



Grief Support Resources



ASPCA Pet Loss Support Hotline – (877) 474-3310

Cornell University Pet Loss Support Hotline – (607) 253-3932

Tufts University Pet Loss Support Hotline – (508) 839-7966

Michigan State University Pet Loss Support Group – meets the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month from 6:30-7:30p via Zoom. Open to anyone who has lost a pet – your pet did not have to be a patient at MSU Veterinary Medical Center for you to be able to attend the group. <https://cvm.msu.edu/hospital/services/social-work/pet-loss-support-group>

Lap of Love Pet Loss and Bereavement Hotline – (855) 352-5683

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - (800) 273-8255

Crisis Textline – www.crisistextline.org

West Michigan Pet Loss Support Group: Ginny Mikita, facilitator – meets at the Heaven at Home office, the 2nd Tuesday of each month

The Argus Institute – <https://csu-cvmb.colostate.edu/vth/diagnostic-and-support/argus>
End of life support for pet parents

Ohio State University Vet School, Honoring the Bond – <https://vet.osu.edu>
Resources for end of life care, quality of life, and grief support

The Association of Pet Loss and Bereavement - www.aplb.org
Moderated online chat rooms for pet loss and anticipatory grief as well as other helpful online resources

Veterinary Wisdom for Pet Parents – www.veterinarywisdomforpetparents.com

Rainbow Bridge pet memorials – www.rainbowsbridge.com

Pet Loss Grief Support, Rainbow Bridge & Candle Ceremony – www.petloss.com



Ways to Memorialize your pet



- ◆ The Living Urn - a bio urn and planting system designed to grow a beautiful, enduring memory tree, plant or flowers with cremated remains (www.thelivingurn.com)
- ◆ Cuddle Clones - hand designed plush animals made to capture everything that made your pet unique (www.cuddleclones.com)
- ◆ Silver Pet Prints - Sterling Silver jewelry made using your pet's actual paw print (us.silverpetprints.com)
- ◆ Spirit Pieces Cremation Art & Jewelry - have a memorial piece created with the ashes of your loved one (<https://www.pethospicevet.com/featured/> - then click on Visit Spirit Pieces)
- ◆ Go to our website and submit a tribute, with favorite photos, to your pet: www.pethospicevet.com - click on Memorialize Your Pet
- ◆ Make a donation in your pet's name or donate your time to an animal-related organization or charity
- ◆ Attach your pet's collar to their food or water bowl and use it as a planter
- ◆ Plant a tree, bush, or special flowers over or near where you have buried your pet or scattered their ashes
- ◆ Keep whiskers or a clipping of fur in a locket or pouch or even a picture frame
- ◆ Create an "inspiration station" - make a shelf, corner, or shadow box to fill with things that you loved about your furry friend - photos, artwork, collars, tags, toys - anything that touches your heart and brings a smile when you see it
- ◆ Observe National Pet Memorial Day - This holiday is on the second sunday of September. Have a small ceremony, light a candle, take a memory walk, or just share stories and memories





Anticipatory Grief: The Sadness Before the Loss

By Lisa Havelin, MA, MFA, LAMFT

When we learn that our beloved pet has a terminal illness, or we realize that they are struggling with the changes that old age brings, many of us feel a deep sense of loss or grief even though the pet is still with us. This experience of coping with loss before our loved one has died is called *anticipatory grief*, and it is a common and natural reaction to the realization that you will soon be saying goodbye. We tend to think of grief as a reaction to the death of a pet, but in some situations the grief process begins the moment we learn of a terminal diagnosis or face the difficult decision of euthanasia. When a pet dies, we often think of and refer to the death as one loss, but in many cases it can actually feel like a series of many losses. For example, as a dog ages, she may one day be unable to go for her daily walk. Or perhaps an elderly cat becomes unable to climb to the top of the couch where she always spent her days sunbathing. These changes represent endings, and they remind us of the inevitable goodbye that everyone who loves a pet must face. To witness and reflect on the losses occurring during the end-of-life stage is a heartbreaking process that can sometimes feel like a rollercoaster. In tandem with our pet's physical health, we experience the good days and the bad days with them and it often reflects in our grieving.

How people experience anticipatory grief varies greatly. People may experience many or few symptoms. Some of the most common symptoms include sorrow, dread, anger, anxiety, and depression, and may include physical symptoms such as changes in appetite, weight, and sleep patterns. In addition, people may experience times of acceptance, peace, growth and reflection. Some people may feel the urge to distance themselves from the pet and the end-of-life process. While this is a distressing feeling, it can be a natural part of the process and is something that can be faced and worked through. For most people, it is this combination of anxiety of what's to come and determination to make things count that leads us on an emotional rollercoaster. It is important to acknowledge your experience and give yourself permission to feel it and process it.

In many ways, anticipatory grief is a form of coping as it helps you prepare yourself emotionally for the loss. However, there are some things that can help when you are feeling overwhelmed:

- **Reach out and use your support system.** Like other forms of grief and loss, it is important to process your anticipatory grief experience with others you can trust. Whether it is a spouse, a friend, a support group or a mental health professional, it is important that you find someone you can turn to for support. When people ask “what can I do”, let them know honestly what they can do to help you.
- **Be extra kind to yourself.** Understand that anticipatory grief may come in waves, and you may experience it in ways you do not expect. Your anticipatory grief may bring tears, anxiety, dread, difficulty sleeping or anger. Sometimes it may also bring growth, reflection or peace. Often, it brings a combination of these feelings at different times throughout the experience, and that is okay. Grieving, both before and after a loss, is hard work. Be sure to give yourself permission to feel what you are feeling and to make extra time for self-care.
- **Make time to cherish your pet.** This may seem obvious, but sometimes we can be so overwhelmed with what needs to be done and who to call that we miss the moments that we will long to remember. This may be a time to create and tackle [a bucket list](#) for your pet, or talk to them about how much you love them. Take special photographs of and with them, or begin a journal or scrapbook now while the memories and images are fresh in your mind. Some people enjoy making memorials while the pet is still here, such as paw prints, gardens or shadowboxes of their favorite things. While it is important to acknowledge your deep sense of sadness about saying goodbye, it is also important to make sure your sadness doesn’t “take over” and prevent you from living in the moment. Directing your pain and anxiety toward actions that create wonderful memories can help provide balance in an overwhelming time.
- **Use this time as an opportunity to plan.** In cases of sudden or unanticipated deaths, many people feel overwhelmed with the decisions they are unexpectedly facing and often regret decisions they were forced to make in the heat of the moment. When we experience anticipatory grief, we are provided with a special, albeit painful, opportunity to make end-of-life plans such as where you would like to say goodbye, what you will do in the case of an emergency, and whom you may want to include in saying goodbye. Planning and making decisions about end-of-life care allows us to gain a sense of control in an uncontrollable situation, and it helps ensure that your final memories with your pet are positive and peaceful.

The grief that you feel as you prepare to say goodbye to your pet can produce intense sorrow and anxiety. It can also provide a foundation to mindfully plan and reflect on your relationship and memories with your pet. As with all grief experiences, there is no right or wrong, and no one can ever be fully prepared to say goodbye. It is okay to feel overwhelmed at times, and it’s okay to ask for help. If you need support while navigating the anticipatory grief experience, lean on those around you whom you trust, and reach out to our counselors if you’d like to talk more about your experience.



Books to help cope with the loss of a pet

Goodbye Friend, Healing Wisdom for Anyone Who has Ever Lost a Pet

by Gary Kowalski

From the moment pets come into our lives, we know the day will arrive when we have to say farewell. Filled with heartwarming stories and practical guidance on such matters as taking care of yourself while mourning, creating rituals to honor your pet's memory, and talking to children about death.

Saying Goodbye to your Angel Animals: finding Comfort After Losing Your Pet

by Allen and Linda Anderson

In this thoughtful book Allen and Linda Anderson walk you through the numbing pain and dreadful sense of loss that arise when a beloved animal dies. They offer solace to help you deal with grief, remember and honor key moments in the animal's life, find comfort through groups and with professionals, and get past the depression. They also include exercises, affirmation, and meditations to use through the various stages of grief. The Andersons' caring, practical advice covers all aspects of pet loss.

Facing Farewell – Making the Decision to Euthanize Your Pet by Julie Reck, DVM

Author Julie Reck is a veterinarian who has devoted her professional career to helping owners make more informed decisions about euthanasia. In Facing Farewell, readers are provided with a complete description of the euthanasia procedure so that we know what to expect and can feel confident that we have made the right choice for both ourselves and our pet.

Old Dogs are the Best Dogs

by Gene Weingarten with photographs by Michael S Williamson

This glorious book documents the unique appeal of man's best friend in his or her last, and best, years with lovely black and white photographs and narration. A fitting tribute to the dogs we can never forget.

Grieving the Death of a Pet by Betty J Carmack

Through the stories of sorrow, strength, and wisdom from people grieving the loss of a pet, the author offers readers a virtual pet-loss support group. She illuminates the common experiences of pet death: feeling utter love and devotion for a pet, weighing the decisions surrounding treatment choices and euthanasia, honoring the pet through memorials and rituals, and beginning the healing process.





The following is information from Kathryn Jennings, Executive Director of the International Association for Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (IAAHPC). We at *Heaven at Home* thought this might be helpful for your family as you work through this difficult time.

Helping children cope

- Be straightforward and honest in all instances
- Don't hide your pet's condition from children
- Include them in caregiving
- Discuss all treatment and end of life options together
- Avoid decisions made in haste

Preparing kids for euthanasia

- Create an environment where it's safe to ask questions
- Emphasize that euthanasia is a loving act of courage
- Explain that natural death can be painful and cause suffering
- Help them understand the "need" for euthanasia when there are no other options
- Educate them about the process – before, during, and after
- Avoid the phrase "put to sleep" or "put down"
- Younger children require a clearer explanation in order to understand the finality
- Explain that the pet will die peacefully without feeling hurt or scared

Should children be present or not?

- You, as the parent, know your child best
- Recommended age is 10 and older
- Whether they are present or not, allow them to view the body afterwards
- Final goodbye can help kids to accept the reality

How can I support my child through his or her grief?

- Grief cannot be fixed or analyzed, it must be felt to be healed. Children need someone to be present with them while they are experiencing the pain of grief as they mourn
- Provide an environment that allows your child to feel and talk about the grief
- Communication should be open, honest, and ongoing
- Experience it together
- Assure them they are not responsible for the pet's death
- The realization that death is permanent does not happen until around the age of 8
- Encourage the expression of feelings verbally and/or through art
- Know that children have a natural ability to "dose" themselves with grief and are able to take a break from it when needed. (They can do this much better than adults.)

How to discuss aftercare

- Avoid talking about burning or fire with respect to cremation
- Cremation can be described as "returning to ashes"
- Make it clear the pet is not hurt in the process
- With respect to burial, describe how the pet will be placed in a box and laid to rest in the ground where he will be safe

Honoring a pet's life

- Rituals can help in acknowledging and accepting the loss, which is the path to healing
- Make a tribute table
- Design a gravestone
- Assemble a scrapbook or collage
- Write a poem or story
- Plant a tree
- Make a donation in the pet's name
- Volunteer at the animal shelter or Humane Society
- Just share stories and memories!

When/if to adopt again

- Involve the whole family; everyone needs to be in agreement
- Adopting too quickly may delay mourning
- Children may take longer to move through grief



Books to help children cope with the loss of a pet

When a Pet Dies by Fred Rogers

Mr. Rogers helps children share feelings of the loss of a pet while offering reassurance that grieving is a natural, healing thing to do. A sensitive and sensible first book about death.

Dog Heaven and **Cat Heaven** by Cynthia Rylant

The words and illustrations for both books are comforting and uplifting, capturing the familiar habits of each furry friend. A book you can give to children and adults. While terms 'God' and 'Heaven' are used throughout, the book does not have a religious message.

A Special Place for Charlee by Debby Morehead

Appropriate for all ages, but is most effective to help pre-school and school-aged children with pet loss. Covers learning bad news, euthanasia, and coping with grief.

The Dragonfly Door by John Adams

This book, about two insect friends, is a beautiful allegory for death and is very gently told. It offers an optimistic concept of where the deceased "goes" after death.

Sammy in the Sky by Barbara Walsh

This is a beautiful book about more than just goodbyes, but also of celebrating love and memories.

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurie Krasny

This forthright book serves as a kid-friendly guide to death and dealing with the loss of a loved one. With Dinosaurs as the characters, it talks about what being alive and what dying means, along with the feelings people may experience when someone they know dies. This book may be most helpful to read before a death, but can also help answer questions kids often have, such as why we have funerals and how death is different than sleep.

Saying Goodbye to Lulu by Corinne Demas

This is an excellent story for parents to read to their children even before a pet is elderly or gone, as it can facilitate a discussion about how pets change and age. It can also help children find ways to tell their own story and verbalize their experiences.



Books Suitable for Teens

A Snowflake in my Hand by Samantha Mooney

A joyous celebration of the bond between animals and people, centered around stories of cats who were patients at the Animal Medical Center in New York City. A “celebration of life in the face of death.”

Mostly Bob by Tom Corwin

A letter written as a tribute to Bob, the author’s golden retriever who passed away unexpectedly. It tells Bob’s story of the possibility of change and the transformational power of love.

Deconstruction/Reconstruction: A Grief Journal for Teens

created by The Dougy Center

The Dougy Center designed this journal specifically for teenagers. It guides teens through prompts and activities that help them process their loss and grief. It’s an “advice-free place where teens can draw, write, paint, and transform whatever they are thinking and feeling”.

Healing a Teen’s Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends, and Caregivers by Dr Alan Wolfelt

This book provides 100 practical ideas for parents or other caregivers to help teens process the death of a loved one and cope with the grief they are feeling.

Healing Your Grieving Heart ‘For Teens’: 100 Practical Ideas by Dr Alan Wolfelt

This book provides 100 practical ideas for teens who are mourning a loss. The writing is directed to teens and contains relevant, useful tips on how to express oneself, how to cope with friends or at school, how to heal and more.

Paw Prints in the Stars by Warren Hanson

Created to help one deal with the loss of a beloved pet, this book is written in the voice of the pet that has passed and brings peace and comfort while celebrating life. There is a place for treasured photos and journal pages for favorite memories as well as a special ribbon to hold collar tags.



Books to help Parents cope with the loss of a pet

Goodbye Friend, Healing Wisdom for Anyone Who has Ever Lost a Pet

by Gary Kowalski

From the moment pets come into our lives, we know the day will arrive when we have to say farewell. Filled with heartwarming stories and practical guidance on such matters as taking care of yourself while mourning, creating rituals to honor your pet's memory, and talking to children about death.

Saying Goodbye to your Angel Animals: Finding Comfort After Losing Your Pet

by Allen and Linda Anderson

In this thoughtful book Allen and Linda Anderson walk you through the numbing pain and dreadful sense of loss that can arise when a beloved animal dies. They offer solace to help you deal with grief, remember and honor key moments in the animal's life, find comfort through groups and with professionals, and get past the depression. They also include exercises, affirmation, and meditations to use through the various stages of grief. The Andersons' caring, practical advice covers all aspects of pet loss.

Facing Farewell – Making the Decision to Euthanize Your Pet by Julie Reck, DVM

Author Julie Reck is a veterinarian who has devoted her professional career to helping owners make more informed decisions about euthanasia. In Facing Farewell, readers are provided with a complete description of the euthanasia procedure so that we know what to expect and can feel confident that we have made the right choice for both ourselves and our pet.

Old Dogs are the Best Dogs

by Gene Weingarten with photographs by Michael S Williamson

This glorious book documents the unique appeal of man's best friend in his or her last, and best, years with lovely black and white photographs and narration. A fitting tribute to the dogs we can never forget.

Grieving the Death of a Pet by Betty J Carmack

Through the stories of sorrow, strength, and wisdom from people grieving the loss of a pet, the author offers readers a virtual pet-loss support group. She illuminates the common experiences of pet death: feeling utter love and devotion for a pet, weighing the decisions surrounding treatment choices and euthanasia, honoring the pet through memorials and rituals, and beginning the healing process.

Helping Children Cope with the Serious Illness or Death of a Companion Animal

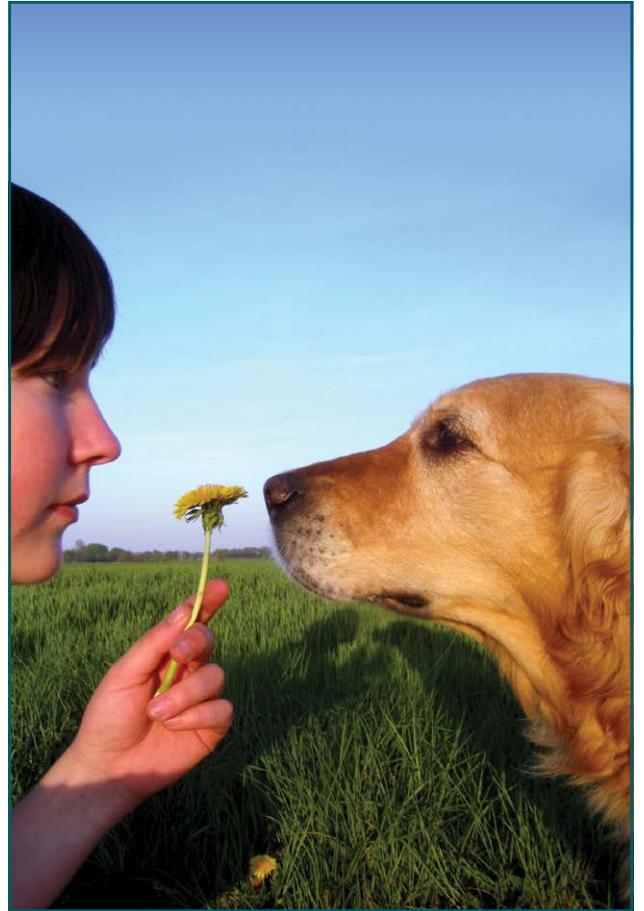
Should Children be Informed?

YES! Learning to accept illness, injury, or death is a natural experience in life. It is important that children have the opportunity to participate in family discussions of these issues. Being involved in the decision-making and treatment process of a family pet that is seriously ill or injured may provide valuable lessons for children about responsibility, compassion, commitment and coping.

WHY? When a companion animal is ill, parents often try to hide worry and anxiety from their children. This protection philosophy can backfire. If children do not find out the information they need from you, they may seek other, less reliable, sources of support. Each time a child inquires and is denied adequate information, they delve into their own imagination or memory to create an answer. The longer such misinformation exists, the more difficult it is to correct. Because of the anxiety and fear created by not talking with children about serious issues that impact the family, children may experience adverse emotional reactions. They may become angry, hoping that their tantrums will restore normality. They may neglect playing and eating because of guilt—not realizing that their own actions had nothing to do with the illness, injury, or death of their companion animal. Involving children throughout the process will most likely alleviate fears and anxieties.

HOW? Each child is a unique individual and your discussions will be based on a variety of factors, including age, development, personality, religion, and culture. Offer explanations or answer questions at the most basic level appropriate for your child. Let your child guide you with additional questions. The well-being of your child should be the main focus. Your child may be consulted and encouraged to participate in decision making, but never forced.

(continued on page 2)



The Ohio State University
Veterinary Medical Center - **Columbus**
601 Vernon L. Tharp Street,
Columbus, OH 43210
(614) 292-3551

The Ohio State University
Veterinary Medical Center - **Dublin**
5020 Bradenton Avenue
Dublin, OH 43017
(614) 889-8070



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER

Honoring the Bond
vet.osu.edu/honoringthebond

Developmental Stages and Grief

The following serve as general guidelines for the grieving process of children. Many children develop differently and you will need to follow your child's lead.*

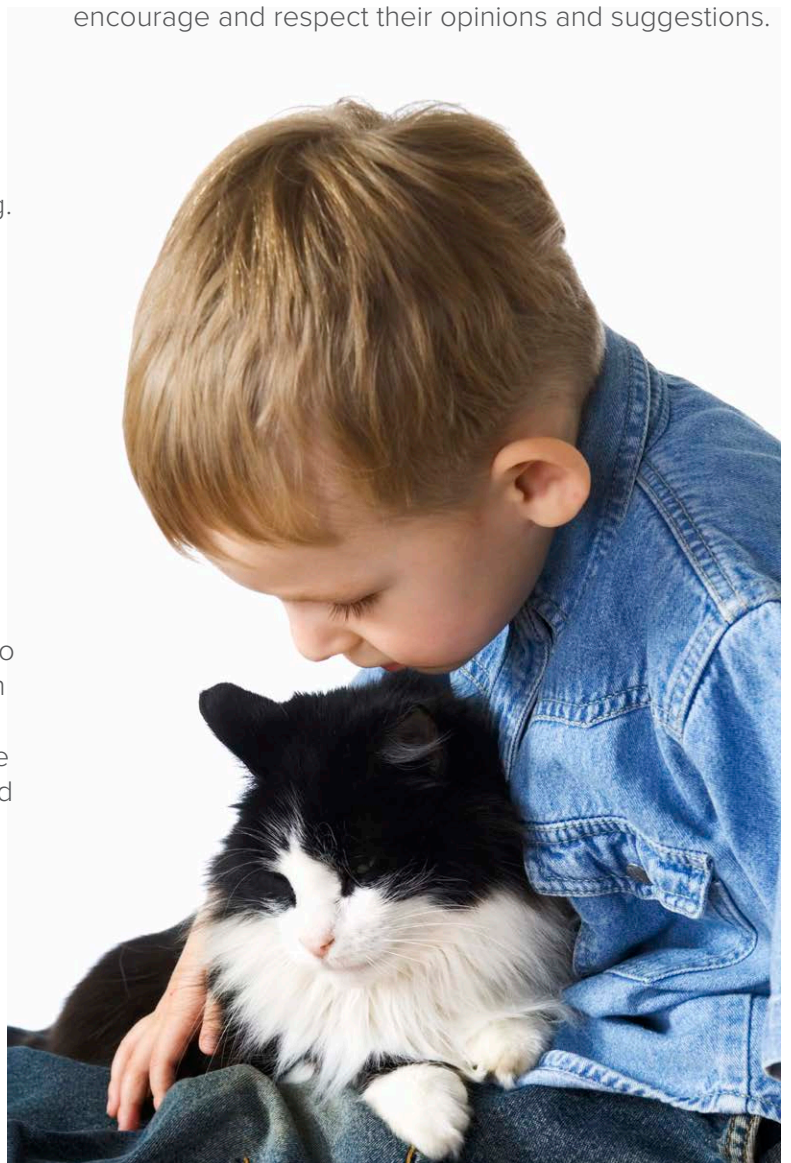
Infants and Toddlers: Can and do grieve. To them, the death of someone close can be an issue of separation and abandonment. They may experience sleep disturbances, regressive behavior, or explosive emotions. Use a reassuring, loving voice and gestures to show your child that someone is there to love and care for them.

Ages 3-5: Do not understand that death is final. They know their pet is gone but they believe it is a temporary situation. Preschoolers need reassurance that someone is there to take care of them and that they are secure. Give simple and direct answers to questions about the death. Read to the child from an age-appropriate book about loss. Encourage the expression of feelings through play, talking, or drawing.

Ages 5-8: Understand that death is final, but they have difficulty imagining it on a personal level. They may visualize death as an angel, skeleton, or monster. Expect questions about the physical aspects of death, and don't be surprised if a child in this age group expresses anger at the pet for leaving them. Answer questions directly. Let them know that their pet loved them and that it's okay to feel angry, or any other emotion.

Ages 9-12: Understand that death is final, personal, and something that happens to everyone. Expect children in this age range to ask many questions and to have an almost morbid curiosity about death. Although they may appear to be coping well, preteens tend to keep many of their feelings hidden. Give them the time and opportunity to talk, share, express themselves, and ask questions.

Ages 13-16: Because adolescents may not verbally express the intensity of their emotions, they are often mistakenly judged by their behavioral reactions to grief. Adolescents may attempt to mask their emotions from all but their closest friends. Although persons in this age group may refrain from emotions or expressions, clinical studies show that teenagers often have more intense grief than any other age group. Because they want to think of themselves as adults, it is important to encourage and respect their opinions and suggestions.



*Adapted with permission of the Bereavement Committee, University of Virginia Health System, and the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia.

(continued on page 3)



How to Help Your Child

Be honest.

Using deception, no matter how well intended, is never recommended. It will be difficult to regain the trust of your child if they ever discover that you distorted the truth or lied to them. Prepare children ahead of time for what to expect. Hold a family meeting and discuss the veterinarian's diagnosis, the pet's prognosis, and the cost of treatments and care, including side effects and the pet's quality of life. If available and willing, you may want to consider enlisting the help of your veterinarian in having these discussions with your children.

Show emotions.

Respect and encourage your child's need to express and share feelings of sadness. Let them see you upset and crying. By talking about sad feelings and crying, children learn that these emotions and behaviors are acceptable and appropriate. Don't feel as if you must have all the answers; sometimes just listening is enough. Expect that young children will ask and need answers to the same questions over and over again. Don't inadvertently cut off their feelings by noting how well your children are handling their grief or how brave or strong they are. Explain that it is the pet's death that makes you sad; otherwise they may worry that they are to blame.

Let children express grief in their own way.

Children often react to death with outbursts of laughter, aggressiveness, hostility, boisterous activity, or in some other manner that may be unacceptable by adult standards. Be patient and supportive. Recognize that children grieve differently than adults and should not be punished because adults do not understand their reactions. Do not reward inappropriate behavior, however. Try to keep the child's routines as normal as possible. Behavior deemed inappropriate may be positively redirected by role-modeling acceptable alternatives for the child. (Although these reactions are quite normal, prolonged adverse reactions may indicate a need for the support of a professionally trained grief counselor.)

Respect the feelings of other family members.

Recognize that not everyone in the family is equally attached to the pet and that not everyone shows their feelings or grieves in the same way.

Inform others of what's going on in your children's lives.

Ask neighbors, teachers, relatives, and friends for extra support and understanding of your children right now, and for help in keeping a watchful eye on them at this sad and difficult time.



(continued on page 4)



Understanding Euthanasia

Include children in the euthanasia decision.

Children need help to understand why the decision has to be made and a feeling that they've participated in making it. They also need an opportunity to say good-bye and make the most of whatever time they may have left with their pet.

If at all possible, do not plan to euthanize a companion animal while a child is away from home.

If this cannot be prevented for medical reasons, be honest. Do not say that the companion animal ran away from home (unless this is the truth).

Help young children understand why euthanasia is necessary, in words they can understand.

Old age: "When animals get very old, their bodies wear out and stop working."

Terminal illness: "Because the disease couldn't be stopped, our pet is very sick. His body has worn out and stopped working."

An accident: "A terrible thing happened (hit by car etc.). Our pet's body was badly hurt and couldn't be fixed. It stopped working."

Explain euthanasia in a developmentally appropriate way.

Explain that the pet will be helped to die peacefully and without pain.

"We will be taking Fluffy to the veterinarian to help her die. Dr. Smith will give Fluffy a shot filled with medicine that only works on animals. The shot will stop Fluffy's heart. When her heart stops, she won't be able to breathe on her own. She will not feel any pain."

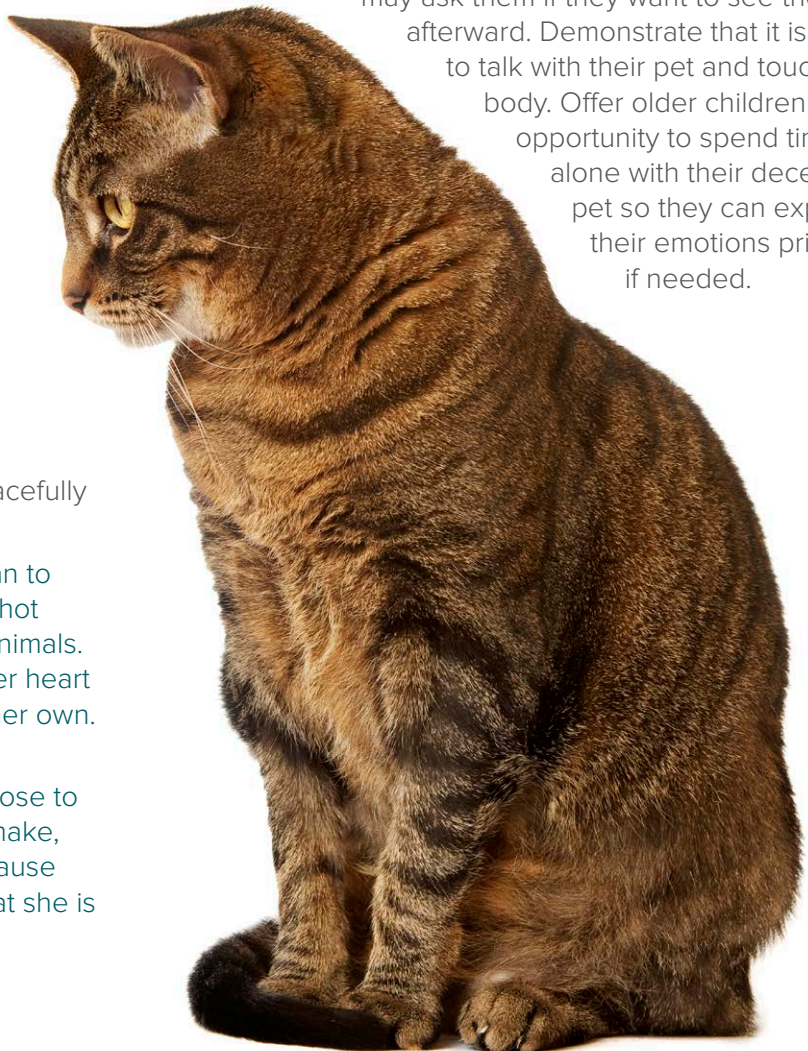
"When an animal is suffering, we can choose to help them die. It's a very sad choice to make, but one that we want to think about because we love Snowball so much. We know that she is very sick and will die."

Avoid the common phrase for euthanasia, "put to sleep."

Since we go to sleep nightly, associating this act with death creates anxiety and might lead to disruptions in sleeping routines or behaviors. (It can also cause fear over surgery and anesthesia.)

Allow the child to be present for the pet's euthanasia, if they choose.

Let them know you will support their decision. The reality of a peaceful death is less traumatic to children than their fantasy of it. Young children may not understand the permanence of death unless they actually see that their pet is not "just asleep." If your child is not present for the euthanasia, you may ask them if they want to see their pet afterward. Demonstrate that it is OK to talk with their pet and touch its body. Offer older children an opportunity to spend time alone with their deceased pet so they can express their emotions privately, if needed.



(continued on page 5)



Explaining Death

Properly explaining death can help to demystify the concept as well as alleviate possible guilt. Explaining death to children can help to alleviate their fears or misconceptions. Children often wonder if the death could have been prevented or if the same thing might happen to them. Children also may wonder if they caused the death by something they said or thought. Make sure the child does not feel at fault—that they understand that their thoughts, feelings or words did not cause the death.

“It’s okay if you got mad at Socks. Your thoughts didn’t hurt him.”

Be simple and concrete.

Use words such as “died” or “is dead.” Explain that every living thing can get sick or be hurt and that no living thing lives forever.

“Joey was very sick and his heart stopped beating.”

“Fluffy’s body stopped working.”

“You had nothing to do with Skippy’s death. He was very sick and his lungs and heart no longer worked.”

“At some point, all animals die.”

“Many animals have shorter lives than we do. They don’t live as long as people.”

Avoid euphemisms.

Children are very literal and may become confused when adults use other terms for death such as “passed away,” “gone to sleep,” “moved on to a better place,” “left us,” or “gone on.” Such phrases might cause children to feel rejected or abandoned, or imply the companion animal may return, or encourage children to go searching for the lost companion animal.

Avoid telling children that their pet was so good or so special that God wants it to be with Him in heaven.

Children interpret information literally and may become angry with God or fear that they (or you) will be chosen next.

Don’t blame the veterinarian.

Your children may develop fear of veterinarians and other health care givers.

What Happens Next?

Explain what will happen to the pet’s remains.

If you plan to have your pet cremated, explain that your pet will be taken to a pet crematory, a place where the pet’s body will be turned into ashes. Then your family will take those ashes and (scatter them, bury them in the backyard, keep them in an urn, etc.). The use of words “fire” or “burn” can be scary to children. Be sure to explain that the pet cannot feel any pain. If you plan on burying your pet, explain that your pet will be sealed in a box or casket and put in the ground.

“Fluffy’s body will be put in a room that gets very, very hot. This will turn his body to ashes, which looks a little bit like sand.”

“We wanted to cremate Fluffy so we could always have a way to remember him. We will keep his ashes in an urn, at our house. We can always take his ashes with us if we ever move.”

“We are going to bury Fluffy in the ground.”

Plan a memorial ritual.

Decide how you’ll honor your pet’s life and keep its memory alive. Emphasis should be placed on the happy experiences that were shared with the deceased companion animal. Let children honor their companion animal in their own way. Encourage activities to help your children experience and express their love and grief (drawing or painting pictures, compiling an album, scrapbook or memory box, viewing videos or home movies, writing or sharing memories, planting a shrub or tree, reading books on pet loss).

“What is your favorite memory of Princess?”

“Snowball knows you loved her.”

“It’s okay to laugh and have fun as soon as you feel like it.”

“How about writing a letter or a story, or drawing a picture about the way you feel?”

(continued on page 6)



What Happens Next?

Don't immediately get a new pet in an effort to "replace" this one.

During this process, it is important to not rush into a decision to adopt a new companion animal to take away the pain of grief. Getting a new pet too soon may imply to children that their grief is unimportant and unnecessary. It might imply that everything is replaceable, including the children themselves. The lesson children can learn through grief is that because relationships are special and unique, they are not replaceable. They also may react with anger or guilt, reject the new pet, and/or feel disloyal to the one who died.

"It's ok to not want a new pet."

"It's ok to want a new pet."



The Honoring the Bond program at The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center

The mission of the Honoring the Bond program is to recognize and honor the human-animal bond by providing support to companion animal owners. Honoring the Bond program services are available, at no cost, to clients of the Ohio State Veterinary Medical Center.

Our social workers can assist in the following ways:

- Act as a liaison between the companion animal owner and veterinary medical team
- Provide crisis intervention during difficult situations
- Assist in processing difficult decisions (quality of life assessments, treatment decisions)
- Be present before, during, and/or after euthanasia
- Facilitate family discussions with children
- Provide assessment and referral for further follow-up counseling, if needed
- Provide resources, including reading lists, websites, counselor and pet loss support group referrals, cremation/burial resources, memorial ideas, etc.

If you would like to speak with someone from the Honoring the Bond program, you may:

- Ask your clinician, student, or client services representative to contact us
- Contact us directly at (614) 247-8607
- Access our website and email at: vet.osu.edu/honoringthebond

Honoring the Bond is sponsored in part by:



This brochure is adapted from the original work of Jennifer Brandt, MSW, LISW, Ph.D.

Sections on euthanasia and death written by Martha M. Tousley, CNS-BC, FT, are Copyright 2004-2008 and are reprinted with permission of the author.

Do Companion Animals Grieve?



Do Companion Animals Grieve?

Families that live together form close attachments. When a companion animal dies, surviving pets may “cling” to their human family members, be more reactive to stimuli, appear anxious or depressed, or demonstrate a loss of interest in playing, sleeping, or eating. These behavioral and emotional changes may be a temporary response to the loss, a distress response to the owners’ sadness, a distress response to changes in routine that occur as the result of the death, or an underlying medical condition.*

If you have concerns about your surviving animal’s behavior, you may consider scheduling a consultation with our Behavior Clinic at vet.osu.edu/vmc/behavior.

* Important Health Alert

If a cat stops eating, this can be a medical emergency. Please contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.

If a dog stops eating, alert your veterinarian.

Look for Changes in the Social Structure

Watch for changes in the relationships between surviving companion animals; particularly if the surviving pet often looked to the other pet for direction. Such reactions may be more common in species or individuals that show more elaborate social interactions.

It can be stressful whenever members are added or lost from groups of social animals. Remaining animals may begin to show signs of separation anxiety. These behaviors include panting, pacing, whining, drooling, howling, barking, and not eating treats while alone. When your pet is alone, video can be utilized to help monitor and record stress levels.

Exercise is the best non-drug stress reliever you have available for your pet. It can also be a helpful tool in managing your grief response. Prior to beginning a new exercise program with your pet, consult with your pet’s veterinarian and your own family doctor.

There are now pheromones available, in sprays and atomizers, and collars, which may be effective tools for reducing your pet’s anxiety. DAP (dog appeasing pheromone) is a replication of the pheromone that a

mother dog releases while nursing her young. For cats, Feliway is a replication of the calming cheek marking pheromone. Many veterinarians, pet stores, and pet supply catalogues have these products available.

For the most part, allow the companion animals to work out their own relationships. Punishment should be avoided as it increases levels of anxiety, fear, and aggression. Instead, try rewarding positive behaviors and interrupting undesired behaviors with obedience commands or redirection to a new activity.

Common underlying medical conditions can contribute to behavioral changes. A thorough medical examination may be needed to rule out these conditions. If you have any questions or concerns regarding changes in a surviving companion animal’s behavior, consult with your veterinarian, a veterinary behaviorist, or a certified applied animal behaviorist.

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center - Columbus
601 Vernon L. Tharp Street, Columbus, OH 43210
(614) 292-3551

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center - Dublin
5020 Bradenton Avenue, Dublin, OH 43017
(614) 889-8070

(continued on page 2)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER

Honoring the Bond
vet.osu.edu/honoringthebond

Do Companion Animals Grieve?

Adopting Again

The decision about bringing another animal into the home is very personal. Some families may decide not to adopt a new companion animal because of the emotional, physical, or financial demands involved with companion animal care. Others may feel the time is right to share their home and heart with another pet.

The time to consider adopting a new companion animal is when the entire family has had sufficient time to deal with the emotions of grief. Adopting too soon can lead to feelings of guilt or resentment toward the new family member. The important thing to remember is that bringing another animal into the home is not a betrayal of the one that is gone. You will never replace the one you've lost. You will simply be opening your home and heart to a new friend.

For families who want to consider adoption, it will be important to remember that each companion animal has a special and unique personality. Take time to discuss different sizes, breeds, or colors before making a final decision. Consider the needs and temperament of any surviving companion animals.

To read more about introducing new pets, please visit indoorpet.osu.edu.



The Honoring the Bond program at The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center

The mission of the Honoring the Bond program is to recognize and honor the human-animal bond by providing support to companion animal owners. Honoring the Bond program services are available, at no cost, to clients of the Ohio State Veterinary Medical Center.

Our social workers can assist in the following ways:

- Act as a liaison between the companion animal owner and veterinary medical team
- Provide crisis intervention during difficult situations
- Assist in processing difficult decisions (quality of life assessments, treatment decisions)
- Be present before, during, and/or after euthanasia
- Facilitate family discussions with children
- Provide assessment and referral for further follow-up counseling, if needed
- Provide resources, including reading lists, websites, counselor and pet loss support group referrals, cremation/burial resources, memorial ideas, etc.

If you would like to speak with someone from the Honoring the Bond program, you may:

- Ask your clinician, student, or client services representative to contact us
- Contact us directly at (614) 247-8607
- Access our website and email at: vet.osu.edu/honoringthebond

Honoring the Bond is sponsored in part by:



Written by Brandt, J., Shreyer, T., Day, S., and Feltes, E. (2005) and adapted from *The Human Animal Bond and Grief* by Lagoni, Butler, and Hetts



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER

Honoring the Bond
vet.osu.edu/honoringthebond