



PET LOSS & GRIEF SUPPORT

LAST WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH AT 6:30PM

FELINE LOBBY AT ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF ROWLETT
9501 LAKEVIEW PARKWAY ROWLETT, TEXAS 75088

We are deeply sorry for the loss of your companion animal. You are not alone. You are invited to review the information provided in this brochure or attend a free grief session, or both.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: CHRISTEN LYNCH AT CLYNCH@AHRDVM.COM

Pet Loss and Grief Support Groups

The loss of a beloved animal companion is difficult and often overwhelming. We are here to offer a safe and confidential environment for you to share your story and connect with others who understand your loss.

A COMPANION ANIMAL PLAYS A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN OUR LIVES. COMPANION ANIMALS ARE VIEWED AS CHILDREN, SIBLINGS, CONFIDANTS, SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND FRIENDS. WHEN WE LOSE OUR COMPANION ANIMAL IT CAN AFFECT US MUCH IN THE SAME WAY AS LOSING A HUMAN. WE FEEL THE SAME GRIEF REACTIONS AND THE GRIEVING PROCESS CAN BE MUCH THE SAME FOR A HUMAN OR COMPANION ANIMAL. GRIEVING IS A NORMAL AND UNAVOIDABLE REACTION TO A LOSS BUT IT IS ALSO A REACTION THAT IS VERY OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD, IF NOT MINIMIZED BY OTHERS. IT IS A NORMAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE THAT REQUIRES EXPRESSION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. THIS GROUP OFFERS COMFORT FOR ALL GRIEVING ANIMAL LOVERS.

How Does The Group Work?

The meetings take on an open format where the participants can bring their current needs to the table. The group will discuss grief and loss as it pertains to the needs of each individual group. Additional discussions involve grief reactions, resources, ways to express emotions related to the grieving process, and offer supportive ideas to one another.

Pet Loss and Grief Support Group Purpose

The Pet Loss and Grief Support group reaches out to any family member or friend that has been affected by the loss of a companion animal. This group offers friendship, hope, and an understanding that every person, each with their own precious memories of the beloved companion, grieves in their own unique way. Primarily, this group is a safe place where thoughts and feelings can be freely expressed, though no one is compelled to do so.

Meet The Facilitator

Christen Lynch, BA

Christen earned her bachelor's degree in Communication at the University of Oklahoma and has worked in both emergency and private veterinary practices. Christen understands that when people are faced with very difficult decisions for their pets it can be unbearable at times. Understanding that pets hold a different role in each person's life, Christen hopes to be a support to those in need.

Christen has a few companion animals of her own. Currently she has 2 dogs: Bo, a 10 year old coonhound/golden retriever mix and Bonnie, a 16 year old rat terrier.

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Rowlett Pet Loss and Grief Support Location



Animal Hospital of Rowlett Veterinary Clinic

Feline Lobby

Last Wednesday of each month

6:30pm

9501 Lakeview Parkway

Rowlett, Texas 75088

Phone: 972-412-0101

Understanding Grief

Grief is a normal psychological response that requires expression and acknowledgement. When grieving the loss of a companion animal we often hear statements such as:



“It’s just a pet.”

“You can always get another pet.”

“At least it was not your child.”

“You still have other pets.”

These statements give us the message that grieving the loss of a companion animal is not ok, that we should not have an emotional reaction to the loss. Nothing could be further from the truth. The loss of a companion animal is significant and we must be allowed to move naturally through our grief reaction. These statements can also send the message that a loved one is easily replaced, and our loss is not important. Others cannot define our relationship we have with our pets, nor can they control our reactions. You may also hear statements such as:



“Just be thankful for everything you do have.”

“God needed them more than you did.”

“There are others that have it far worse off than you.”

These statements minimize our grief reactions and often make us feel guilty for feeling the way we do. They encourage us to avoid our feelings and pressure us to get over the loss quickly. In reality, minimizing and not recognizing grief can actually prolong the grieving process and does not allow us to move forward. Creating artificial deadlines and expecting grief to disappear creates more stress for the bereaved person. It is important to remember that, regardless of our loss, we need support, acknowledgement, and validation through our grieving process. It is important to remember that grief is normal, and not to judge the emotions we are feeling. Sometimes we can get support through our friends and family members. Other times we may need professional assistance to help us with our grief. Assistance can be found through counselors, therapists, and clergy members. There are also a number of books and websites about the grieving process that can be helpful. There is a list of resources included in this packet; many of these books may be available at your local library, in bookstores, or online.

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Manifestations of Grief

While everyone experiences grief in different ways, there are many reactions that are predictable manifestations of grief. Grief can manifest in physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual levels. Grief may appear in any of these forms before, during, or after our loss. Grief manifestations may also appear simultaneously or individually and we may experience the same reaction several times.

Physical: Crying, sobbing, wailing, shock, numbness, dry mouth, shortness of breath, stomach ache or nausea, tightness in the chest, restlessness, fatigue, sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, stiff joints or muscles, body aches, dizziness or fainting.



Intellectual: Denial, sense of unreality, inability to concentrate, feeling preoccupied by the loss, experiencing hallucinations concerning the loss, a need to reminisce about the loved one and talk about the circumstances of the loss, a sense that time is passing very slowly, a desire to rationalize or intellectualize feelings about the loss, thoughts or fantasies about suicide (without actual plans or behaviors).



Emotional: Sadness, anger, depression, guilt, anxiety, relief, loneliness, irritability, a desire to blame others for the loss, resentment, embarrassment, self-doubt, lowered self-esteem, feelings of being overwhelmed or out of control, feeling hopeless or helpless, feeling victimized, inappropriate affect.



Social: Feelings of withdrawal, isolation and alienation, greater dependency on others, rejection of others, feeling rejected by others, reluctance to ask for help, a desire to re-locate or move, need to distract oneself from the intensity of the grief.



Spiritual: Bargaining with a deity to prevent loss, feeling angry at ones deity when a loss occurs, renewed or shaken religious belief, feelings of being blessed or punished, searching for a meaningful explanation of a loved one's death, visions or dreams concerning a dead loved one, questioning whether or not souls exist, finding a purposeful way to say goodbye (funeral, memorial service, good-bye service).



Memorializing Your Pet

Our pets are a part of our family. The death of our pet, expected or unexpected, can leave us with an empty feeling. Finding ways to memorialize your pet can help in filling that void after they have died. Below are some ideas of how we can memorialize our pets. Ideas for this list have been adapted from the University of Minnesota's Coping With the Loss of Your Companion Animal. Ideas are from the Pet Loss Support Hotline at the University of California Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine.

Take lots of photographs, and, when you think you've taken enough, take some more. Use the photos to fill an album, place them in your pet's favorite spots in the house, make a collage with them, fill a multi-picture frame with them, and carry pictures in your wallet.

Write a poem, story, song, etc., about and/or dedicated to your pet.

Write down your special memories of your pet. Add to these stories or anecdotes from friends and family. Alternatively, you could make a tape recording of the same thing.

Chronicle your pet's life with photos and/or by keeping a journal of its life.

Write a letter to your pet expressing feelings you may be struggling with.

Videotape your pet doing anything and everything – eating, sleeping, playing, and just sitting there.

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Make something that reminds you of your pet, e.g., a drawing, a clay sculpture, a needlework project, etc.

Have a professional portrait, sketch, or sculpture done of your pet. This can be done after the pet's death from a photograph. You can also have a photo of your pet transferred to a T-shirt, clock, button, or mug (check advertisements in magazine like Dog Fancy and Cat Fancy).

Keep baby teeth, whiskers, fur (from shaved areas) and place in a locket. Save shoes, tail, and mane hairs from horses.

Have fur spun to make yarn in order to knit/crochet something in memory of your pet.

Keep pet tags. You can place these on your key ring so that you will always be carrying the memory of your special friend with you.

Have a plaque made to honor your pet. Place it in a special place—next to your pet's ashes, on a tree near where your pet was buried, in the hospital where your pet was cared for, etc.

Make a donation in memory of your pet to a special cause.

Volunteer your time at a humane organization and/or help find homes for strays and unwanted pets. Start a pet loss support group in your area.

Plant a bush, shrub, tree, or flowers over or near location where body or ashes are buried.

Place a bench with an engraved nameplate and/or inscription beside where pet is buried.

Place ashes in a potted houseplant. Scatter ashes in an area that was special to you and your pet.

Place ashes in a locket with animal's name engraved on locket. (Ashes need to be sealed in an airtight bag and then placed in locket, which must be airtight as well.)

Collect pet's collars, tags, bowls, blankets, etc., and place in a special area in honor of your pet. Also place ashes, sympathy cards, etc., with them.

Send out cards with a photograph of your pet informing those close to you and your pet of your loss. If the animal is not buried near you, take pictures of its grave and place these in a special spot which you can "visit."



Talking To Children About Pet Loss

The loss of a pet can have a dramatic effect on children. Guiding a child through the loss can be very difficult and it is often hard to determine the appropriate way to do so. For many children, the loss of an animal is the first death they experience and the experience can affect how children view death. It is important to explain the death of the pet in a way that gives a realistic explanation of death. Being open and honest with the child can help shape their understanding of death, this includes being open about when the death has occurred and explaining what death looks like. It is best to use concrete terms as opposed to “soft” words. Telling a child that an animal was “put to sleep” or “put down” can create confusion about what it means to sleep or rest. It is preferable to explain euthanasia in more concrete terms, explaining it as something veterinarians do to help animals die peacefully. For younger children it may be easier to explain it as a way to help animals leave their body.

Answer questions honestly. Children may have many questions about death and euthanasia, it is important to answer these questions to help a child come to terms with the death. Unanswered questions may make the grieving process more difficult for a child be as open as possible with your child to help them through the process.

Involve the child. A child should be involved in the death of an animal in a manner they are comfortable with. When preparing for the death of an animal, explaining what death looks like, through euthanasia or natural death, will allow the child to determine how they want to be involved. Understanding that a pet is going to die also allows a child to prepare how they would like to say goodbye.

Allow children to grieve naturally. Children may have any number of responses to the death of their pet, it is important to listen and allow the child to grieve in their own way. Grief looks different for each person and a child cannot be told how to grieve, they need someone to listen and allow their natural process while ensuring them that their feelings are normal and ok.

Memorialize the companion animal. Children may benefit from an active form of grieving that allows them to memorialize their pet. Often a scrap of fur or a paw print will be offered, this can serve as a memorial for the child. Children may also find comfort in making a scrapbook, drawing a picture, or writing a letter to the pet. Making time to talk about the pet and share stories can help a child through their grieving process.

Talk openly. Often we feel that we should be sad about the grief, we can also share memories that make us happy. Allowing time to talk about the deceased pet can help balance out the grief with laughter and can help children through their own grieving process.

Maintain routine. Caring for a pet often involves a level of routine in a child’s life. The death of a pet can interrupt the child’s routine. Maintaining a routine helps provide consistency for the grieving process. Bedtimes, naptimes, mealtimes, services, etc. should be maintained. It may be helpful to integrate a time to memorialize a pet into the routine. For instance, if a certain time in the evening was devoted to pet care, it can become a time of remembrance. The family could light a memorial candle or share stories to honor the pet.

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Growing From The Death Of A Companion Animal

Everyone experiences death of their companion animal in their personal way. There are many different theories on the grieving process, none of which is exact for each individual. The following model is a guide for how one may experience the grieving process. People may experience some or all of the phases, people may also move back and forth within the phases to suit their own personal process.

Initial awareness of the loss

This is the phase of “anticipatory grief.” People in this phase realize that they may lose their animal and begin to display symptoms of grief. People begin to prepare for the death of their companion animal and begin to say goodbye

Coping with the loss

This is the phase where death is imminent and people are faced with making end of life decisions including facilitating and supporting the dying process.

Saying Goodbye

People may choose to say goodbye before, during or after the death of their animal. People may choose euthanasia for their pet and may choose to be present or not for the euthanasia. This is also the phase of burials, cremations, commemorative rituals and memorial ceremonies. Ceremonies and rituals are a helpful and meaningful way to pay tribute to the bond you shared with your animal.

Awareness of the loss

People feel the full extent of their loss in this phase. People may experience adjustments in their daily routine which trigger the grief reaction over and over. The reality of the loss is experienced in this phase and people may need additional support from family and friends or other veterinary or human service professionals.

Recovering from the loss

In this phase people redefine their relationships with their deceased animals and are able to talk about the loss of their animal without intense pain and sadness. It becomes easier to remember the good times one had with their animals and the special characteristics that made their animals unique. People are able to adjust to life without the physical presence of their companion animal.

Personal growth through grief

People are able to find meaning in their animal’s death. They are able to grow emotionally and measure their personal development in terms of recovery from the loss. People may be able to welcome new animals into their lives without feeling guilty or having a sense that they have betrayed their animal that has died.

Recommended Books

Adults

- Abercrombie B. (Ed.) (2011). *Cherished: 21 writers on animals they have loved and lost*. New World Library.
- Adamec, C. (2000). *When your pet dies: Dealing with your grief and helping your children cope*. Excel Press.
- Anderson, A. & Anderson, L. (2005). *Rainbows and bridges: An animal companion memorial kit*. New World Library.
- Anderson, M. (1996). *Coping with sorrow on the loss of your pet* (2nd Ed.). Peregrine Press. Bronson, H. (2000). *Dog gone: Coping with the loss of a pet*. Bestsell Publications.
- Congalton, D. (2000). *Three cats, two dogs: One journey through multiple pet loss*. NewSage Press.
- Greene, L. & Landis, J. (2002). *Saying goodbye to the pet you love*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Kowalski, G. (1997). *Goodbye, friend: Healing wisdom for anyone who has ever lost a pet*. Stillpoint Publishing.
- Kowalski, G., Regan, T., & Wolfe, A. (1999). *The souls of animals* (2nd Ed.). Stillpoint Publishing.
- Nieberg, H. & Fisher, A. (1982). *Pet loss: A thoughtful guide for adults and children*. Harper & Row.
- O'Neill, E. (1999). *The last will and testament of an extremely distinguished dog*. Henry Holt & Company.
- Reynolds, R. (2001). *Blessing the bridge: What animals teach us about death, dying, and beyond*. New Sage Press.
- Sife, W. (1993). *The loss of a pet*. Howell Book House.
- Smith, K. (Ed). (1997). *Healing the pain of pet loss: Letters in memoriam*. The Charles Press.
- Tousley, M. (1997). *The final farewell: Preparing for and mourning the loss of your pet*. Pals Publishing.
- Wolfelt, A. (2004). *When your pet dies: A guide to mourning, remembering, and healing*. Companion Press.22



Children

- Buscaglia, L. (1982). *The fall of Freddie the leaf: A story for all ages*. Slack Book Division.
- Cardeccia, K. (2004). *Healing your heart when your animal friend is gone: A children's pet bereavement workbook*. Bree's Gift Publishing.
- Carney, K. (1999). *Our special garden: Understanding cremation*. Dragonfly Publishing.
- Carney, K. (2001). *They're part of the family*. Dragonfly Publishing.
- Davis, C. (2001). *For every cat an angel*. Lighthearted Press.
- Davis, C. (1997). *For every dog an angel*. Lighthearted Press.
- Heegaard, M. (2001). *Saying goodbye to your pet: Children can learn to cope with pet loss*. Fairview.
- Heegaard, M. (1988). *When someone very special dies: Children can learn to cope with grief*. Woodland Press.
- Mellonie, B. (1987). *Lifetimes: The beautiful way to explain death to children*. Bantam Doubleday/Dell Publishing.
- Rogers, F. (1988). *When a pet dies*. Putnam Publishing Group.
- Ross, C. (2005). *Pet loss and children*. Brunner-Routledge
- Rylant, C. (1996). *Cat heaven*. Blue Sky Press.
- Rylant, C. (1995). *Dog heaven*. Blue Sky Press.
- Tousley, M. (1996). *Children and pet loss: A guide for helping*. Pals Publishing.
- Viorst, J. (1971). *The tenth good thing about Barney*. Atheneum.
- Warren, P. (1992). *Where love goes*. Art After Five.
- White, E. B. (1952). *Charlotte's web*. Harper Junior.
- Wilhelm, H. (1985). *I'll always love you*. Crown Publishing Group.
- Wolfelt, A. (1983). *Helping children cope with grief*. Accelerated Development.
- Yue, S. (2012). *Snort's special gift: A family story*. Beaver's Pond Press.

Support Hotlines

- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) National Pet Loss Hotline (877) 474-3310
- IAMS Pet Loss Support Center and Hotline (888) 332-7738
- The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement (APLB) (718)-382-0690 www.aplb.org
- Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets (707) 557-8595 www.pethospice.org
- Rainbow Bridge www.rainbowbridge.com
- Pet Loss Support Pages pet-loss.net/
- Marty Tousley TousleyM@aol.com www.griefhealing.com
- University of Minnesota Veterinary Social Services (612) 624-9372 www.cvm.umn.edu/vmc/aboutVMC/clientsupport.html
- Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement www.aplb.org

Information included in this booklet is adapted from John Schneider's book *Stress, Loss and Grief* (1984) by Laurel Lagoni, M.S. and Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D, and the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center's *Coping With the Loss of Your Companion Animal* (2012) (additional revisions by Rena Ledin, MSW, LGSW) This booklet was written by AEVS and Rena Ledin.



We are deeply sorry for your loss.

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