

Grief After the Loss of a Pet

A gentle guide for understanding and support

Because the loss of an animal companion can leave an enormous space

For many people a pet is family, companionship, routine, comfort and unconditional presence. Their death can change the rhythm of the whole day. Pet grief is sometimes dismissed by others, but the strength of grief reflects attachment, not whether the person you loved was human.

Understanding this kind of grief

- Daily routines can become painful reminders: feeding time, walks, the sound of a collar or an empty favourite place.
- Decisions about euthanasia can leave guilt and repeated questioning even when they were made with love and veterinary guidance.
- Other animals in the home may also behave differently after a companion disappears.
- You do not need to replace a pet to recover. If you eventually welcome another animal, that relationship does not replace the one you lost.

A gentle reminder

You do not have to prove that your grief is serious enough to deserve care. Loss is personal. What matters is the impact it has on you.

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Therapy & support that may help

Therapy is not about taking grief away or making you forget. At its best, it gives you a safe relationship in which the loss can be spoken about, understood and carried with less isolation.

Person-centred counselling - appropriate when pet loss is affecting wellbeing or bringing up other losses.

Pet-bereavement support services or groups - speaking with people who understand this bond can reduce disenfranchised grief.

Grief counselling - particularly if the loss connects with previous bereavements or significant isolation.

You do not have to start therapy simply because you are grieving. Some people are supported well by family, friends, community, reading or peer support. Others value professional help. Cruse Bereavement Support also offers bereavement information, helpline support, groups and one-to-one support in the UK.

When to reach for more help

Consider speaking with your GP or a qualified mental-health professional if grief is making everyday life feel persistently unmanageable, you are experiencing severe or worsening distress, trauma symptoms are dominating daily life, or you are worried about your safety. If you feel you may act on thoughts of harming yourself, seek urgent help through emergency services or a crisis service.

A few things that can help between difficult waves

- Reduce expectations on the hardest days. Grief uses physical as well as emotional energy.
- Keep basic needs visible: fluids, simple food, medication, sleep routines and fresh air where possible.
- Choose one or two safe people you can be honest with rather than feeling you must explain yourself to everyone.
- Create a small ritual of remembrance or acknowledgement if that feels right for you.
- Notice triggers and anniversaries in advance and plan extra gentleness around them.
- Allow moments of laughter, interest or rest without treating them as betrayal.

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Books I would recommend exploring

Books cannot tell you how you should grieve, but sometimes another person's words help us recognise something we have not yet been able to say ourselves.

The Loss of a Pet

Wallace Sife

Explores the emotional impact of losing an animal companion.

Goodbye, Friend

Gary Kowalski

Gentle reflections on mourning and remembering a pet.

When Your Pet Dies

Alan D. Wolfelt

A compassionate guide to acknowledging and expressing pet grief.

A reflection to take with you

What did my pet give me emotionally and practically, and how can I honour that relationship now?

From me to you

Please be gentle with yourself. Grief is not a test you pass, a set of stages you complete, or evidence that you are failing to cope. Sometimes the most helpful thing we can do is make a little more room for what is already there. You are allowed to take this one day - or one hour - at a time.

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