



General Pet Loss and Children's Grief Overview *Helping Teens*

(13-years-old through 17-years-old)

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

In General

Teens:

- 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, teenagers:

- are self-conscious and hyper-emotional.
- can have frequent mood swings and contradictory thought processes.
- want to be treated like adults one day, but reassured like younger children the next.
- are devastated by a pet's death one day, but say it's "no big deal" the next day.
- miss the cuddling and physical closeness that pets provide because they often feel awkward about being hugged or touched by other people.



Helping Children

Adults can:

- be cautious about overburdening teens with responsibilities. Teenagers are often asked to care for younger siblings, grandparents, and even household chores during a family loss or crisis. If this burden is prolonged, their own grief processes may be interrupted or delayed.
- be careful about triggering feelings of rebelliousness by insisting that teens grieve in specific, "socially acceptable" ways or within certain time frames.
- allow and encourage teenagers to view their pets' bodies, visit crematories, help dig their pets' graves, or plan and participate in creating their pets' memorials.
- provide teenagers with opportunities to talk about how they feel and answer their questions honestly and truthfully.
- allow teens to see adults expressing emotions in normal, healthy ways so teens know it is also okay for them to cry, feel sad, express anger, etc..

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