SANE We're people like you.

Grieving the Loss of a Pet

Pets play important roles in our lives and can bring us so much joy and love. When we lose a pet, it can leave a huge hole in our hearts. The grief experienced after the loss of a pet may not be any different to the grief experienced after the loss of a person, and some people report grieving the loss even more intensely.

Understanding Grief

- Grief is a natural response to loss
- Everyone grieves differently, and there is no set time frame for grief
- You can grieve in anticipation of losing your pet
- There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and everyone's experience is different
- Grief is not just sadness, grief is full of many different emotions
- Grief is non-linear and does not occur in set stages
- Grief is experienced in both the mind and body, affecting thoughts, emotions, and physical well-being.

When you feel alone in your grief

What can make the loss of a pet particularly challenging is that some people may not understand the extent of your grief. This is called 'disenfranchised grief'. If you are feeling alone in your grief, try reaching out to fellow animal lovers in your life to share how you are feeling. The Griefline Forum has many people who are also grieving the loss of their pet and can provide support and understanding.

Navigating feelings of guilt

Guilt is a common feeling experienced by those who have lost a pet. Despite the deep connection we have with our pets, we cannot speak to them to ask them how they are feeling, or when it is the right time for them to go. There is a quote by Jamie Anderson that says, "grief is just love with no place to go". If you are reading this resource, it is clear you must have had a lot of love for your pet. They would have felt that love. All you can ask of yourself is that you did your best to care for your pet with the information you had. If you are still experiencing self-blame, try speaking to yourself as you would a good friend, or seek support through one of the services listed below.

Honouring your pet

Ceremony and ritual can help you to honour your pet and express your grief. You could hold a ceremony, share your favourite memories of them, and tell them how much they meant to you. There is no wrong or right way to do this; do what feels right for you and your pet. You could also plant a tree or flower in their memory, write a story, or create a piece of art to remember your pet after they're gone.

Finding what helps

Everyone grieves differently, and different things will help different people at different times. A good place to start is returning to things that have supported you in the past, while gently exploring new ways to care for yourself.

Below are some suggestions for caring for yourself through grief. You don't need to do everything on this list, start small, and remember that small actions can make a big difference over time.

- Support your body with rest, nourishment, and gentle movement where possible.
- Express your thoughts and feelings through writing, creativity, mindfulness, or talking with someone you trust.
- Lean on safe and supportive people, communities, or grief support forums for connection.
- Connect with spiritual, cultural, or personal practices that support you.

When grief doesn't ease

If you find that your grief remains persistent, overwhelming, and debilitating and is preventing you from living your life in the way you would like, it can be helpful to seek specialist grief support. You can start by speaking to your GP or exploring the supports listed below.

SUPPORT

- Grief and loss support can be accessed through SANE's RecoveryClub. To join RecoveryClub, register through the SANE website.
- The grief and loss space on the SANE forums gives another safe opportunity to share, remember and find support with others navigating loss.
- Speak to your GP about accessing your local grief or bereavement service.

National Association for Loss and Grief

Access up to 12 free grief support sessions with a trained volunteer.

1300 474 33

RESOURCES

- How to help a child grieving the death of a pet – Child Bereavement UK
- Rest Your Paws – Pet Counselling & Palliative Care
- 'This Is Grief' – a gentle guide for individuals and families.