



Supporting Your Clients' Grief by Helping Them Memorialize Their Pet

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When your clients experience the deaths of their beloved pets, they are likely to feel significant grief, especially if they were especially bonded with those pets. It may be hard to watch them grieve and you may feel powerless to help them. However, one very important way to support your clients is to encourage them to memorialize their pets.

Memorialization is the process by which the griever acknowledges and honors the life that was lived. It is a critical part of the grieving process because it allows grievers to express their emotions in healthy ways and to accept the reality of a loss. One of the biggest challenges we all face with loss is finding ways to establish new “connections” with our loved ones in the face of death. Memorialization helps us to do this and gives us healthy outlets to work through our grief. When we can make our emotions “active” we are better able to move through our losses. Memorialization also allows us to tap into our creativity and unique expressions of love for our pets.

When encouraging your clients to memorialize, it is important to explain to them some of these benefits and to let them know that you support them. You may even choose to self-disclose about a time when you honored a loved one (clients respond very well if you are willing to tell your own stories and experiences). If you feel that self-disclosure is too personal, you can give them some general ideas and some time to decide how they can best pay tribute to their companion animal. People need to memorialize their pets in ways that are meaningful *for them*. When supporting clients, avoid being judgmental about their ideas, even if what they propose to do seems strange or unusual to you.

Conversations about memorializing pets often take place in a Comfort Room. The soothing environment puts everyone more at ease and the privacy allows clients to express their emotions as they consider your suggestions. While memorializing can be explained during pre-death consultations, the conversation is also appropriate for the minutes immediately following a pet's death or euthanasia.

Suggested Memorialization Ideas for Your Clients

- Use photographs to create an album or chronicle a pet's life
- Make a video of a pet's daily life, including the pet's routine behaviors like eating, sleeping, and playing

- Write a story, poem, or song, etc. about and/or dedicated to the pet
- Have a plaque made in honor of the pet (many pet hospitals create their own memorial plaques and clients can have their pet's name engraved)
- Make a donation to a worthy animal organization (or to your pet hospital) in honor of their pet
- Plant a tree, flowers, or bush in a meaningful place
- Volunteer at a humane society or other organization that fosters homeless animals
- Keep pet tags, putting them on a keychain
- Make something in honor of the pet (sculpture, painting, etc.)
- Start a pet loss support group in the community
- Place ashes in a houseplant or scatter them in a meaningful place
- Make a ClayPaws[®] print as a lasting keepsake
- Some clients want to give back to you or your pet hospital as a way of thanking you for your support and care of their pet—some possible ways they can do that are:
 - ◇ Donate books or other reading material that you would like for your hospital (children's books on pet loss and grief are especially helpful)
 - ◇ Donate some money to create a special client subsidy fund that can assist truly needy clients or help in special situations such as animal abuse cases
 - ◇ If a client wants to donate a large sum of money, you may consider buying some new hospital equipment or making an improvement to the pet hospital in memory of the pet

What About Funerals or Memorial Services for Pets?

Some people feel that holding a memorial service for an animal is ‘over the top’ as a way to deal with pet loss. In fact, this is an excellent and very necessary way for people to express their grief. People need emotionally healthy ways to express their grief. A memorial service not only provides this, but also creates a loving environment where the grievers can garner some much needed support. This is a time when the grievers can be around people who care and who also feel bonded to the pet. If your clients ask about having a memorial, give them the necessary encouragement and support to do so.