



Five Ways to Help Yourself (and Others!) through Pet Loss

Laurel Lagoni, M.S.

The death or dying process of a beloved pet may be one of the most stressful events in life. Research says, for many of us, grief for our pets can be equal to the grief we feel when a human companion or relative dies, second only to the pain of losing a spouse or child.

However, most of us know very little about coping effectively with pet loss-related stress. Sure, we know that it's normal to cry (a lot!) and to feel sad and depressed. But, how do we get through it and come out stronger, and maybe a little wiser, on the other end?

Here are five ways you can manage the stress of caring for and, ultimately losing, your pet:

1. Acknowledge Your Loss

Loss is a serious emotional wound. Like physical injury, it requires care and attention in order to heal. Time alone will not heal loss. The most effective way to recover is to admit you are hurting and then create an active process for healing. This might include seeking support, allowing yourself to have "down" days, and creating meaningful memorials.



2. Understand Grief

Grief is the natural and spontaneous response to loss and the normal way to adjust to change. Allowing grief to be present in your life is a necessary process for healing the wounds caused by loss. Like most people, you probably believe the best way to 'get through grief' is to be stoic, strong, and composed. You may also believe that staying busy and keeping your mind off your pet's death is the best way to feel better and to recover. But, research says these beliefs are misguided! Studies reveal that people who refuse to show or express their grief, or those who keep themselves busy and distracted, actually prolong the process of grief and cause their grief to become more complicated. Freely and frequently expressing your grief and making it an active process may actually reduce your healing time.

3. Ask Your Veterinary Team to Guide you Prior to Your Pet's Death

It's hard to make decisions in the midst of a crisis. Yet, when you are facing the imminent death of your pet, there are many decisions that need to be made. When is it really time to say good-bye? Will you and your family be present during your pet's euthanasia? How will you care for your pet's body? Veterinary teams who are trained to deal effectively with pet loss can help you sort through these decisions BEFORE your pet dies. Talk to them. Most veterinarians today know that helping you make decisions before your pet dies can minimize the regrets you may have later about how your pet died. These supportive veterinarians rely on resources, like www.VeterinaryWisdom.com to help.



(Cont.)

4. Ask Others for Support

Support is defined as encouragement, help, or approval. It is also defined as helping another carry all or part of the “weight” and as keeping another from falling, sinking, or failing. During grief, knowing you have the support of others can help keep stress at a manageable level. Support can range from simply listening without judgment to another’s feelings to actually performing many of the griever’s daily tasks (grocery shopping, yard work, and even child care). Asking for support or making time to support others during the grief associated with pet loss is a powerful way to provide care for yourself or for others.

5. Create Memorials or Mementos

There are many ways you can memorialize your pet. You can gather friends and family for a funeral or memorial service or collect your memories into a scrapbook or photo album. You can frame your favorite pictures or write a letter to your pet. Your feelings, thoughts, and specific recollections can be recorded into a journal or you can plant a memorial tree or flower garden in your yard. Videos and ClayPaws® prints are two of the best ways you can create lasting mementos of your pet. After your pet dies, you may find that the most comforting videos are of your pet doing normal, daily things like eating, sleeping, and interacting with you and your family. Don’t wait for special moments, film your pet enjoying daily life. After your pet dies, you may find that having a clay impression of your pet’s paw helps remind you to celebrate the loving bond you shared. You or your veterinarian can make an impression of your pet’s paw so you’ll have a lasting memento of your very special friend.

ClayPaws® Kits are available online at www.veterinarywisdom.com along with many free resources in the Veterinary Wisdom® Resource Center to help you through pet loss.

