

FEAP NEWSLETTER

A Series of Educational Articles from your Employee Assistance Program

THE EMOTIONS OF PET LOSS AND HOW TO COPE

ONLY RECENTLY have researchers come to realize that a pet is often considered a family member. Their loss may evoke emotions similar to that of the grief that is felt when a human member of the family is lost in death. Acknowledgment of these emotions is the first step toward recovery and healthy coping. Only by honestly looking at your emotions and your reactions can the process of working through the grief begin.

Although everyone grieves in their own way, shock, denial, anger, loneliness, regret are generally felt by all to some degree. Constructive anger, can help to resolve situations that caused your pet's death, for example, if the death of your pet was caused by someone else. Focusing anger to place blame is a distraction. Anger held onto without a positive focus can be detrimental and hinder your grieving process.

Guilt another emotion, is also a possibility. If we as the pet owner, think or know that something we did or did not do may have contributed to the death of our pet, our sense of responsibility will come into play. If this is the case, we must acknowledge our responsibility, make changes if possible to prevent the same from happening again (another pet may at some time come into your life) and, make a conscious choice to change the direction of our thinking. A little bit of guilt, for the right reasons can be healthy. A lot of guilt, however, is not. How do we change the direction of our thinking? By choosing not to repeat the guilty thoughts over and over again. Replace the thought, when you first become conscious of it, with another activity or thought. Deliberately focus your thoughts on something positive, plans for the next day perhaps or choose a physical activity that will distract you from those feelings of guilt. Refocus your thoughts on good memories with your pet. Accept what cannot be changed. Learn what you can from the ordeal and choose to forgive yourself. ***Treat yourself with the same degree of love and acceptance that your pet gave you.***

Denial makes it difficult to accept that the pet is gone. It sometimes will not allow one to move on to owning another pet because they feel that they are being disloyal to the deceased pet.

Depression, although it can result from a variety of things, does at times result from the loss of a pet. The death of a pet is traumatic, stressful and painful. Many report "feeling low" to being emotionally "paralyzed" for a period of time. Although this is logical, it is also a state of mind that can hinder recovery from the loss of the pet.

Am I Crazy to Hurt So Much?

Realize that grief for your pet is normal and natural. Do not let others dictate your feelings. Remember that there are phases to the grieving process and allow yourself to work through them.

What Can I Do About These Feelings?

First - learn what to expect in the way of typical grief reactions and the stages of mourning.

Second - learn ways of coping with grief reactions and accept the length of time it takes to grieve.

Third - Recognize the things that hold people back from recovering, such as fear of grieving.

Fourth - Recognize the signs of recovery.

Be honest with yourself. Acknowledge those feelings. Reminisce about the good times you shared with your pet. Look at photographs, take the familiar walk that you shared with your friend. Allow your friends to help you. Other pet owners will understand your need to talk about the loss of your pet.* Some find it helpful to express their feelings through poetry, stories about or letters to their pets.



FEAP NEWSLETTER

A Series of Educational Articles from your Employee Assistance Program

What Should I Tell My Children?

You are the best judge of how much information to share with your children. Above all, be honest with your children about the loss of a pet. Be available to your children if they have questions, fears or misperceptions about death. Make it clear to the child, regardless of age, that the pet will not come back but is not in any pain. Try to avoid saying that the pet “went to sleep” or “got sick and died”, as this may make your child fearful that the same will happen to her/him. Allow your child to feel his/her emotions, and them to see you feel yours. Have a family discussion (or more than one) so that all may air their feelings and work through their grief.

Should I get Another Pet Right Away?

The general answer is no. There will be time needed to work through the current loss. This is better achieved before trying to establish a relationship with another animal. When you are ready, avoid the temptation to replace the deceased animal with a “look-a-like”. A new pet should be acquired only when you are ready to move forward and can build another healthy relationship.

If you cannot distract yourself from the grief, find yourself dwelling on it, find yourself robbed of your energy, continue to have difficulty concentrating, have experienced a change in your sleeping and/or eating patterns or, are bothered by other symptoms that cause you or your family members concern, please feel free to contact the EAP. Our counselors can be used as a source of support and referral for you. It’s as easy as a phone call:

(434) 243-2643 or (800) 847-9355

Coping with sorrow is easier said than done - but it CAN be done. You can do it.

* If you are the friend of someone who has lost their pet, know that visits, telephone calls and offers to assist with chores that may be too painful at this time will help to fill the void of the loss of your friend’s pet.

RESOURCES

Charlottesville Pet Loss Support Group
Contact: Marguerite David, LCSW
(434) 760.1330

Coping With Sorrow on Loss of Your Pet; Anderson, Moira.

Cold Noses at the Pearly Gates

The Loss of a Pet; Sife, Wallace

When Only the Love Remains: The Pain of Pet Loss; Stupary, Emily Margaret

Children and Pet Loss, A Guide for Helping; Tousley, Marty, RN

Murphy and Kate; Howard, Ellen.

**Faculty and Employee Assistance
Program**

**1224 JPA, Suite 777
Charlottesville, VA 22903**

(434) 243.2643

www.uvafeap.com

