

Passing Paws

SUPPORT BEYOND THE SERVICE

Understanding and Normalising Grief





Understanding Grief

It's important not to underestimate the pain of losing a beloved pet. When we lose a person that we love, it's expected by those around us that we will feel sorrow and express our grief openly. In some segments of society however, there is less understanding of the deep impact the loss of a pet can cause in our lives. They may tell you that 'it's just a pet', or suggest that you replace your pet with another. Such comments are usually well-intentioned but can be hurtful.

Even for pet owners who know what to expect, the grief experienced by losing a furry member of their family can be overwhelming. Our pets are with us for a relatively short period of time, and some of us may endure the experience several times in our lifetimes.

There is no correct way to navigate the feelings of hopelessness and heartache that can accompany the loss of a pet, however one thing is clear. It is absolutely vital for your health and well-being that you give yourself permission to grieve.

Of course, it's important to consider your pet's needs and to ensure that your children are guided carefully through this painful life lesson. But you mustn't forget about YOU. Without you, none of the above can happen, so make sure that you:



Ask for support. Talking with family and friends or to a grief counsellor can be very beneficial in helping you to live day to day with your loss. At Passing Paws we host free empathy sessions facilitated by an experienced and professional pet grief counsellor. It is crucial that pet owners are given the right support at this difficult time, and we are committed to being there through the whole journey, not just the beginning.



Allow time for grieving. Taking time off work for the death of a pet is much more acceptable these days than it used to be. Your colleagues are much more likely to understand the impact of the loss of a beloved pet. Some people cope better with their loss by going to work and trying to take their mind off it. Do what you need to do.



Don't feel pressured. Before long, well-meaning people will be asking when you'll get a new pet? Only you can decide if and when you're ready to take home a new bundle of fur and start again. But if you do, it doesn't mean that you are being disloyal to your pet who has passed. If your home and your heart are open to the pitter-patter of paws in your home again, then starting a new chapter of love may indeed help with the healing process.



1. Is What I'm Feeling Normal?

Everybody grieves differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve the passing of your pet, however it is common to experience some or all of the following:

- Shock and disbelief
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Anger
- Fear
- Physical pain

Acknowledge and accept these feelings as a part of your own personal grieving process.

2. How Long Should my Grief Last?

Give yourself as much time as you need to grieve and treat yourself with compassion and patience. Grief is so personal and each of us experiences it differently depending on our personality, our support systems and our life circumstances.

There is no linear progression with processing grief. On some days you will feel better and start to think that you are recovering. The next day you will be reminded of something that your pet did or a place you visited together, and your emotional wounds may open up again. Be patient with yourself and know that although grief seems like a painfully slow process, you will continue to have those good days more and more frequently.

There is no time-table for processing grief. Some people start to feel better within a few weeks or months. For others it may take years.



3. The 5 Stages of Grief

Although the experience is different for each of us, there are five accepted stages of grief. These stages may be briefer for some or longer for others, and some people may not experience all of them.

- 1. Denial:** This can't be happening.
- 2. Anger:** Why did this happen? Who is to blame?
- 3. Bargaining:** Make this not happen and I will...
- 4. Depression:** I can't bear this; I'm too sad to do anything.
- 5. Acceptance:** I acknowledge that this has happened, and I cannot change it.

There is no 'typical' loss or type of grief and these stages may not appear in any particular order, but it can be helpful to recognise them when we experience them and to understand that these feelings are normal.

4. Getting Through the Day

For some, work is a helpful distraction and for others it's a nearly impossible task. Thankfully employers have become more understanding and compassionate about pet loss in recent years. If you do decide to take some time off work to mourn the loss of your pet then you should do so without guilt or fear of judgement.

As you face the days ahead without your pet, feelings of emptiness and sadness may seem insurmountable. Take it one day at a time.

- Plan one activity for each day – even if it's just getting dressed and going for a walk.
- Maintain a routine. Familiarity creates a sense of security.
- Eat healthy foods and avoid depressants such as alcohol.
- Write your feelings in a journal.
- Volunteer with animals at a local shelter.
- Foster pets for an animal rescue.
- Create a personal memorial for your pet.

5. It's Okay to Ask for Help

- Daily coping strategies are not always enough to get us through. Sometimes we need a little extra help. Ignoring or suppressing your grief can lead to depression and anxiety in the longer term, so if you find that your grief is not abating, if you feel isolated or if you are struggling to maintain your daily routines it may be time to seek external support. You don't have to do it alone.
- If you don't feel comfortable expressing your feelings to a friend or family member, a professional pet grief counsellor will be able to provide you with support and guidance to make the sorrow of losing your beloved pet a little less painful.
- At Passing Paws we host regular Empathy Sessions where you will be able to share your grief in a supportive and understanding environment. It is crucial that pet owners are given the right support at this difficult time, and Passing Paws are committed to being there through the whole journey, not just the beginning.



They will not go quietly

*They will not go quietly, the pets
who've shared our lives.*

*In subtle ways they let us know their
spirit still survives.*

*Old habits still can make us think we
hear them at the door,*

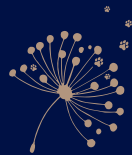
*Or step back when we drop a tasty
morsel on the floor.*

*Our feet still go around the place the
food dish used to be,*

*And, sometimes, coming home at
night, we miss them terribly.*

*And although time may bring new
friends and a new food dish to fill,*

*That one place in our hearts belongs
to them and always will.*



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