

Your Pet Loss Guide

a personalized tribute to your pet



Rainbow Bridge

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor. Those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by. The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent. His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....

~Author unknown



In memory of

who left us this day







Our pets are a very important part of our lives. They are our companions and partners in life. They usually know us better than anyone else. We hug them when we are feeling sad, and they make us laugh with all the silly things they do. We provide for them in sickness and in health, and they are there for us as we pass through the stages of our own lives. Our bond with them is undeniable; it can only be expected that their loss will affect us deeply.

This booklet is here to aid you in the loss of your pet. Please use it as a personalized tribute to them and look back upon it anytime you need. At the end of this booklet is a list of other readings and websites that can be of help.





Common Feelings After the Death of a Beloved Pet

Although each of us experiences grief in different ways, there are common signs. The important thing to realize is that feelings like these are normal and expected to some degree. Something that always resonates with us is how special each loss is and how unique the feelings that come forward each time are. Keep in mind that while some people may take these feelings on quickly, others may not experience them for some time. Please reach out to our staff if you need help in any way.

- ♥ Shock and disbelief
- ♥ Disorganization and confusion
- ♥ Physical symptoms
- ♥ Explosive emotions
- ♥ Sadness and depression
- ♥ Relief and release

Factors That Can Complicate Grief

Our lives are shaped by our experiences and everyone is unique. So much will be related to the relationship you had with your pet, your unique personality, and other stresses going on in life. How you will move forward into your mourning will depend on many factors like the ones listed below.

- ♥ Recently experienced other losses
- ♥ A history of multiple losses at the same time
- ♥ Little support from family and friends
- ♥ No previous experience with significant losses
- ♥ Feelings of guilt or responsibility concerning the death
- ♥ Witnessed a traumatic death

There are likely other factors, both big and small, that are affecting your unique grief journey. Take some time to think about what they are.



Taking Care of You

Caring for your pet through treatment for a terminal illness and death can be very stressful. You may focus so much of your energy on your pet that you neglect yourself and your health.

When your pet dies, you will grieve. Grief is an emotionally and physically exhausting experience that can take a toll on an already exhausted you. During this time, it is important to take care of yourself. Here are some ideas to help you:

- ♥ Surround yourself with supportive friends and family who understand the relationship you shared with your pet. If you find you meet people who do not understand, take heart in knowing that someday they will.
- ♥ Give yourself the time and space to grieve. Keeping busy and putting it off will only complicate things. You don't have to face it all at once, but make sure you allow yourself time to cry and simply be sad.
- ♥ Reach out to your spiritual faith. Take strength in it....maybe more than you ever needed before.
- ♥ Get outside and do some of those things you used to do when your pet was still with you. Your pet likely kept you quite active: the daily walk, the play time in the backyard, etc. Without them, it is easy to fall into a quieter routine. Exercise may help to clear your mind and rejuvenate the body.
- ♥ Let others assist you during this difficult time. Seek out a support group or a mental health professional, if needed.
- ♥ Some people take years to get another pet, if at all. Others will be ready very quickly. Listen to your heart and be ready. After all, the new pet you bring in to love deserves the same level of love as your last sweetheart. You need to be ready to give it.
- ♥ Eat and drink. This may sound silly, but many people in grief forget the basics. Provide yourself with healthy foods and plenty of water. Keep up your strength to fight off illness. Make sure any other remaining companion pets do the same.



Celebrating Your Pet's Life

There are many ways you can celebrate the life of your pet. We have funerals for human loved ones. Did you know you can do the same for your pet? Ceremonies like this can be large events or small ones like saying a few heartfelt words in remembrance. Here are a few ideas:

- ♥ Create a memorial table. You can display items that were special to your pet and you: food dishes, collars and leashes, brushes, toys, photos, and more. You can also make it a special place to hold any cremated remains, special keepsakes, or sympathy cards. Places like this can remain up for a short period of time or forever. Children tend to really appreciate these special places of remembrance.
- ♥ Gather at your pet's favorite place like the park, down by the lake, etc and reflect on your life together. Invite friends and family to share in the experience. You can tell stories, give a memorial reading, spread cremated remains, and more.
- ♥ Have a candle-lighting ceremony. You can place a large candle on a table surrounded by photos of your pet (and others). Invite loved ones to bring smaller votive candles of their own beloved pet too. When a story is shared, the candle can be lit in honor.
- ♥ Create a memory scrapbook or box. So many of us take pictures of our pets over the years. Why not put them all together in a memory book or photo collage? You can chronicle your pet's life journey from beginning to end. If you have children, they may want to include a hand-drawn illustration too.
- ♥ Plant a tree, bush, or flowers. This space can be a beautiful place to visit and look upon in remembrance.
- ♥ Make a donation in memory of your pet. There are many organizations that support animal-related causes and all of them would welcome your gift. Many will post your pet's name on their materials in gratitude and share your pet's story with members of their staff.
- ♥ Have a funeral. Just like for humans, pets can be honored the same way. You can have a funeral at your own home or we can arrange one for you. Funerals can be small and intimate to more involved including invitations, chaplains, newspaper announcements, balloon releases, and more. The important thing to remember is that funerals can happen anytime following the death itself, even after cremation or burial has taken place.

Whatever you choose to do, the reason behind it is to help you, and those who loved your pet, to feel closer to them. By remembering, we can move forward and heal. No gesture is too big or too small if it feels right in your heart.



Memorial Readings

Loving creator of all that is, we turn to you in prayer at this time of remembrance. The link of life that bound us to _____ has been broken, but feelings of love continue to bind us together. We give thanks for the gift of _____ life, companionship, and memory. Help us understand how our lives have been formed and shaped by what _____ was and did. May his/her memory be a blessing. As long as we live, _____ too will live, for they are part of us as long as we remember them.



May I find the strength to mourn with dignity.
May I find the strength to mourn in peace.
May I find the strength to mourn without shame or embarrassment.
May I find the strength to mourn out loud and cry until my crying is done.
May I find the strength to mourn with patience and be tolerant to move through this at my own pace.
May I find the strength to accept that I am in mourning and be at peace with that while my heart mends.
May mine be a good mourning, one that cleanses my heart and renews my inner being.
May my memories of my beloved _____ comfort me so that I may be ready to love again.



Through _____, we learned compassion.
Through _____, we learned patience.
Through _____, we experienced joy.
Through _____, we learned to think about someone other than ourselves and we learned both giving and forgiving.
Through _____, we learned about friendship and loyalty.
Through _____, we learned about innocence and humility.
Through _____, we were given the greatest gift of all, unconditional love.
Through this beloved animal, we were shown the best qualities of humankind and found that the highest virtue of all is kindness to others. As we go forth from this day, may these important lessons be within our hearts. It is in sharing them with others that we truly honor the memory of _____ and keep his/her spirit in our lives.



In the rising of the sun and in its' going down, We will remember.
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, We will remember.
In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, We will remember.
In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn, We will remember.
When we are weary and in need of strength, We will remember.
When we are lost and sick at heart, We will remember.
When we have joys we yearn to share, We will remember.
So long as we live, our companions, too, shall live for they are ever a part of us.
We will remember.



The Pet Lover's Code

Ten inalienable rights after the death of a special companion animal

Taken from 'When Your Pet Dies: A guide to mourning, remembering, and healing.'
By Dr. Alan Wolfelt • Center for Loss and Life Transition • Fort Collins, Colorado

Though you should reach out to others as you journey through grief, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain “rights” no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. You have the right to grieve the death of a pet. You loved your pet. Your pet loved you. You have every right to grieve this death. You need to grieve this death. You also need to mourn this death (express your grief outside of yourself).
2. You have the right to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk about your grief. Other pet lovers who have experienced the death of a pet often make good listeners at this time. If at times you don't feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.
3. You have the right to feel a variety of emotions. Confusion, anger, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey after the death of a pet. Feelings aren't right or wrong; they just are.
4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. After the death of a pet, your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel like doing.
5. You have the right to experience “griefbursts.” Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural.
6. You have the right to make use of ritual. After a pet dies, you can harness the power of ritual to help you heal. Plan a ceremony that includes everyone who loved your pet.



7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality. At times of loss, it is natural to turn to your faith or spirituality. Engaging your spirituality by attending church or other place of worship, praying, or spending time alone in nature may help you better understand and reconcile your loss.
8. You have the right to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, “Why did my pet die? Why this way? Why now?” Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. Ask them anyhow.
9. You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of a special companion animal. Instead of ignoring your memories, find ways to capture them and treasure them always.
10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief after the death of a pet may not happen quickly. Remember, grief is best experienced in “doses.” Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of a beloved pet changes your life forever.

Also by Alan Wolfelt

Understanding Your Grief:

Ten essential touchstones for finding hope and healing your heart.

ISBN 978-1-879651-35-7, 176 pages

The Journey Through Grief:

Reflections of healing, 2nd Edition.

ISBN 978-1-879651-11-1, 176 pages

Healing Your Grieving Heart:

100 practical ideas.

ISBN 978-1-879651-25-8, 128 pages





Canine Grief

When one dog dies, owners will often notice some changes in the pets that are left behind. They may become aloof or lethargic. Some may stop eating or become clingy. Based on these outward signs, it appears that dogs do grieve when their canine companion dies.

When a person experiences the death of a human loved one, we may know he feels grief based on what he says. Very often, however, it is how he reacts or what he does that tells us he is suffering. He loses his focus, becomes listless and disoriented, doesn't eat, and becomes disinterested in what is happening around him. The person may cry or go without sleep or sleep more than usual.

An animal that is experiencing the loss of another animal companion may react similarly. "Some animals can actually become depressed when they lose a loved one," says Monique D. Chretien, MSc, AHT, Animal Behavior Consultant. "They show symptoms similar to humans such as loss of interest in their favorite activities and sleeping more than usual. However, sometimes dogs may distance themselves from the family and sleep more than usual when they are ill, so you should consult with your veterinarian before seeing a behaviorist if your dog exhibits symptoms such as these."

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals conducted a Companion Animal Mourning Project in 1996. The study found that 36 percent of dogs ate less than usual after the death of another canine companion. About 11 percent actually stopped eating completely. About 63 percent of dogs vocalized more than normal or became quieter. Study respondents indicated that surviving dogs changed the quantity and location of sleep. More than half the surviving pets became more affectionate and clingy with their caregivers. Overall, the study revealed that 66 percent of dogs exhibited four or more behavioral changes after losing a pet companion.

If your dog shows signs that she is grieving the loss of an animal or human family member, provide her with more attention and affection. "Try to take her mind off it by engaging her in a favorite activity," says Chretien. If she enjoys human company, invite friends that she likes to visit and spend time with her. Use environmental enrichment techniques, such as toys, to help keep her busy. Hide toys or treats at her favorite spots for her to find during the day.

If your dog is vocalizing more or howling, don't give her treats to distract her or you might unintentionally reinforce the howling. "Giving attention during any behavior will help to reinforce it, so be sure you are not reinforcing a behavior that you don't like," says Chretien. "Give attention at a time when your dog is engaging in behaviors that you do like, such as when she is resting quietly or watching the squirrels. As the pain of the loss begins to subside, so should the vocalizing, as long as it is related to the grieving process."

If you are thinking about adding another dog, wait until you and your surviving dog have adjusted to the loss. Forcing your dog to get to know a newcomer will only add stress to their already anxiety-ridden emotional state. And be patient. Your dog may miss the canine companion as much as you do.



Feline Grief

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When a companion cat dies, owners often notice behavioral changes in their remaining cats. Some of these are due to adapting to a changed hierarchy, but other behavioral changes are due to a sense of loss. Some researchers believe a cat's concept of death is similar to a young child's concept of death, i.e. they lack the concept of death being a permanent state. Cats appear to comprehend a state of someone not being alive - body temperature changes, smell changes, etc. Therefore cats probably have some comprehension that something dead cannot become alive again.

If the cats were sociable, the surviving cats may search, cry out (yowl or frequently meow), or even pine. Other changes include sleep pattern changes, loss of interest in favorite activities, withdrawal ("sulking") or conversely separation anxiety, depression, and eating pattern changes. Because stress hormones are secreted, there may be physical effects including vomiting or diarrhea, hair-loss (often through over-grooming since grooming is a comforting activity), inappropriate toileting, anorexia, or weight loss. Stress can often unveil an underlying medical condition and it is important to have it addressed by your veterinarian. They will need individual attention and reassurance. If they were unsociable or indifferent to each other, the survivors might simply rearrange themselves into a new hierarchy, dividing up their former companion's territory between them. Sometimes the surviving cat(s) blossom if they were previously bottom of the pecking order. Cats are not hierarchical in the same way as dogs, but there are still boss-cats and under-cats.

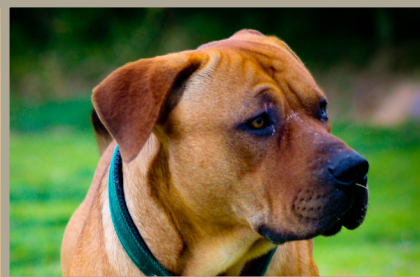
On average, the healing process takes between two weeks to six months. During this time, a grieving cat will need reassurance and attention. This doesn't mean forcing attention on a withdrawn cat, but it does mean little things such as offering food treats, catnip, or new toys to draw a withdrawn cat out of its' shell or to reduce a suddenly clingy cat's over-attachment. If the cat is severely affected or shows no signs of overcoming its' grief, your vet may prescribe anti-anxiety medication.

If the cat is now on its' own, some owners ask if they should get it a new companion to prevent loneliness. While this may work for the more sociable and extrovert breeds, it doesn't work for all. The new cat will be seen as a stranger and a territorial invader. For this reason, if you anticipate the death of a pet, it is usually better to introduce a new companion before the ailing pet dies to allow the newcomer to form a relationship with the existing cats. If your cat has already passed away, give the remaining cats time to adjust before introducing someone new, and do it gradually to avoid upsetting the household.

In summary, it is important to allow your cat(s) left behind the chance to grieve in their own way and to support them in anyway necessary. The only time human intervention is needed is if illness presents that warrants veterinary care. By understanding the needs of your feline companion(s), you can help make the healing process easier.



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 20 equally spaced lines extending across the width of the page.





Little Souls

With clumsy legs and a silly heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of children when there can be none,
Of our own sweet daughter or playful son.
When our hand is too firm or our voice too cold,
They forgive us our sins and put love in our souls.

With sturdy legs and a willing heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of trusted friend with love to give
When too lonely seems our life to live.
With pleading eyes beneath a noble head,
Asking only for praise, or tattered bed.

With trembling legs and a trying heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of one who takes their last breath,
To willingly go before us in death.
They teach us how to live and die,
Never complaining, never asking why.
Tail slow to wag, purr too soft to be heard,
Their dying wish, but one kind word.

With silent legs and a renewed heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of greeter to a better place,
Should our own lives be so noble, so full of grace.

A long lost toy found beneath a chair,
Reminds us of how we used to care.
For those of willing heart and sturdy legs,
At our tables who no longer beg,
For they have found a softer lap,
On which they wait while they nap,
With One who grants their souls to rest,
Souls indeed, because our Lord needs pets.

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Recommended Readings

The Rainbow Bridge. Paul C. Dehm, Running Tide Press, 1997

A Special Place for Charlee: A Child's Companion Through Pet Loss. Debbie Morehead, Partners in Publishing LLC, 1996

Cat Heaven and Dog Heaven. Cynthia Rylant, The Blue Sky Press, 1995 and 1997

Animals Make Us Human. Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009

The Human-Animal Bond and Grief. Laurel Lagoni, Carolyn Butler, Suzanne Hetts, W.B. Saunders Company, 1994

Grieving the Death of a Pet. Betty J. Carmack, Augsburg Books, 2003

The Last Walk: Reflections on Our Pets at the End of Their Lives. Jessica Pierce, The University of Chicago Press, 2012

Beezer and Boomer: Lessons on Living and Dying From my Canine Brothers. Doug Koktavy, B Brothers Press, 2010

Recommended Websites

The Association of Pet Loss and Bereavement
www.aplb.org

The International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care
www.iaahpc.org

Pet Loss Grief Support and Candle Ceremony
www.petloss.com

Pet Loss Support Page
www.pet-loss.net



A Most Sincere Thank You

All of us thank you for the love and commitment you shared with your companion through life. We understand how much they gave to you as well.

Our animals teach us so much and we carry those lessons with us forever. Over the years, we have been blessed to meet so many wonderful people like yourself and hear stories of funny habits, of great adventures, and of beautiful friendships. All of us are the better for it. We have been honored to assist your family during this most sacred time.





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