



General Pet Loss and Children’s Grief Overview

Helping Young Adults

(18-years-old through 21+)

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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

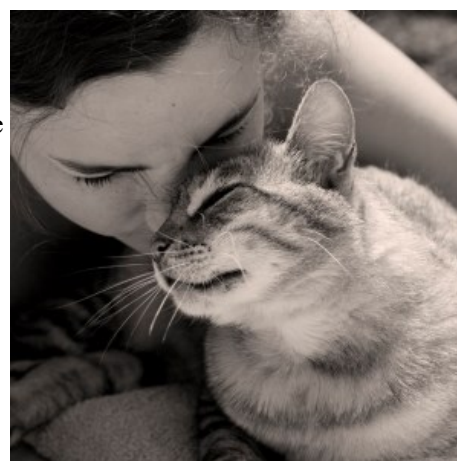
Young adults:

- 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, young adults:

- often lose their childhood pets, the pets they grew up with and thought of as their best friends or “fur” sisters or brothers.
- feel that part of their childhood dies, too. Many describe the deaths of their childhood pets as a rite of passage into adulthood and as the end of a simpler, more innocent time.
- want to be treated like adults one day, but reassured like younger children the next.
- often feel guilty if they are away at college or no longer live at home with their pets. It’s common for young adults to feel they abandoned their pets and weren’t there to provide end-of-life care and love when their pets needed them the most.



Helping Children

Adults can:

- be cautious about overburdening young adults with responsibilities. Young adults are often asked to care for younger siblings, grandparents, and even household chores during a family loss or crisis. If responsibilities are prolonged, their own grief processes may be interrupted or delayed.
- acknowledge the history and bonds that have always existed between the pets and young adults and reassure them that their pets never forgot them or stopped loving them.
- use technology, like Skype and Face time, to include young adults who live elsewhere in the decisions and activities surrounding saying good-bye to their pets. With technology, young adults can view their pets’ bodies, make virtual visits to pet crematories, be “present” as their families bury their pets, and plan and participate in their pets’ memorials.
- provide young adults with accurate and timely information about how their pets died, especially if pets die suddenly. Adults can further support young adults by creating opportunities for them to talk about how they feel and to ask questions about the circumstances of their pets’ deaths.
- allow young adults to see the adults in their lives expressing emotions in normal, healthy ways. It’s important for young adults to realize that it is normal and acceptable to cry, feel sad, express anger, etc., when loss occurs.

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.veterinarywisdompetparents.com