



your guide to **COPING WITH LOSS OF A PET**

from the word to the wise series | www.funeralwise.com

Scientific research has shown that the bond between animals and humans can be extremely strong. If you have a pet who is a member of the family you don't need a study to tell you that.

The trouble is, the life span of our furry friends is much shorter than ours so somewhere along the line you may have to say goodbye to your loyal and trusted companion. To make matters worse, you may be called on to make the hard decision to euthanize an animal.

Experiencing the death of a pet is hard regardless of the circumstances. This Guide is designed to help you navigate the difficult path of recovering from the loss of a pet. You can find additional information along with a comprehensive list of resources on the Funeralwise.com website in our [Pet Loss Section](#).

TIPS FOR COPING WITH GRIEF OVER LOSS OF A PET

ALLOW YOURSELF TO GRIEVE

Don't minimize your grief. Whether the pet was a favorite feline, a faithful dog, or even a little turtle, pet loss can spark deep feelings of grief. Everyone experiences loss differently so there's no reason to expect specific behaviors.

ACCEPT THAT WHAT YOU ARE FEELING IS NORMAL

You may have heard of the *Five Stages of Grief*. Being aware of these emotional shifts can help you understand that what you are feeling is completely normal. You can learn more about the *Five Stages* on the following page.

REACH OUT

Turning to a family member, friend, clergy, or support group may give you an outlet for expressing your feelings. If you want to reach out but aren't sure where to turn, pet loss hotlines can help*. Do not hesitate to contact a professional if your grief is over whelming you.

CREATE A RITUAL

Today many people turn to pet funerals as part of the grieving process. While you may not want a full-blown funeral ceremony, creating a ritual may help you say goodbye and offer comfort and closure.

MEMORIALIZE YOUR PET

Creating a lasting memorial of the time you and your pet spent together helps many people. Some of the most popular ways are to create a special photo album, find a special spot for your pet's remains, or to have a special burial spot.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

There is no need to put yourself on a grief time table. You should, however, take care of yourself by eating properly and getting enough rest. Taking care of your physical and emotional needs will help you heal more quickly.

*For a list of resources including pet loss hotlines go to www.funeralwise.com/pets/resources/.

THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

The *Five Stages of Grief* is a widely accepted model for how we deal with grief. Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross developed the theory while working with terminally ill patients. She introduced her model in the 1969 book, *On Death and Dying*. The *Five Stages of Grief* have helped many people understand their feelings after the loss of someone close to them. Of course, everyone experiences grief differently so you may not feel each of these in a “text book” way. The important thing is that you recognize that the feelings you have are normal. You'll find helpful information on managing your grief at www.funeralwise.com/grief/.



- At first, you may feel shock or numbness. It's hard to believe that your pet has actually died or will succumb to a life-ending medical condition.
- You may be angry at your pet, at your family members, at the doctor, or even yourself. Most experts recommend that you recognize your anger for what it is and allow yourself to work through it.
- You may try to make a deal with a higher power so that your pet will not be ill or die. Going through this stage can help you deal with the aftermath of the loss.
- You may feel overwhelming sadness and emptiness. It may be hard to go about daily activities. If you are worried about how you feel, do not hesitate to seek help.
- After some time you will begin to feel that things will be OK. You may never get over missing your pet, but you will feel ready to move on.

HELPING PETS GRIEVE

Pets can grieve the loss of another animal or human with whom they are close. Luckily, pet grief is usually more short-lived than ours. Telltale signs include loss of appetite, restlessness, insecurity, or inability to sleep. If you notice these symptoms, talk to your vet to make sure no underlying illness is responsible. Assuming your pet is healthy, there are ways you can help it work through grief. You may even find that helping your pet helps you.



- Be patient. Time can be the best healer.
- Stick to your normal routine as much as possible.
- Spend a little extra time cuddling & playing.
- Go for walks and outings to new places.
- Take up positive training activities.
- Introduce new toys or enhancements to habitats.
- Give your pet some time before introducing a new animal.

MEMORIALIZING YOUR PET

If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went. —Will Rogers

Cremation versus Burial

Choosing the interment method that is right for your pet depends on your personal preferences. There are a few things to consider that can help you decide which is right for you.

BURIAL

- Pet cemeteries can offer a comforting, sacred place to visit your pet's remains.
- Costs can range widely depending on type of casket and degree of personalization.
- Many areas do not permit home burial so check local regulations.
- Your pet must be buried deep enough to prevent wildlife from disturbing the grave.
- If bury at home you may not be able to take your pet with you if you move.

CREMATION

- Cremation can be an economical alternative to burial.
- There are many private pet crematories. Your veterinarian may also offer the option of taking care of pet remains for you.
- You can choose whether or not to have cremains returned to you.
- There are a wide range of unique and beautiful options available for storing pet remains and creating a lasting memorial.

Creating a Lasting Memorial

Losing your pet doesn't mean you have to lose the memories. Creating a special memorial will help you hold on to the special times you shared and provide a lasting tribute to your pet.

- Hold a funeral or memorial ceremony.
- Plant a tree in your pet's memory.
- Post an online memorial or obituary.
- Create a special place in your garden with a garden stone or marker infused with your pet's ashes.
- Find a spot in your home to display a special urn with your pet's ashes.
- Have your pet's ashes encased in a piece of memorial jewelry or have a diamond or gemstone made.
- Donate in your pet's name to an organization that helps animals.
- Have fireworks created from your pet's remains or have the remains shot into space.

*Visit the Funeralwise Memorial Store at <http://store.funeralwise.com> for many unique memorialization options.

No heaven will not ever Heaven be. Unless my cats are there to welcome me. —Anonymous

CHILDREN AND PET LOSS

Losing the family pet can be particularly hard on children. This may be the first experience your child has with the death of a loved one and he or she may not even remember a time when their furry friend was not part of the family. Below are a few tips to help you through this difficult time.



It's OK to be sad.

Your child may feel uncomfortable with the emotions he or she is feeling. He or she will look to you for reassurance that it's ok to be sad that the family pet is gone. A hug would probably be good too.

Be Honest.

It may be tempting to make up a story to protect your child from the truth, but most experts recommend that you be honest about what has happened.



Let them help.

Contributing to a family effort may offer comfort to many children. Planning a memorial service, writing a goodbye letter to the pet, or setting up a special memory spot may give your child an outlet for expressing his or her grief.

Encourage discussion.

Talking about the pet, the feelings associated with the loss, and what will happen now that the pet is gone can help both you and your child work through the grief.



Talk about death.

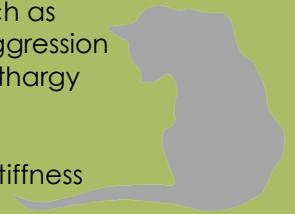
What you say about death will depend on the age and maturity of your child. It is important to remember that your child may not know what death really means. He or she may also feel responsible in some way.

For more information on children and pet loss visit <https://www.funeralwise.com/pets/children/>.

SENIOR PETS

Living with a senior pet can offer many rewards. It can also present a unique set of challenges. The best thing you can do for your older animal is to talk with your veterinarian to find out what to watch for. Some of these things are:

- Changes in behavior such as increased irritability or aggression
- Decreased mobility or lethargy
- Changes in appetite
- Unusual house soiling
- Unusual odors, sores, or stiffness



Raising a dog is like a rainbow...

Puppies are the joy at one end. Old dogs are the treasure at the other.

~Author Unknown

IS IT TIME?

Deciding when to consider euthanasia is never easy. Many vets use a "Quality of Life Index" to help assess the pet. One popular version is **HHHHMM**. The index evaluates 7 criteria on a scale of 1-10. The total score helps guide the decision.

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| • Hurt | • Hygiene | • More |
| • Hunger | • Happiness | Good Than |
| • Hydration | • Mobility | Bad |

(Visit <https://www.funeralwise.com/pets/when-to-euthanize/> for more on the index.)

If you have to make the hard choice, ask for help if you need it. Reach out to your vet, your friends, and your family. You don't have to go it alone.

THINKING AHEAD

Since your life span is longer than your pets, you may have a senior pet in the family and face making a difficult health decision for your friend. Planning ahead may make the process of grieving for your pet a bit easier. It will also give you time to weigh your options and avoid making complex decisions at an emotional time.

TIPS FOR PLANNING AHEAD

Talk with your veterinarian about:

- What to expect during your pet's last days.
- How to help your pet remain comfortable.
- What your options are should it be necessary to consider euthanasia.
- What type of support services the vet offers.

Talk with your family about:

- The best way to memorialize your pet.
- Who might like to visit with your pet before the time comes.
- What to do with your pet's remains.

Investigate

- Support services or groups that are available to help you and your family with your grief.
- Visit funeralwise.com to view our pet grief resources page.

Average Pet Life Expectancy In Years



PET HOSPICE

The philosophy behind hospice care is that dying is a normal process. Hospice caregivers normally provide services in the home and involve all of the people who are important in the pet's life.

Many communities have palliative care available for families with pets. Services may include pain and symptom management and psychological and spiritual support.

Your veterinarian may be able to help you locate hospice care for your pet if this is a service you would like to take advantage of.

Try Our Free Planning Tools

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START A QUICK PLAN



[Log-in to an existing plan](#)

THE WISE PLANNING SYSTEM

Whether you are planning ahead or making arrangements for an immediate funeral, our Wise Planning System can help you every step of the way.

STEP 1 – QUICK PLAN

Get started with a basic plan and see an estimate of your expected costs. It's quick, easy and free.

STEP 2 – ESSENTIALS PLAN

This Free Upgrade takes your planning to the next level. Manage your expected costs in detail. Search for and select providers, advisors and products in our online directories.

STEP 3 – COMPLETE PLAN

The ultimate funeral planner. Assign trustees for your plan, design your ceremonies, record vital

[Learn More About Wise Planning](#)