



## **COPING WITH GRIEF IN PET LOSS**

### **Coping with grief in pet loss**

When we truly care for our pets, they become an integral part of the family, and often a deeply loved companion in everyday life. Pets return our love in immeasurable ways, offering warmth and companionship. When such a beloved pet dies, the sudden sense of loss can be overwhelming, bringing a whole roller-coaster of emotions, such as:

-  Shock and numbness
-  Anger
-  Deep sadness
-  Longing
-  Anguish
-  Anxiety
-  Guilt

..and sometimes the fear that we will never recover or feel normal again.

The severity of these emotions can take us aback, even to the point of thinking "I'm going out of my mind". These feelings and thoughts reflect the depth of pain of separation and, although this is a normal response, it can be hard to bear, particularly in the early days of a pet bereavement.

Grief of any kind is a natural and necessary process. It's a journey which we each face at different times during life, and it is certainly not a process that we can simply 'get over'. Grief needs to be recognised for what it is – a natural reaction to the loss of a loved one, be that a person or pet.

It is important to allow ourselves the time and space to grieve fully and to release the many emotions that arise, and to talk through the troubling thoughts and anxieties that grief can bring.

It's natural for everyone to cry during grief, whether man, woman or child. Indeed, tears are a necessary release during this emotionally turbulent time.

Shock usually accompanies grief, making us feel 'all over the place' and 'out of sorts', even disturbing sleep and making us not want to eat for a short while. Therefore it makes good sense to take care of ourselves and 'to be kind to oneself', recognising the significance of the grieving process and how it affects us individually.

It often helps to talk things through with someone who understands what we are going through, or who at least recognises the significance of the loss we endure. This could be a close friend, relative or maybe a pet bereavement counsellor or befriender, as offered by some animal welfare organisations. Some people find they need to visit their general practitioner, especially if they have a condition such as depression that is likely to be affected by an emotional upset.

Whilst it is wise to allow ourselves the freedom to express what we feel, there may be times when we need to be just a little firm, but gently so, with ourselves – when we can – to begin to lift ourselves up from the anguish and sadness we experience. As one lady reflected after the loss of her beloved dog, Max:

*"I was totally distraught for days when Max died, and I cried and cried – on my own, with my husband, on the 'phone to my friends, and with my sister. But after a while, I remembered how Max used to look at me when I'd been upset. He would look very anxious – he didn't like to see me upset. So I tried each day to not stay down for too long, because I knew Max would want me to start to be happy again. It was difficult to do this, especially at first, as I had started to feel very low, but I wanted to get through this in memory of Max as much as for my own sake. Of course, I still miss him terribly, but now when the sadness threatens to descend on me, I try to focus on the good times we shared, and there were many of these, and then I begin to feel a bit stronger. I think of him running across the field, full of joy, and how he'd love to share adventures with me, and this lightens my heart making me thankful for the wonderful time we had together."*

Grief takes the time it needs, but within the process there comes a quiet healing and eventually a settlement to the fact that 'life moves on' and sometimes our beloved companions move on before we do. We may always miss those whom we have loved and lost, but in our hearts and minds we can settle to the special times we shared and cherish the many memories gifted to us within our journey together.

One of the hardest things can be 'to let go'; however we can each find our unique way of doing so. It may help to remember that our beloved pets will always stay close in our hearts and minds. No one can ever diminish the special bond shared between a person and their pet – this can live on in the memory for the rest of our lives.

In closing, please remember that it is totally natural to grieve for the loss of a beloved pet, and through your care for your companion animal over the time you spent together, you helped to make the world a better place for animals in the world.



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