



General Pet Loss and Children’s Grief Overview ***Helping Late School-aged Children*** (nine-years-old through 12-years-old)

by Laurel Lagoni, M.S.

This is a basic guide and is intended to help adults as they support children through pet loss and grief.

In General

Children:

- deal with grief differently than adults due to their age and stage of development, but they grieve just as deeply.
- are unique and should be encouraged to grieve in their own, individual ways.
- need to be provided with age appropriate knowledge and understanding about life and death, taught a variety of coping skills, and receive solid emotional support from family and friends.



Getting Specific

When pets die, late school-aged children:

- understand that death is irreversible and happens to everyone.
- are curious and may ask questions that seem shocking and morbid to adults. For instance, they may ask about dismemberment of bodies during autopsies or express interest in body decomposition after burial.
- are capable of sustaining intense periods of grief and can become preoccupied with a particular loss, particularly if they have feelings of abandonment or rejection from a previous loss.
- are capable of, and often want to be involved in discussions and decisions about their pets’ end-of-life care, including euthanasia.
- often cope well with loss and grieve normally and age appropriately when adults include and support them.

Helping Children

Adults can:

- understand that “morbid curiosity” is normal at this age.
- respond to children’s questions honestly and calmly, without making children feel guilty or wrong for asking.
- allow and encourage children to deal with anxiety and curiosity by taking action, like viewing their pets’ bodies, visiting crematories, helping to dig their pets’ graves, or planning and participating in creating their pets’ memorials.
- provide children with opportunities to talk about how they feel and answer their questions honestly and truthfully.
- allow children to see adults expressing emotions in normal, healthy ways so children know it is okay for them to be sad, angry, etc., as well.

The amount of time children spend with their pets, as well as the emotional comfort they receive from their pets, deepens the bonds between them. Young children who think of their pets as “best friends” are often more attached than those who don’t think of pets this way.

For more information, visit the Veterinary Wisdom® Resource Center at www.veterinarywisdom.com