

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Our animal companions can be our truest, most steadfast friends. Their love is unconditional and their loyalty unflinching. They lend a gentle ear, make us laugh, soothe our souls. When an animal dies, it is natural to feel grief and sadness, even depression. For many, these emotions manifest themselves through sleeplessness, loss of energy and appetite, crying, frustration and anger.

There is no right or wrong way for people to grieve their companion animal; each person experiences loss in his or her own way. Some may have a good cry and then get on with life. Others may cry at every reminder of their pet for weeks or months. Still some may not feel any emotion until reminded of the pet in some way. Reminders may come unexpectedly -- perhaps at tax time when one sees a check for the vet, or in the park upon seeing a similar dog, or when suddenly hearing a cat meow. Without warning, the grief arrives and can be overwhelming.

If you need understanding people to talk to, consider attending PHS/SPCA's free Pet Loss Support Group. We're here to help.



## WHAT ABOUT ANOTHER PET?

Some people resolve their grief by providing a home and love to a new animal as quickly as possible. Others find that they do not have room in their heart to give their love and care to a new animal until they have had time to grieve for the animal they have lost. And for others, the time commitment required for the first animal -- particularly if there was significant illness at the end of the animal's life -- leaves them without the emotional or financial resources to begin a new commitment. Adopting another pet is usually successful when the owner acknowledges the loss of their first pet, experiences the grief and pain of that loss, and has begun to heal.

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## THE PHS/SPCA MEMORIAL PROGRAMS

You may also wish to memorialize your pet with a donation. Individuals who make a gift to PHS/SPCA in their animal's name have their animal acknowledged in our quarterly newsletter. Animals become a permanent part of our shelter's Memorial Wall for donations of \$100 or more.

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PENINSULA HUMANE SOCIETY & SPCA  
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## COPING WITH THE DEATH OR LOSS OF A COMPANION ANIMAL



## Our Pet Loss Support Group Can Help



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

## WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT

If you are unable to find support from your family or friends or find that you need more support than they can give, you're not alone. Please know that the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA can help. The following services address the very emotional and often misunderstood feelings regarding the death or terminal illness of a beloved animal companion.

### PHS/SPCA PET LOSS SUPPORT GROUP

Our free Pet Loss Support Group meets at the shelter at 7 pm on the second Thursday of each month. For more information email [Lreynolds@PHS-SPCA.org](mailto:Lreynolds@PHS-SPCA.org) or call **650/340.7022 x344**. Since the group began in 1996, hundreds of people have benefitted from practical and personal advice from our grief counselors and fellow participants. The group is currently led by grief counselor Nina Marillo.

### PET LOSS SUPPORT HOTLINES

The ASPCA

**877.474.3310** | seven days a week

Washington State University

College of Veterinary Medicine

**866.266.8635** | \*M-Th, 7 to 9 pm & Sa 1-3pm

Iowa State University

College of Veterinary Medicine

**888.478.7574** | \*M-F, 6 to 9 pm (CST)

Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine

at Tufts University

**508.839.7966** | \*M-F, 6 to 9 pm (EST)

\*summer operating hours may change

## READING FOR CHILDREN

*The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*

by Judith Viorst

*When a Pet Dies* by Fred Rodgers

## READING FOR ADULTS

*How to Survive the Loss of a Love*

by Harold Bloomfield

*Coping with the Loss of a Pet: A Gentle Guide for All Who Love a Pet* by Christine Lemieux

*Pet Love* by Betty White

*When Your Pet Dies: How to Cope with*

*Your Feelings* by Jamie Quackenbush

& Denise Graveline

*Goodbye My Friend, Your Aging Pet and A Final*

*Act of Caring*, all by Mary & Herb Montgomery

*When Only Love Remains: The Pain of Pet Loss*

by Emily Sturparyk

*Grieving the Death of a Pet* by Betty J. Carmack

## OTHER THINGS THAT CAN HELP

Allow yourself to grieve in the way that is acceptable to you. Seek out friends or family who are able and willing to hear how much you miss your companion and how the loss is affecting you. Being able to talk and express loss helps us to let go of the pain and move on to healing.

Many people find comfort when they symbolically say good-bye to their pet. Just as funerals are an important part of grieving the loss of a human, a ceremony for the deceased animal can provide a symbolic ending.

If a pet funeral doesn't seem right, you may want to set a time aside when you express how much your pet meant to you and remember the times that you shared. Other ways of coping include planting a tree or writing a letter expressing your feelings of loss and remembering the relationship. A memorial activity can be particularly important for children to help them express and understand their feelings and to acknowledge that the pet's loss is permanent.

## THINGS THAT CAN HINDER

Pushing down and denying your grief may work for the short run but frequently results in a longer period of grief and a longer period before emotions begin to heal. In some cases it can result in a delayed grief reaction even more intense and difficult to handle.

Many people will not understand the important role and meaning your companion animal had in your life. Well-meaning friends or family may try to minimize or deny your feelings. Other people may make such hurtful statements as: "What's the matter with you? It was just an animal," "You'd think someone in your family had died the way you're acting," "If you miss the pet so much, why don't you just get another!"

Remember that your sorrow is valid. Mourning the loss or death of an animal is very similar to the process people go through when grieving for a human family member or friend. Grief, sadness and depression are normal. If your friends or family are unable to provide the support you need, please consider attending a pet loss support group meeting, like the one offered by PHS/SPCA.

## WEBSITES

[PHS-SPCA.org/services/loss.html](http://PHS-SPCA.org/services/loss.html)

[aspca.org/pet-care/pet-loss/](http://aspca.org/pet-care/pet-loss/)

[vetmed.wsu.edu/PLHL/](http://vetmed.wsu.edu/PLHL/)

[tufts.edu/vet/petloss](http://tufts.edu/vet/petloss)

[vetmed.illinois.edu/CARE/](http://vetmed.illinois.edu/CARE/)

[petloss.com](http://petloss.com)

[rainbowbridge.com](http://rainbowbridge.com)