



Tough Questions from Kids about Pet Loss

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It can be challenging to know how to answer the tough questions children ask about pet loss. The following questions are commonly asked by children between the ages of five and 11. Each question is paired with a **recommended** answer. These answers are merely suggestions. Please experiment until you are comfortable with your own version of the words and phrases.

While talking with children, use a calm, soothing voice and keep your body posture and facial expressions calm and open. Sit or kneel down so you are eye-to-eye with children and use their names often. Don't lecture or tell them too much about your own experiences with death or pet loss. Most children have short attention spans and a limited understanding of loss and death. Keep your answers to their questions simple and brief.

“Why can't we save Pepper?”

Suggested Answer: *“We have all worked together to do everything we could for Pepper. Pepper has a disease (or injury) that is so powerful that we can't make it go away. The important parts of Pepper's body have stopped working and we can't help him stay alive any longer. The kindest thing we can do is help Pepper die peacefully and without any more pain.”*

Sometimes the truth is that you simply can't afford to spend the amount of money it would take to truly “save” your pet. Yet, telling children that you can't save your pet because you don't have enough money or because the veterinary care required is too expensive puts everyone in a bad light. A more helpful way to deal with a financial reality is to begin your pet's treatment by designating a certain amount of money that you can afford to spend. Then, talk to your children and clearly describe what that amount of money will allow you to do for your pet. This helps children realize that you truly are doing “everything you can do” for your pet and that, when those funds are exhausted, a different (but still kind and humane) decision will be made.



“Will it hurt Pepper to die?”

Suggested Answer: *“No, we will help Pepper die so he will stop hurting. Helping Pepper die is called euthanasia. Euthanasia means we will help Pepper die peacefully and without pain, with all of us there to say good-bye.”*

“Will Pepper be afraid to die?”

Suggested Answer: *“Pepper won't feel afraid because we will all gather around him, talk to him and pet him. When we all feel it is the right time to say good-bye, our veterinarian will give Pepper a drug that will make his heart stop beating and his lungs stop breathing. To us, it will seem like Pepper drifts off to sleep —>*

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and that's how Pepper will feel, too. It's important for us to remember that Pepper won't be able to wake up again. The drug will make his body die, but his love will always live on with us."

"What will happen to Pepper's body?"

Suggested Answer: *"We can take Pepper's body with us and bury it in the ground, either at home or in a cemetery for pets. Or, we can cremate Pepper's body. Cremation means Pepper's fur, skin, and bones are heated up to a very high temperature until they are changed into very small pieces, becoming like sand or even ashes. We can keep these remains in a special container or we can scatter them outside in one of Pepper's favorite places. If we don't choose either of these for Pepper, we can leave his body with the veterinary clinic and they will take care of it for us."*

If children ask about your veterinarian's method of body care, please be honest. Ask your veterinarian about the method used. If it is mass cremation or mass burial in your local landfill, tell your children the truth. Just like adults, children deserve complete and accurate information in order to help make decisions they feel are right for their pets.

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"Can we get a new dog today?"

Suggested Answer: *"That's a decision our family needs to talk about and make together. Some families decide they want to take a few days or weeks to say good-bye to their pet and let their sad feelings pass. Other families feel ready to have a new dog right away. When do you think you would be ready for another dog?"*

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