



Dear member of the Friendship community,

We offer our heartfelt condolences for your loss or anticipated loss of your animal and can only imagine how difficult this moment is for you and your family. We hope you may always cherish your fond memories together and find ways to continue to honor your bond in your own time. Since many find it helpful to seek additional support after loss, we offer the following resources as a place to begin as you cope and remember.

Enclosed in this packet, are the following pet-loss resources:

- 5 Tips for Coping with Pet Loss
- Do Pets Grieve? A DVM Perspective
- Talking to Your Children about Pet Loss
- Memorialization to Honor Your Bond
- Community Connections for Grief
- Pet-Loss Websites, Hotlines and Books

Beyond these resources, we encourage you to visit our dedicated webpage for Pet Loss (friendshiphospital.com/petloss)

If you have concerns that you or your loved one's grieving is significantly impairing functioning, please seek guidance from medical providers or call 911.

5 Tips for Coping with the Loss of a Pet

1. Expect a Range of Emotions

There is no right way to grieve the loss of your animal since your bond and relationship are unique. Each person in your family and social circle may handle the loss differently, so allow all responses to the difficult moment. Allow yourself and others to feel whatever you feel, at whatever intensity, and for whatever time. Though there are often common emotions experienced following a loss, those emotions may come in waves and are not necessarily linear.



Anger is common as you process circumstances beyond your control. You are likely to feel guilt regarding time not spent together, decision making, or the specific events leading to their death. You may be surprised by the common experience of relief or even happiness after seeing your pet no longer suffering or not feeling burdened by significant decision making and expenses--this may also lead to guilt. Naturally, sadness is also expected since your pet likely held significant meaning in your life. Anxiety is a common response to the loss, especially if your pet served as a companion or protector. Many other emotions are possible and normal depending on other stressors in your life, histories with loss, and the pet's role in your life.

2. Take Time to Grieve and Release Your Emotions

Be gentle with yourself and allow yourself intentional time to release your emotions. Holding your emotions in may intensify them or lead to releasing them at inopportune times that can disrupt your functioning in other essential parts of your life. Some people find it helpful to express themselves through art or writing (journal, letter to pet, biography of pet, poetry). There is no set time allotted for grieving, so process and accept your emotions as they come and expect cycles. This difficult moment will not last forever and courageously seek additional support when helpful.

3. Get Support to Process

Pet loss is considered a disenfranchised loss because often there is less acknowledgement, understanding, or support for those grieving their animal. Not everyone appreciates the bond you had with your pet, so seek support from those who may provide you empathy and non-judgmentally listen as you share. Consider joining Friendship's bi-monthly Pet Loss Support Group, engaging a therapist, speaking with your faith community, and/or getting peer support and companionship from animal-friendly friends. Our veterinary social worker is available for bereavement counseling and referrals to resources.

4. Avoid Rushing to Replace Your Pet

After the loss of your pet, you may notice profound silence and interruptions in your routine that can be overwhelming. It is natural to want to fill the void. Rushing into a new pet may lead to feelings of resentment when the new pet has its own personality and behaviors. Take time in considering adding a new pet to your family. Intentionally consider the role you want a new pet to play in your life and ensure you are not still in emotional turmoil. Consider first volunteering at a shelter or rescue to heal your connection with animals and give back to your community.

5. Engage in Self-Care Practices

Experiencing a loss as significant as your pet may influence all aspects of your well-being. A critical part of accepting the loss is coping with the distress that follows to stay resilient. Immediately after the loss, ensure you are eating, drinking water, taking any prescribed medications, and caring for and stabilizing any other animals or people in your life. Try exercising, mindfulness strategies like a gratitude practice to notice the good remaining in your life, or getting out in nature to help cope. Avoid withdrawing by asking a friend for coffee or having family dinner together. Intentionally take breaks at work to recharge and express emotion. Identify small actions within your control to feel empowered and consider implementing an affirmation like “You are strong enough to accept this grief.” Many find it helpful to find ways to hold hope for the future even without your loved animal by scheduling motivating activities.





Do Pets Grieve?

*Contributed by Sophie Kindberg-Hanlon, BVetMed, PGCertSAS, MRCVS
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Grief is complicated and pets are as individual as we are.

Losing a pet is hard, watching another pet grieve can be heartbreaking. Research suggests that pets do grieve. Behavior changes are commonly seen in cats and dogs following loss. The most common behavior changes seen in both cats and dogs are an increase in affectionate behaviors, followed by territorial behaviors. Both cats and dogs commonly demand more attention from their owners following loss. Dogs have been shown to reduce their food intake and cats often become more vocal. Some pets may sleep more, others may pace and appear anxious. Any change in behavior after loss is likely to suggest an impact and the general consensus is that these behaviors represent grief.

How can I help?

Continuing a routine has been demonstrated to provide comfort. Providing consistency with meals and walks is recommended. Spending more time with remaining pets can be beneficial for both you and your pet following loss. To help provide closure, while it might not always be practical, it may be helpful for another pet to see the body of their close companion after death. Synthetic pheromones have been demonstrated to help pets with change. Feliway is a pheromone diffuser for cats and Adaptil is a pheromone diffuser for dogs. When pets are extremely distressed or symptoms persist longer than several months they may benefit from anti-anxiety medications which should be discussed with your primary care veterinarian.

What about a new companion pet?

While never a replacement, a new pet can be a welcome distraction as some pets might find comfort in a new companion. However, some pets can find it difficult to deal with any further changes in the household at this time and the introduction of a new pet can redirect attention as well as change routine. The decision to bring a new pet into the home should always be made carefully as you consider what is in the best interest of your family (both human and pet) as a whole.

No matter what you do, it may take several months for even pet family members to fully grieve. Adjustment to life after pet loss requires time and patience.

Should you have any additional questions on how a pet might be grieving after loss, reach out to your primary care veterinarian who can provide additional resources.



Dr. Sophie Kindberg-Hanlon grew up in the British countryside surrounded by animals and always wanted to be a veterinarian. She graduated from the Royal Veterinary College of the University of London and practiced in London for several years before relocating to Washington, D.C with her husband. Dr. Kindberg-Hanlon joined Friendship's Primary Care Department in June 2023. In addition to her clinical work she serves on the Board of Veterinary Medicine in D.C.

Talking to Children About the Death of Your Animal

You know your children best so deciding how to speak to them about the loss of your pet is a personal choice. Experts recommend using simple and concrete terms to communicate, especially since this may be their first experience with death. Children need honest, direct, and factual information to understand that the animal has died or is anticipated to die. Abstract terms like "passed away" or "put to sleep" may unintentionally cause children distress and can prolong the grief they feel. Consider your child's developmental age when communicating with them. Young children may need pictures or play to put their emotions in words and process the significance of the death. Provide comfort and routine for children, to stabilize and include them in the memorial process for honoring the pet. By including children in the family crisis, you can guide your children toward healthy ways of coping with the loss, and provide opportunities for them to say goodbye.



Words to Consider

- ❖ "Our pet was in such pain that the kind thing to do was end their suffering even though it was hard for us."
- ❖ "Our pet was facing a significant amount of pain so we needed to make the hard and loving decision to allow them to die because we really care about them."
- ❖ "It's okay you got mad at Libby for peeing on your bed. Your thoughts didn't hurt her. Libby was very sick."
- ❖ "It's okay to laugh about your favorite memories of Libby. Laughing doesn't mean you didn't care about her."
- ❖ "Nothing you did, thought, or said caused them to die."
- ❖ "Although we will all feel sad for a while and always miss them, we will feel that love forever and learn to be happy again."
- ❖ "No matter what happens, you will always be taken care of and loved."
- ❖ "I know this is hard to talk about, but know that I'm ready to listen or to talk any time."
- ❖ "Many animals don't live as long as people can."
- ❖ "Death means we will no longer be able to see her or have her in our home with us again."
- ❖ "How about writing a letter, telling a story or drawing a picture of your favorite memory together or of how you feel right now."

Adapted from Brandt JC, Grabill CM. Communicating with special populations: children and older adults. Vet Clin North Am Small Anim Pract. 2007 Jan;37(1):181-98. doi: 10.1016/j.cvsm.2006.09.012.

Tips for Supporting Children with Loss by Age

Infants and Toddlers

- ❖ Reassure them that they will always be cared for.
- ❖ Do not understand death, but do sense family's experience so ensure to care for yourself
- ❖ Maintain routines, avoid separation and provide extra physical connection for comfort and security
- ❖ Often too young to be at euthanasia due to developmental stage and limited insight of permanence

Youngest Children (2–5 years old)

- ❖ Plan to talk for a very short time. Children this age can focus only for brief periods.
- ❖ Be clear and simple. Draw a picture or use play to show.
- ❖ Check on their understanding of what's happening.
- ❖ Try to maintain routines and tell them about any changes expected.
- ❖ Reassure them that they will always be cared for.
- ❖ Often too young to be at euthanasia due to developmental stage and limited insight of permanence

Young Children (6–9 years old)

- ❖ Plan to talk for a short time. Plan more than one talk to cover what you need to say.
- ❖ Remember young children may have strong feelings.
- ❖ They may express by focusing on something else during your talk to help process at their own pace.
- ❖ Use relevant examples (Trees dying; Butterfly losing its wings; Disney movies with death).
- ❖ Let them know they will be taken care of and assure their own safety.
- ❖ Answer all their questions. Invite them to talk more later.
- ❖ Listen to what involvement they want to have in euthanasia and respect their choice.

Pre-Teens (10–12 years old)

- ❖ Plan for a slightly longer talk. Let your children set the pace of the talk.
- ❖ Be aware that your children may ignore or avoid topics when afraid. Allow space for discomfort.
- ❖ Use simple, concrete information.
- ❖ Tell your children you will do your best to answer their questions and be honest with unknowns. Let them know you're there to talk whenever.
- ❖ Listen to what involvement they want to have in euthanasia and respect their choice.

Teens (13-18 years old)

- ❖ You may be able to have a longer talk. Let your teens set the pace.
- ❖ Be prepared if your teens try to ignore or avoid topics. Teens may act this way because they're afraid or scared. Allow yourself to hold space for the uncomfortable.
- ❖ Teens often need time to themselves to process. They may want to be alone or with friends.
- ❖ Teens should be told the facts and disclose unknowns. Give teens booklets or websites to read later.
- ❖ Answer their questions as best you can and let them know you'll be glad to talk again later.
- ❖ Teens may want to know how the death will affect them. Will it change their household responsibilities? This is normal.

Common Reactions Kids May Have to Loss

While these behaviors are normal, your child may need extra support to manage their expression:

- ❖ Quick shifts in mood and changes in behaviors
- ❖ Regressions in developmental level (bed wetting, co-sleeping, speech, transitions)
- ❖ Be confused, scared, angry, lonely, or overwhelmed
- ❖ Act clingy or miss the attention
- ❖ Feel responsible or guilty for the death
- ❖ Get into trouble at school or neglect work
- ❖ Have trouble eating, sleeping, keeping up with schoolwork, or relating to friends
- ❖ Be angry that the animal was not treated or could not be healed

Other Strategies to Consider for Your Family

- ❖ Encourage exercise and outdoor activities
- ❖ Ask children what they think about your animal's death and what they worry about. Listen patiently to their answers. Correct misinformation and hold space for the uncomfortable and big emotions.
- ❖ Try to provide children with the choice to participate in honoring your pet and avoid shielding children from loss so they may build resilience and coping skills. While it's natural to want to try to protect them, there may be unintended and sustaining consequences for children by excluding them. Rituals of loss according to your family's cultural beliefs provide valuable opportunities for closure. Allow children to choose their own role in the memorialization and activities to honor their unique bond. (see memorialization suggestions on next page)
- ❖ Normalize common grief emotions by talking openly about your own experience with the loss. Put words to emotions and describe what it feels like in your own body and mind.
- ❖ Communicate updates and expectation throughout the veterinary-care and euthanasia process to improve their processing of difficult information and promote open family communication.
- ❖ Give space and permission for every child in your family to feel whatever they feel, at whatever intensity, and for however long it lasts. You may notice different reactions and coping among your family members, all are valid and likely reflect the unique meaning and role of the animal for that individual.
- ❖ Counseling from a therapist specializing in pediatric bereavement and grief (see community connections)
- ❖ Speaking with their pediatrician and school about potential resources

Steps for Meeting Children's Needs During Crisis

- ❖ Maintain Routines for Stability (bedtimes, school, meals, medications)
- ❖ Consider Disclosing Loss to School
- ❖ Provide Opportunities for Fun Together to Continue to Hold Hope for the Future
- ❖ Encourage Exercise and Outdoor Activities
- ❖ Facilitate Interactions with their Friends
- ❖ Implement an Affirmation ("You are not alone in this," "You are safe and loved," "You are in grief and it's okay to feel like this right now.")

Memorialization to Honor Your Bond



Finding ways to memorialize and honor your pet may provide your family important closure and dignify the meaning they hold in your family. Some find it helpful to hold a ceremony or funeral service aligned with their cultural beliefs. Others prefer to write an obituary for their pet, create a photo album, or plant a memorial tree. Personalize your pet's memorial to reflect their unique personality and preferences, your cultural beliefs, and the roles they played within your family. Here are suggestions to consider for honoring your pet and getting the conversation started with your family.

Inspiration for Honoring Your Pet's Life

- ❖ Hold a funeral or memorial service
- ❖ Write a biography, eulogy or obituary
- ❖ Anniversary celebrations (donate in their honor, go to pet's favorite parks)
- ❖ Create a family album or slideshow (pictures, memories, and quotes)
- ❖ Hold a music-based ceremony (bell)
- ❖ Plant flowers, herbs, or tree
- ❖ Decorate and place a rock in your garden or around your home
- ❖ Hang a flag
- ❖ Make and donate a toy for a shelter pet (write a message on squeaker before stuffing or on frisbee)
- ❖ Incorporate pet's tags or meaningful items into accessories (keychains, jewelry, car decor)
- ❖ Family Campfire (share stories and toss sprig of rosemary into fire)
- ❖ Place votive light in your home and decorate glass/vase
- ❖ Rock painting and rock garden
- ❖ Decorate a pot or vase with their collar or other belongings
- ❖ Get a tattoo
- ❖ Incorporate cremains, pawprints, or noseprints into jewelry and/or decor
- ❖ Make ornaments with pet's picture
- ❖ Create a memory or shadow box of pet's collar/leash/bowl/toys
- ❖ Donate to an animal shelter or animal-welfare cause (time or money)
- ❖ Journal about the loss
- ❖ Write letters or cards to pet (and from)
- ❖ Make a windchime with pet's picture
- ❖ Make a headstone
- ❖ Decorate a birdhouse
- ❖ Frame a picture
- ❖ Donate pet's belongings to accepting animal organizations

Starting the Conversation to Remember with Family

- ❖ Share favorite memories with your pet.
- ❖ What will you always remember about your pet?
- ❖ Where were your pet's favorite places?
- ❖ What were your pet's favorite toys?
- ❖ What did your pet teach you?
- ❖ How would your pet want you to celebrate their life?
- ❖ What were your pet's favorite treats?
- ❖ What were your pet's favorite activities?
- ❖ How did your pet like to show their love?
- ❖ Share your favorite picture of your pet.

Community Connections

Solace Veterinary Services

In-home euthanasia, hospice, and bereavement resources.

(301) 674-4123

info@solaceveterinaryservices.com

solaceveterinaryservices.com

Pet Loss DC

Low-cost counseling over-the-phone, in-home, or in-office.

petlossdc.com

DC Crisis Hotline

24/7 telephone line staffed by behavioral health professionals who can refer to immediate help or ongoing care.

(888) 7WE-HELP or (888) 793-4357

The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing

Low-cost therapeutic practice that hosts meetings for pet bereavement.

4201 Connecticut Ave NW #300

Washington, DC 20008

wendtcenter.org

Baltimore Humane Society Memorial Park

Pet cemetery with funeral and burial services located on the grounds of their green, wildlife-friendly 365-acre property.

410-833-8848 ext. 219

vvanhof@bmorehumane.org

bmorehumane.org



Pet-Loss Websites and Hotlines

Friendship Hospital for Animals

friendshiphospital.com/petloss

FHA offers resources and access to our on-staff veterinary social worker for support.

Agape Pet Services

Agapepetservices.com

Agape Pet Services provides pet cremation urns, cremation jewelry, and keepsakes.

Lap of Love

lapoflove.com

A network of veterinarians that offer in-home hospice and end-of-life care.

Honoring the Bond: Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center

vet.osu.edu/honoringthebond

Program honoring the human-animal bond by providing evidence-based resources.

Pet Loss Support Hotline at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

vet.cornell.edu/about-us/outreach

Hotline staffed by volunteer veterinary students who have undergone extensive training with professional grief counselors. (607) 218-7457

Rainbow Bridge

rainbowbridge.com

Rainbow Bridge is a virtual grief support community with an area to post a memorial.

Artful Ashes

www.Artfulashes.com/memorials

Artful Ashes memorializes cremains into beautiful glass art.

Perfect Memorials

www.perfectmemorials.com

Perfect Memorials provides memorial ideas with many options, including garden stones, jewelry, windchimes.

Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement

aplb.org

Association linking to pet-bereavement counselors and chaplains and hosting bereavement chat rooms and memorials.

Pet Compassion Careline

agapepetservices.com/pet-compassion-careline

Speak to a grief counselor available 24/7 in English, Spanish, and French. (855) 245-8214

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for your family. (800) 273-8255

Additional Resources

Pet Loss Books for Adults

- Anderson, M. (2015). *Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet*. Loveland: Alpine Publications
- Carmack, Betty J. (2003) *Grieving the Death of a Pet*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.
- Chauncy, S. (2020). *P.S. I Love You More Than Tuna*. Boulder: Sounds True.
- Dolan-Del Vecchio, K. & Saxton-Lopez, N. (2013). *The Pet Loss Companion: Healing Advice from Family Therapists Who Lead Pet Loss Support Groups*. Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Eastwood, L. (2012). *Soul Comfort for Cat Lovers: Coping Wisdom for Heart and Soul After the Loss of a Beloved Feline*. London: Sparkletonic Books.
- Friedman, R., James C., & James, J.W. (2014). *The Grief Recovery Handbook for Pet Loss*. Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing.
- Hanson, W. (2008). *Paw Prints in the Stars: A Farewell and Journal for a Beloved Pet*. Minneapolis: Tristan Publishing.
- Katz, J. (2012). *Going Home: Finding Peace When Pets Die*. New York: Random House.
- Montgomery, Mary & Herb. (2000). *Forever in my Heart: Remembering my Pet's Life*. Chanhassen, MN. Montgomery Press.
- Montgomery, Mary & Herb. (1991). *Good-bye my Friend: Grieving the Loss of a Pet*. Chanhassen, MN. Montgomery Press.
- Kowalski, G. (1997). *Goodbye Friend: Healing Wisdom for Anyone Who Has Ever Lost a Pet*. Walpole: Stillpoint Publishing.
- Quintana, M., Veleba, S., & King, H. (1998). *It's Ok to Cry*. Perrysburg: Mariposa Press.
- Ross, G. J. (2010). *A 30 Day Guide to Healing from the Loss of Your Pet*. Chapel Hill: Broken Heart Press.
- Sife, W. (2005). *The Loss of a Pet*. Hoboken: Howell Book House.
- Wolfelt, A. (2004). *When Your Pet Dies: A Guide to Mourning, Remembering and Healing*. Fort Collins: Companion Press.

Pet Loss Books For Children

- Cochran, B. (2007). *The Forever Dog*. New York: HarperCollins. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Demas, C. & Hoyt, A. (2004). *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*. New York: Little Brown. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Hanson, W. (2008). *Paw Prints in the Stars: A Farewell and Journal for a Beloved Pet*. Minneapolis: Tristan. (Ages 4 to adults)
- Karst, P. (2019). *The Invisible Leash: A Story Celebrating Love After the Loss of a Pet*. New York: Little Brown Books. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Mellonie, B. & Ingpen, R. (1985). *Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children*. London: Bantam. (Ages 5-8yo)
- Lyons, M. (2018). *Until We Meet Again, From Grief to Hope After Losing a Pet*. Windsor: Choose to Choose. (Ages 3-6yo)
- Morehead, D. (1996). *A Special Place for Charlee: A Child's Companion Through Pet Loss*. Broomfield Publishing. (Ages 4-9yo)
- Raeside, A. (2012). *The Rainbow Bridge: A Visit to Pet Paradise*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing. (Ages 4-9yo)
- Rogers, F. (1988). *When a Pet Dies*. New York: Family Communications, Inc. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Rylant, C. (1997). *Cat Heaven*. New York: Blue Sky Press. (Preschool to Grade 2)
- Rylant, C. (1995). *Dog Heaven*. New York: Blue Sky Press. (Preschool to Grade 2)
- Viorst, J. (1971). *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*. New York: Aladdin. (Ages 6-9yo)
- Walsh, B. (2011). *Sammy in the Sky*. Somerville: Candlewick Press. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Wilhelm, H. (1985). *I'll Always Love You*. New York: Dragonfly Books. (Ages 3-7yo)

Other Books Concerning Loss for Children and Adults

- Grollman, E. A. (2011). *Talking about Death: A Dialogue between Parent and Child*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hanson, W. (1997). *The Next Place*. Golden Valley, MN: Waldman House Press. (Ages 5-8yo)
- James, J. W. & Friedman, R. (1998). *The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Death, Divorce, and Other Losses including Health, Career, and Faith*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. (Adults)
- Karst, P. (2018). *The Invisible String*. New York: Little Brown Books. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Krasney Brown, L. (1998). *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death*. New York: Little Brown Books. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Leeuwenburgh, E., and Goldring, E. (2008). *Why Did You Die? Activities to Help Children Cope with Grief and Loss*. Raincoast Books. (Ages 6-12yo)
- Mundy, M. (1998). *Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss*. St. Meinard, IN: Abbey Press. (Ages 4-8yo)
- Thomas, P. (2012). *I Miss You: A First Look at Death*. New York: BES Publishing. (Ages 4-7yo)
- Zucker, B. (2019). *Something Very Sad Happened (A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death)*. Washington, D.C.: Magination Press. (Ages 2-4yo)

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