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TEN WAYS TO HELP COPE WITH THE LOSS OF YOUR PET

1. Give yourself permission to grieve. You've experienced a tremendous loss, a faithful companion who gave you unconditional love. It is normal after this loss to feel sad and worn down for a while. Take all the time you need to heal.
2. Understand that guilt often accompanies grief, especially when dealing with animals. Your pet couldn't tell you that she was sick, so you may feel guilty for not taking her to the vet sooner. Or you may feel at fault if your pet was injured after escaping from the yard. Guilt is a reflection of how responsible you felt for the care of your pet; it is a human response to grief after this loss.
3. Find a special way to say good-bye to your pet. Have a family ritual or ceremony celebrating his life and acknowledging his death. Write a letter, a poem, or a special tribute.
4. Pick a meaningful way to memorialize your pet. Make a scrapbook, plant a tree, donate your time or money to a worthy animal charity.
5. Find at least one person you can talk to openly about your loss and share your feelings. Realize that family members or other loved ones may grieve differently or be in too much pain to support you. Recognize that you may need professional help to get through this.
6. Creatively express your feelings. Write down whatever you're feeling in a journal. You may choose to work out your emotions in clay, paint, pastels, etc. Celebrate the life you shared with your companion.
7. When you feel strong enough, think about helping others. Speak openly and honestly with your children. Join a pet loss support group. Volunteer at the Humane Society. Find an internet chat room for pet loss and bereavement.
8. Be especially good to yourself, because it takes a lot of energy to grieve. Try to eat well, exercise, and get plenty of rest. Taking care of yourself physically can help in your emotional healing.
9. Each day, do at least one thing that brings you joy. Take a walk, garden, watch the sunset, listen to music, see a funny movie. And allow yourself to laugh! Laughter has great healing power.
10. If you decide to get another pet, do so only when *you* are ready. You will never be able to replace the pet you have lost; it takes time to emotionally invest in another.

Book Resources on Pet Loss and Grief

The following are a list of books that can be borrowed from the Ottawa Library. You can request the book online via the Ottawa Library website or you may go into any local branch and put in a request.

- **Pet Loss: A thoughtful guide for adults and children**
By Herbert Nieburg
- **The Loss of a Pet**
By Wallace Sife
- **Coping With Sorrow On The Loss of Your Pet**
By Moira Anderson
- **When Children Grieve**
By John James
- **When A Family Pet Dies: A guide to dealing with children's loss.**
By Joann Tuzeo-Jardmen
- **Among Angels**
By April Andrew

The next list of books can be found either online or through Chapters or Indigo book store.

- **When Friendship Lives Beyond The Stars (A book to help children cope with the death of a pet)** By Amy Sugar
- **Grieving The Death Of A Pet** By B.J. Carmack
- **Saying Goodbye to The Pet You Love**
By L.A. Green and J. Landis
- **Saying Goodbye To Your Angel Animals: Finding Comfort After Losing Your Pet**
By Allen and Linda Anderson
- **How to Roar: Pet Loss Grief Recovery**
By Robin Jean Brown

Pet Loss Support Websites

- Grief Healing
www.griefhealing.com
- Pet Loss Support Website
www.petloss.com
- Rainbow Bridge
www.rainbowbridge.com
- Pet Loss Support
www.pet-loss.net
- Lightning Strike Pet Loss Support
www.lightning-strike.com
- Pet Loss Support Group of Ottawa
www.ottawapetloss.com

GRIEF COUNSELLORS IN OTTAWA (Dec. 2014)

Debra-Lynn Ménard, 150 Isabella Street, Suite 303, 613-260-8070

Dr. Peter Liu, Hunt Club Psychological Services, 2446 Bank St, Suite 211, 737-1969

Kathy Al-Zand, Alliance Counselling, 317 Catherine St, 730-3549

John Wendell Counselling Services, 610- 267 O'Connor, 231-8548

W. Dickson Davidson, Registered Social Worker (house calls), 613-867-9264

THE GRIEF PROCESS

Although not always supported by our society, grief over the loss of a pet is a normal, healthy reaction. The passage of grief is through, not over, not by, not around, but *through*. It is the very difficult process of adapting to a significant loss. Although not always a linear or well-defined process, for many people grief manifests itself in several stages. These have been described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross as:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

1. Denial is often the first reaction to learning about the death or terminal illness of a loved one. It is a defense mechanism used to protect ourselves from overwhelming emotions. "I can't imagine life without him", "I can't believe she's gone", "This isn't happening, it must be a bad dream" are all familiar sayings.
2. When the reality of the situation starts to sink in, we again shield ourselves from the pain by redirecting it and expressing it as anger. Convenient targets are family and friends, our dying or deceased pet, and very often veterinary staff. Rationally we know these people are not to blame but emotionally we need some kind of outlet.
3. As we begin to feel helpless and vulnerable to feelings of sorrow and loss we try to find ways to regain control. The bargaining stage is the could have, should have, would have stage. "I could have saved my pet, if only I had.....", "I should have taken her to the vet sooner", "Things would have been different if I....."
4. In the depression stage sadness and regret predominate. This is the time when we cry a lot, we feel unable to cope with everyday life, we don't eat or sleep properly, and begin to feel very worn down. We often withdraw from others at this time when really it is when we need help the most.
5. Reaching the acceptance stage of mourning is a gift not afforded to everyone, especially if we have not taken the time or effort to grieve properly, or if our grief is complicated by other factors. It is not a period of happiness but rather a time of peaceful resolution.