



Clients Who May Need Additional Help

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Several variables can help you predict which of your clients may have more intense grief responses when their companion animals die and thus require more of your time. These red flags may also alert you to which clients may benefit from referrals to one or more human service professionals for further counseling and ongoing support.

- Cases that involve children
 - Clients who consistently or exclusively anthropomorphize (assign human characteristics) their pets.
 - Clients who have invested significant amounts of time, energy, and money in their companion animals' treatment
 - Clients who have recently experienced other significant losses and/or stressors (e.g., death of a family member, major illness, divorce, loss of a job, recent move, birth of a child)
 - Clients who identify their companion animals as their children, best friends, or primary source of support
 - Clients who live alone and cannot identify other sources of emotional support
 - Clients who may be clinically depressed or those who make references to suicide, homicide, abuse, or violence
- Clients who symbolically link their pets to another person, relationship, or time in their lives. Symbolic links often develop from previous losses and grief that is still unresolved.

If clients seem to meet two or more of these criteria, educate them about the emotional support services available in your area as early in your relationship as possible, rather than waiting until after their pet dies. Clinical experience shows grief counseling and emotional support can yield the greatest benefits for pet parents when they take place before the death of a companion animal.



(photo from istockphoto.com)

*Adapted from Morehead D., Lagoni L., et al. *Guidelines for Bond-Centered Practice*, 2001. (Out of print.)