



Five Minutes of Grief Education

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The loss of your pet can be a sad event, filled with feelings of loss and grief. Most people consider their pets to be family members, so profound grief is normal and to be expected. It can also be overwhelming.

Research tells us that 75% of people who lose a pet experience difficulties and disruptions in their work and relationships. This may be because pet loss is viewed as a very significant loss. In fact, in one study, people ranked the loss of their pet as less significant than the loss of an immediate family member (parent, spouse or child), but more significant than other human losses.

If you are grieving for a pet, you are not alone. As you grieve, remember your feelings are normal. Grief follows loss and is a healthy, spontaneous healing process.

The Normal Process of Grieving

The best way to heal your deep feelings of loss is to become well informed about the grief process. Grief is different for each person who experiences it. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Grief is usually quite intense immediately following a loss and its symptoms are not just emotional. Along with sadness, you may also feel confused, preoccupied, exhausted, or disoriented. You may have mood swings, a loss of appetite, trouble sleeping, or shortness of breath. Loss can make you feel angry with your Higher Power or increase your reliance on your faith. You may want to spend long periods of time alone or, on the other hand, you may never want others to be far from your side.

It's important to remember that grieving is a *process*. It isn't finished at the end of an event like a funeral or memorial service. Intense feelings of grief can last a few days or even several months, depending on your personality and life circumstances. In general, though, your grief should lessen in intensity as time moves on, even though the awareness of your loss may never really go away.

Five Facts About Grief

1. Men and women grieve differently. Women often need to talk and cry. Men often prefer to stay busy or may feel angry instead of expressing their sadness.
2. Children grieve just as deeply as adults, but may express their feelings through their behavior rather than in words.
3. If you have other pets, they may also grieve for their animal friend after a death. They may seem to search your home, looking for their lost friend. They may also become depressed and lethargic, choosing not to eat or sleep. Keep your routines as normal as possible and spend time with your pet to comfort one another.
4. Grief can cause what some would call 'paranormal' experiences—"seeing" your pet out of the corner of your eye, "hearing" his toenails on the kitchen floor, "hearing" her meow when you return from work. These "hallucinations" are normal and common, part of the adjustment to life without your pet.
5. Keeping a memento of your pet nearby can be comforting and healing. It's not 'morbid' to keep your pet's food bowls, cremains, a paw print impression, or a clipping of fur. Do whatever makes you feel better and remember that there is no "right" or "wrong" way to grieve. There's only the way that works for you.



If you'd like to learn more about normal grief, find an experienced veterinary grief counselor, or find an appropriate memento, visit www.veterinarywisdom.com.