



## Why You May Need Additional Support

**Laurel Lagoni, M.S.**

When your pet dies, there are several reasons you may have a more intense grief response than others. This is nothing to feel ashamed about! There are dozens of life situations that serve to complicate grief. And, there are dozens of resources available to help you sort through your feelings.

If you see yourself in two or more of the following descriptions, you may be experiencing what experts call 'complicated' grief. This means that the circumstances surrounding your pet's death may have made grieving a bit more difficult or prolonged for you.



(Photo from Dreamstime.com)

Your grief may be complicated if you:

- haven't had previous experience with a significant loss or death
- have experienced several other recent losses
- have a personal history of multiple losses
- feel you have very little support from friends or family
- had an exceptionally close bond with your pet (you considered your pet to be like a child or your pet was your primary source of emotional comfort and support)
- lost your pet suddenly or unexpectedly
- witnessed your pet's painful or traumatic death
- weren't present at your pet's death and are having a difficult time accepting that death actually did occur
- pet disappeared or was lost and you feel you must continue to search for him or her
- feel responsible for your pet's death

- Symbolically link your pet to another person, relationship, or time in your life that you have already lost. This may cause you to re-experience your previous loss again.
- Have poor coping skills, in general, or are clinically depressed/under the care of a doctor or mental health professional
- Believe that society or your workplace, in general, trivializes the role your pet played in your life and may penalize you for taking time to grieve

Our society tends to believe that the simple passing of time can heal our emotional wounds just as it heals our physical injuries. Yet, research and clinical experience shows that the passing of time isn't always enough to heal the wounds inflicted by loss. True emotional healing often requires grief education, understanding and support from others, and the addition of new, effective coping skills.

It's never too late to seek help. If grief seems to be complicating your life, talk to your veterinarian today and ask for a referral to a pet loss support group or mental health professional in your area. For information about how to contact a qualified counselor via telephone or the internet, visit the Veterinary Wisdom® Support Center on the website for pet parents at [www.veterinarywisdom.com](http://www.veterinarywisdom.com)



(Photo from Istockphoto.com)