

## Saying Goodbye to a Beloved Equine Friend



Grief is a difficult subject but an important one, and understanding the process may well help to bring some peace of mind during this turbulent time. Because any significant shock, such as news of impending loss or grief, is likely to cause major disruption to the ongoing everyday normality of your life, you may find that your overall sense of stability is temporarily 'out of order' and you're left desperately trying to piece your life back together.

### **Preparing for loss**

If you are preparing for the inevitable loss of a much-loved equine companion, staying in close contact with your vet team will allow you to talk through any worries and concerns as they arise, and keep you best informed about what to expect as your horse's condition progresses. For example, it can help to settle the mind to find out what you can do yourself to keep your horse comfortable, what to look out for – such as certain behavioural changes or specific symptoms – and when to seek veterinary advice. Be sure to know how to get hold of the vet team urgently. Staying focused on your horse's needs can help you through this potentially emotionally traumatic time, and there is some comfort in knowing that you're doing everything you can for your beloved equine friend. If euthanasia is needed, it is important to plan ahead and get the practicalities in place to ensure that everything is done as you would wish and to avoid any further stress from having to make vital decisions in a rush.

### **Understanding and Coping with Grief**

Grief of any kind is a natural and necessary process. It's a journey which everyone faces at different times during life, and it's certainly not something to 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 animal.

On one level it may seem obvious in that losing someone you love is going to leave a huge gap in your life, but in an attempt to deepen the understanding, the following is one way of looking at this process.

We each have our own day-to-day routine which comprises the holding patterns we've formed up during our lives. Obviously these patterns change over time, but at any given moment they allow a level of stability and easement, and therefore, to some degree, a harmony. This is the case even if our life seems anything but harmonious because at least it is what we are used to and familiar with.

Shock and grief cause a major disruption to these holding patterns, thereby disturbing one's ongoing harmony or 'normalness'. One way of considering this is by analogy: think of your daily routine as being made up of the many facets fitting neatly together, like a jigsaw puzzle, forming the overall picture that describes your life. Each piece is an integral part of the whole, including your relationships and everyone whom you value and care about. A significant shock, such as a death or the devastating news of terminal illness of a loved one, causes the many pieces of your life to come

apart – as though the jigsaw puzzle, previously intact, has now been dashed to the ground, scattering into separate components. Then the overall picture, which up to now has been familiar and secure with the normal interconnectedness of your everyday goings-on, disappears. So, in effect you may feel as though your life is suddenly ‘in pieces’.

At first, you’ll need time to take on board what has happened. Even when distressing news was expected the actuality often brings shock, which can make you feel numb or think ‘this can’t be happening’. Shock can make you feel ‘all over the place’ and ‘out of sorts’, often disturbing sleep and appetite; therefore it makes good sense to take extra care of yourself during this process. It is worth knowing that certain medical conditions can be exacerbated by shock and emotional upset, and it is therefore sometimes necessary to seek advice from healthcare professionals.

It is important to give yourself the time and space to work through the many emotions – to allow yourself to *feel what you feel*. Try not to censure these feelings but to release them as they arise. This might mean a lot of tears, perhaps anguish, deep sadness or maybe feelings of anger, all of which are natural and normal parts of grief. So rather than bottling things up for fear of appearing weak or unable to cope, recognise that you’re going through a significant process which mustn’t be rushed, and that it can help tremendously to talk things through with someone whom you know will understand.

However difficult it seems at times, know that within the process there comes a quiet healing, and eventually a settlement to the fact that life moves on – and that sometimes our beloved companions must 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 holding onto the special times we shared and cherish the many memories gifted to us within our journey together.

**Other organisations which offer support to those suffering animal bereavement:**

[www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk) – Friends at the End Scheme - The British Horse Society will ensure that no horse owner has to face the loss of their equine companion alone

[www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk) – Pet Bereavement Support by telephone and email

<http://departedfriend.wordpress.com/about-df/> - Telephone support and newsletter

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