

Grief and Loss

Grieving the loss of your pet after they die is a natural process. For many of us, our pets are a place of unconditional love and acceptance and are very much members of our families. Sometimes we have wonderful support systems around us that understand the important roles that our pets have had in our families. Others of us are not so lucky, and do not have loved ones around us that know and understand the pain we experience when a beloved pet has died. It is important that you recognize that your grief around your pet's death, is just as important as any other grief experience you have in your lifetime.

What is grief?

Grief occurs in response to the loss of a loved one. Anyone can experience grief and loss; however, individuals are unique in how they experience this event. Grief, itself, is a normal and natural response to loss. It is important to acknowledge and allow the grief to happen because it promotes the healing process. Grief can impact your body, thoughts, and emotions. Some examples of feelings you may have can be found below:

Body	Thoughts	Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Pit” in your stomach• Nausea• Tightness in the throat and/or chest• Oversensitivity to noise• A surreal feeling• Breathlessness• Muscle weakness• Lack of energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disbelief• Confusion• Preoccupation• Sensing the presence of your deceased pet• Thinking you see or hear them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guilt and Self-blame• Fear or Anxious feelings• Anger• Loneliness• Fatigue• Shock• Helplessness• Yearning• Emancipation• Relief

You may also find yourself responding to grief in some of the following ways:

- Crying,
- Difficulty sleeping
- A change in appetite,
- Absent-mindedness,
- Social withdrawal,
- Dreams and nightmares about your pet,
- Avoiding reminders of your pet,
- Wanting to leave all of your pet's belongings right where they left them,
- Trying to stay busy.

How each person grieves will vary. It is important that you allow yourself the space to grieve in the ways that you need to and expect that you will have ups and downs from day to day.

When Grief Feels Unmanageable

When we are bereaved, we are changed by our grief. It is important you know that there is no “correct” way to grieve the loss of a loved one. However, if over time you find that your grief is unmanageable, intrusive, or that you are not able to actively participate in your life it is worthwhile to seek out support.

When to seek professional help for grief:

Contact the Veterinary Social Worker or another professional counsellor if you:

- Feel like life isn't worth living
- Wish you had died with your loved one
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities
- Want support in managing your grief

Supports Available in Saskatoon

- Veterinary Social Work at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine
Contact 306-966-2852
No charge for these services
- Mental Health and Addiction Services Centralized Intake Saskatoon
Contact an intake worker for free counselling at 306-655-7777 or online at Mental Health and Addiction Services Centralized Intake (Saskatoon)
No charge for these services
- Pet loss Support group
1st and 3rd Sunday of each month at the Family Pet Cremation Services – In-City Office
210A 33rd Street East
Contact Bev Ashwin at 306-343-5322
No charge for this service

Online Resources

- The Rainbow Bridge
Rainbowbridge.org
Lists of pet loss resources, Monday Candle Ceremony, list of pet loss books for children and adults, and links to other websites with pet loss resources.
www.petloss.com

- Memorial ideas for pets (and humans). www.perfectmemorials.com
“Handcrafted tributes to the pets we loved.”
www.petsweloved.com
- Memorial jewelry that has cremated remains infused into a beautiful glass bead pendant.
<http://www.sarahjanefisher.blogspot.com/p/jewelry-collection.html>

Books (List adapted from UTK Knoxville VSW Program):

- Anderson, M. (1994). *Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet*, 2nd Edition. Loveland, CO: Alpine Publications.
- Carmack, Betty J. (2003). *Grieving the Death of a Pet*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.
- Kowalski, G. (1997). *Goodbye, Friend: Healing Wisdom for Anyone Who Has Ever Lost a Pet*. Walpole, NH: Stillpoint Publishing.
- Quintana, M. L., Veleba, S. L., King, H. G. (1998). *It's Ok to Cry*. Perrysburg, OH: Mariposa Press.
- Ross, G. J. (2010). *A 30 Day Guide to Healing from the Loss of Your Pet*. Chapel Hill, NC: Broken Heart Press.
- Sife, W. (2005). *The Loss of a Pet*. Hoboken, NJ: Howell Book House.
- Wolfelt, A. D. (2004). *When Your Pet Dies: A Guide to Mourning, Remembering and Healing*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.
- Pet Loss Books for Children
- Cochran, B. (2007). *The Forever Dog*. New York: HarperCollins. Mike and Corky do everything together until one day Corky is gone.
- Demas, C. & Hoyt, A. (2004). *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. After her dog dies, a little girl grieves but continues her life.
- Kramer, J. (2001). *A Gift from Rex: Guiding Children through Life and Loss*. Edina, MS: Beaver's Pond Press, Inc. Suggestions on how to facilitate a child's feelings while providing counsel to adults who are also grieving.
- Morehead, D. (1996). *A Special Place for Charlee: A Child's Companion Through Pet Loss*, Broomfield, CO: Partners in Publishing, LLC. Legitimizing the loss of a child's pet dog.
- Rogers, F. (1988). *When a Pet Dies*. New York: Family Communications, Inc. Talks to children about a pet dying.
- Viorst, J. (1971). *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks. When Barney, the cat, dies the family holds a funeral to remember him.
- Walsh, B. (2011). *Sammy in the Sky*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press. When Sammy, the hound dog's, life is cut short by illness, the girl's family keeps his spirit alive.
- Wilhelm, H. (1985). *I'll Always Love You*. New York: Dragonfly Books. Death of an old pet dog, Elfie.