



TM

The Death of a Pet

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A Pet is a Family Member, Too

- A pet gives unconditional love, constant companionship, and acceptance, so, of course you will grieve when your pet dies.
- With the death of your pet, you may be experiencing a significant loss.
- Sometimes society denies your need to grieve your pet; as a result, your grief may be hidden, buried, or ignored.
- Grieving means to express your feelings, no matter how painful, outside of yourselves.
- Even if your family is denied understanding and support, your family needs to grieve the death of your pet.
- Comments like, *"It was just a dog,"* or *"You can get another one,"* are not helpful and are hurtful.

Your Emotions Will Vary

- You may experience a variety of emotions: sadness, confusion, disorganization, anger, or guilt. These are normal and healthy.
- Allow for different emotional responses within the family, and be careful to respect each person's need to grieve in his or her own way.

Rituals Can Be Helpful

- Allowing and encouraging your family to have a funeral for your pet can be helpful.
- It provides a time to acknowledge the loss, share memories, and create a time for the family to openly express emotions.
- Design a ritual that best meets your needs as you gather to pay tribute to a pet that was and always will be loved.

Children Need to be Involved

- This may be the first opportunity parents have to help children during times of grief.
- Any child old enough to love is old enough to grieve.
- If their parents are open, honest and loving, experiencing the death of a pet can be a chance for children to learn about both the joy – and the pain – that comes from caring deeply for pets and for people.
- You may not experience the same depth of loss as your children. Try to respect their grief and allow them to express it freely.

Older Adults have Special Needs

- For older adults, the relationship with their pet is often the most meaningful relationship in their lives.
- The death of a pet can have a significant impact, particularly if they are isolated from human contact.
- When the pet dies, the experience may trigger old grief from previous losses.
- It is imperative that family and friends respond with warmth and understanding.

When is a Family Ready to Replace a Pet?

- The temptation after the death of a pet may be to run out and get another one right away.
- Although it may sound like a good idea, you should be careful about premature replacement.
- You need time to grieve and heal when your pet dies.
- Be especially careful of the message it may send to children. When something is lost, all that you have to do is buy another one. In reality, this is not the case.
- While there is no specific timetable for when to get a new pet, when in doubt – wait.ⁱ

ⁱ Wolfelt, Dr. A. (n.d.). helping your family cope when a pet dies. Fort Collins, Colorado, USA.



Caledon \ Dufferin
Victim Services

Support, Information, Referrals