

Coping With the Loss of a Pet

- Grief is a natural reaction to the loss of a pet.
- Everyone grieves differently.
- Pet-loss support resources exist and may be helpful for you.

The Five Stages of Grief

Grief is a natural reaction to the loss of a pet. Regardless of whether the pet is old or young, or whether the loss is expected or sudden, family members and other people who were close to the pet will experience similar feelings when a beloved pet dies. These feelings, commonly called *the five stages of grief*, are the same as those experienced when a person passes away:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining (i.e., trying to find an activity or action that either could have helped avoid the loss or that will take it away)
- Depression
- Acceptance

There is no “set” way that people experience these stages, and not everyone goes through all of them. Everyone grieves differently. What is important to know is that if you have lost a pet, it is normal to feel sad or angry. Sometimes, people who did not know the pet may say things that imply that grief is a reaction that should be reserved for the death of a person. This is not the case—grief is natural whenever you lose a loved one.

Remembering Your Pet

Some people find that performing a special activity, such as planting a flower or creating a memorial

item, helps ease the sadness they feel at losing their pet. A memorial item might be something you make yourself, like a photo of the pet in a special frame, or something you can purchase and personalize for your pet—you can find many suggestions on the Internet by typing “pet memorials” into a search engine. Donating to an animal shelter or favorite charity in your pet’s name can also be a way of remembering your pet.

When—or if—to Get a New Pet

Just as there is no set way that people mourn, there is no set time. Some people feel that they are ready for a new pet quickly, and some people do not want to consider getting a new pet until time has passed. Some people decide not to have another pet, even

Pet-loss support resources exist and may be helpful for you.

when they have finished grieving. Because every pet is different, it is not possible to “replace” a pet, but every pet offers a new chance for companionship.

Professional Pet-Loss Resources

Many resources exist to help people who are grieving the loss of a pet. Two of these are the Argus Institute and the Veterinary Social Work Program at the University of Pennsylvania. Both of these sites have links to or phone numbers for grief counseling services. Your veterinarian may also be able to suggest local support groups or other people, such as therapists or spiritual counselors, who can help.