



hamilton
SPECIALIST REFERRALS

HSR GUIDE TO

Saying Goodbye

Coping with the loss
of a loved one



Losing a member of the family

Our pets are such a significant part of our lives and many of us are unprepared for the extent of our grief when we lose them. **It is normal to feel as deeply when grieving a pet as when grieving a dear friend, or loved one.**

Grief is very personal and can be overwhelming. **There is no right or wrong way to feel or deal with losing someone you love;** Everyone grieves in their own way. Grief is natural and it can last a long time.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach, the important thing is to do whatever feels right for you. Lots of us can be reluctant to open up about our emotions, but **talking about how you feel is really important.**

You will have good days and bad days, and remember that sooner or later – as with any bereavement – **time will begin the healing process.**

What is normal?

Besides feelings of sadness, you may experience any, or all, of the following emotions:

Shock and Denial: It's very normal to go through a period of numbness or disbelief, a feeling of being disconnected from everything and everyone, especially if your pet's death was unexpected.

Guilt: Perhaps you feel you should have done more or ought to have been able to prevent your pet's death in some way? Guilt is a very common emotion and yet you were almost certainly doing the best you could at the time.

Anger and Blame: When things go wrong it's natural to look for someone or something to blame. Working through strong emotions like anger is an important part of healing, but do make sure you find a safe outlet for your feelings.

Depression: We rarely experience grief 'in a straight line'. Rather, it can be like a roller coaster, leaving us feeling out of control. But if you find yourself, months later, feeling permanently heavy-hearted, and wondering what there is to get up for, you may need to seek professional help.



Remember to:

- ✦ Take time off from your normal routine. People are very good at insisting that 'life must go on' when grieving. Taking time out is a way of acknowledging to yourself the depth of your loss.
- ✦ Make healing your priority. It is okay to put your needs above other people's for a while.
- ✦ Treat yourself with the same love and compassion you would a friend. Be your own best friend right now.
- ✦ If any well-meaning, but insensitive, comments made by friends and colleagues, try not to dwell on them. Not everyone understands grief relating to a pet.
- ✦ Eat, rest and care for yourself. It is important not to neglect your primary health, as this will lead to a further negative state of mind.
- ✦ Stay connected. After a loss, you might find yourself becoming more withdrawn, avoiding social situations, and staying at home more - especially if you worry people will not understand your grief over a pet. Trust that the people closest to you will appreciate your feelings and probably share them too.



Processing your loss

If your pet was unwell for a stretch of time, it is very distressing for owners, both to struggle to care for them, as well as organise veterinary visits and home treatment around your life, and dealing with the fees involved.

After your pet is gone, it is easy to focus on the weeks or days leading up to that moment. It is important that you understand how your care has benefitted and enriched the animal's life, and that you remember all of the good moments you spent with them.

Children and grief:

Children react to the death of a pet in many different ways, depending on their age and what else may be going on in their lives. If they are already struggling, perhaps with school or friendships, the loss of a pet's unconditional love can trigger some powerful emotions.

If it is their first experience of death, they may find it very confusing and have lots of questions. Even though you may be grieving, it's important to give children the space and permission to talk about their feelings – and to answer their questions as honestly as possible without going into distressing details.

Some children are not deeply involved with their pets, or may appear more curious than upset. Teenagers, especially, may struggle to show or share any emotion, but may still need understanding and reassurance from the adults around them.

Looking forwards

It can be difficult to think about the future while you're grieving, but there's no rush to do this – do everything at your own pace. Keeping your favourite memories of your pet in the forefront of your mind can help you start to look ahead. You might feel guilty at first, but finding enjoyment in life isn't a betrayal to the memory of your pet.

It is often suggested to wait a while before considering getting another pet, and it is important not to make any big decisions in the wake of an emotional upheaval.

It may be that you feel you could never have another pet again, or that you have a solitary life and miss having someone to keep you company, or having someone to look after.

If you have another pet at home, they could also be grieving for the companion they have also lost.

If you do find yourself getting another pet, there is no need to feel guilty. You will not be replacing your lost pet, but extending your love to another pet who may need a loving, caring home.

Putting your pet to sleep

Every decision you make on behalf of your pet such as, what food to give them, how much exercise they have, what kind of bed they sleep in etc, you have done because is the best option for them, their health, and their comfort.

If you make the decide to put your pet to sleep to prevent them for suffering, **this decision is no different.**

Making this choice is both heart breaking and responsible, your love for your pet is never in question.

Options Available

Home Burial

You can take their body home in a blanket to lay them to rest as you see fit.

Individual Cremation

Your pets body is cremated and the ashes are returned to you; Most services offer options such as engraved boxes, statues and scatter boxes.

Communal Cremation

The body is cremated and the ashes are scattered in a communal rose garden.

Support Available



The Blue Cross

www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-and-pet-loss

0800 096 6606

pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk

The Blue Cross can support you over the phone, email, online live chat, and through their Facebook community of like-minded animal lovers.

Cats Protection

www.cats.org.uk/what-we-do/grief

0800 024 94 94

Cats Protection does not offer counselling, but does have volunteer listeners ready to speak to anyone speaking pet-related grief. Sometimes, all you need is a sympathetic ear at this difficult time. If you are not ready to talk, they also have a support form that can be submitted via email.

EASE Animals

ease-animals.org.uk/pet-loss-support

If you are not ready to talk to anyone, this website has podcasts created specifically for subjects surrounding the loss of a pet and provides some advice on how to cope.

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