on good moments with your pet. Spending time outside, taking a walk, biking, and other physical activities will relieve stress and help you to process your thoughts and emotions. Volunteering is a great outlet that encourages you to concentrate on others and provides a positive change in your life.

As you are healing the sadness will come in waves, but so will the memories of great moments you shared. Memories of adventures you had and times of great joy will become more frequent.

Animals have a wonderful way of living in the moment, we need to incorporate that skill into our own lives. Be thankful for the time you had together, remember them and smile. Letting go of the pain allows room in your heart to remember your best friend with all their quiet reassurances, tail wagging, lap sitting, goofy antic joy-filled moments.

### Memorial

If you are searching for a way to create a lasting memorial honoring your beloved pet, consider making a donation to the Morris Animal Foundation. The foundation, created in 1948, supports groundbreaking research in animal health. Morris Animal Foundation has invested more than \$103 million in 2,500+ studies that have been responsible for significant advances in diagnostics, treatments, preventions and cures benefiting companion animals, horses and wildlife worldwide. <https://www.morrisanimalfoundation.org/ways-give>

### Pet Loss resources:

- [Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement](#)
- [Lap of Love](#)
- [University of Florida](#)
- [University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine](#)

Pet Loss Hotline CARE 217 224-2273

- [Cornell University Pet Loss Support Hotline](#) 607-253-3932
- [Tufts University Pet Loss Support Hotline](#) 508-839-7966
- [University of California, Davis, Pet Loss Support Hotline](#) 800-565-1526

Check with your veterinary clinic, they may be aware of local support groups.

- Written by Denice Rackley June 2018

For all the dogs that have blessed my Life

