



The 3 H's of Coping with Holiday Grief after Your Pet Has Died

Laurel Lagoni, M.S.

It's never easy to lose your beloved pet and experiencing pet loss during the holiday season can make your feelings of sadness even more difficult to bear. Holidays can bring so many reminders of your pet, like the ornament you bought because it looked just like your cat or the scraps of Thanksgiving turkey you always saved for your dog.

When grief comes upon you this holiday season, it may be helpful to remember the 3 H's of coping with the loss of a pet.

Harvest

Part of grieving is gathering your memories and mementos like a farmer harvests a crop. And then giving thanks.

You may have well-meaning friends and family who have advised you to get rid of everything that reminds you of your pet. Yet, most people find that keeping, preserving, and displaying these objects brings them much more comfort.

If your pet's belongings bring you tremendous comfort, please allow yourself to continue to live with them around you. And feel free to be creative! Float roses in your dog's water bowl, buckle your cat's collar onto your key chain, encase a favorite photo, toy, and your ClayPaws® paw print in a shadowbox, make a scrapbook, or nestle a beautiful urn containing your pet's cremains among your holiday decorations.



There is no right or wrong way to deal with your memories and mementos and there is nothing morbid about keeping your memories close. Your memories and mementos are unique and personal to you. How you choose to preserve them should be unique and personal to you, as well.

Humanity

While you're grieving, please remember that you are a human *being*, not a human *doing*.

If you are keeping yourself extremely busy, you may be trying to distract yourself from your painful feelings of loss and sadness. While this coping method is common, it's not helpful in the long term. *Doing* will only mask your emotional pain for a short while and will usually exhaust you in the process. Allowing yourself to *be* with your feelings of grief is the only way to truly heal.

Loss and grief are common, normal human experiences. Yet, it is rare for us to allow ourselves to be human and to express our memories and feelings as they arise. However, as human *beings*, we are meant to live in the moment and to experience a wide variety and range of emotions and sensations, whatever they might be. If you can allow yourself to grieve how and when you need to, you may be surprised at how quickly and easily you are able to find peace. ➡

(Cont.)

Help

Benjamin Franklin said, “a man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle.”

Grieving can be lonely. Some days, it may seem as though no one else truly understands your loss or is able to help you through the pain you are experiencing. If your grief process has brought you to a place of isolation, it may be helpful to turn your perspective around. Why not heed Ben Franklin’s advice and reach out to help someone else?

Helping others can help you, too! In fact, studies show that people consistently feel better physically and emotionally when they help other people (or animals!) on a regular and frequent basis. Researchers call this phenomena the “helper’s high.” In one study, volunteer helpers described the “helper’s high” as a collection of emotional and physical benefits, including:

- increased energy
- reduced symptoms of stress
- a heightened sense of calm and emotional well-being
- feelings of increased self-worth
- greater feelings of happiness and optimism
- fewer bouts of depression and feelings of helplessness

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During the holiday season, you can find dozens of ways to assist others, no matter where you live. For instance, you can sign up to gather donations for your local food bank or volunteer at your local animal shelter. Studies say that feelings of emotional intensity are not required in order to benefit from helping others. Even simple acts of kindness, like opening a door for someone in need of assistance or walking a busy neighbor’s dog, can be powerful antidotes to the loneliness and isolation of coping with holiday grief.

And, don’t forget that helping also includes helping yourself. Ask your veterinarian about the grief support resources in your area.

If you want to learn more about coping with pet loss and grief, visit www.veterinarywisdompetparents.com to read more articles like this one. 🌍