



Pet Loss Support

We have put together this page to help you understand your grief and answer some questions that you may have.

Grief Responses

Just the same as losing a human loved one, grief responses can vary hugely depending on the individual. We all grieve in different ways and our emotions and behavior will change too.

Some of the typical emotional grief responses you may experience include intense tearfulness, insomnia, failure to accept loss, denial, shock, loss of appetite, disorientation, anger, guilt, isolation, nausea, thinking that you can see/hear your pet, emotional numbness, depression and reliving your final moments with your pet.

Some of the typical behavioural grief responses that you may experience include being unable to remove your pet's possessions, sleeping with his/her favorite toy or blanket, avoiding walking the same routes you took when walking your pet, continuing with your daily routine as if your pet were still alive, withdrawing from everyone and over-memorializing your pet.

Bereavement following Euthanasia

Following the decision to euthanize your pet, you can often feel extreme guilt, bitterness and regret and constantly ask yourself if you could have done anything more. While these are normal responses, it is important to remember that any good veterinarian will never agree to euthanize a pet if there is another viable option. If your pet has been put to eternal sleep then you should try and process that it was the kindest and most humane option for your beloved pet.

Some owners who have made the decision to euthanize may find it easier to complete all stages of grief as they will have had longer to process the decision and come to terms with it.

If you chose to be with your pet during his final moments, then this trauma can continue through the grieving period. Replaying those memories, although painful, is completely normal. If you chose not to be with your pet when he was put to sleep then you may feel an overwhelming sense of guilt. Again this is normal and part of the grieving process.

At this point your heart will very much be ruling your head, but as your grief progresses then you will be able to rationalize that whatever decisions you have made regarding your pet's departure from this life were made because you loved him and wanted to end his suffering in the kindest, most painless and humane way possible.

Telling your children your pet has died

For many children, the loss of a pet will be their first experience with death and can help them learn to cope with other losses during their lifetime.

Breaking the news that your pet has died will likely be very distressing so you should try and do so in a place where your child feels safe and secure; and there are minimal distractions. What and how you tell your children will depend largely on their age and maturity level.

If you are getting ready to euthanize your pet you should consider preparing your children by

explaining to them that the veterinarian did everything they could for your pet, that he wouldn't or couldn't get better and that it is the kindest way for your pet to die without feeling hurt or scared. You may wish to give your children the option of saying a final goodbye to their pet.

If your pet's death is unexpected then calmly and simply explain the basic details of what happened, for example "Rover's heart was poor and couldn't work anymore". Using words like death and dying may be a good way to explain what they are to your child. You need to make sure that they realize that your pet is unable to come back to them.