

Tufts University Pet Loss Support Hotline

508-839-7966

**6 p.m. – 9 p.m. EST Monday – Friday
24-Hour Voice Mail**

Calls will be returned during the next shift.

For latest information on hours and services, please visit us at our website: vet.tufts.edu/petloss

The death of a beloved pet...

The bond we form with our pets is a unique and personal one and so is the grief we feel when they die. All of us experience and cope with loss just a little differently. We can experience a wide range of emotions including: shock, sorrow, anger, fatigue, guilt, insomnia, loss of appetite, and loneliness. Others may feel simply empty and heartbroken. All of these things are normal. What's important is that you allow yourself to grieve as much or as little as you need to and for as long as you need to.

Talking with others and sharing your precious memories may help. Seek support from family, friends, and caring people. Finally, the day will come when thoughts of your beloved pet will only bring you smiles.

But suppose my pet didn't die...

The Pet Loss Support Hotline is available not only for people facing decisions regarding euthanasia and death of their pet, but also for situations where people have experienced separation from their pet as this can be a devastating time. The Hotline can be a resource for those who are forced to give up their companion animal for any number of reasons: relocation, allergies, financial constraints, etc. Occasionally, animals stray from their home, never to return to their original family. What makes these experiences so sad are the lingering questions and lack of closure. You are left wondering:

- Is my pet safe?
- Is someone caring for my pet?
- Will my pet ever return to me?
- Did I do the right thing?

Volunteers at the Hotline can help you work through these and many other unanswered questions.

About the Tufts University Pet Loss Support Hotline...

Since its inception in 1996, the Tufts Pet Loss Support Hotline has received over 1000 phone calls from people just like you: people grieving over the loss of their beloved friend and cherished family member.



The Hotline was established by a group of caring veterinary students in response to the perceived need for a community-based resource through which people could safely grieve the past or impending separation from a pet. To that end, an effort was launched to establish the Pet Loss Support Hotline at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University.

The Hotline is run by our own veterinary students under the guidance of faculty advisors. These student volunteers participate in training sessions with a licensed therapist. In addition, regular volunteer meetings and on-going trainings are held.

Callers are assured the assistance of a caring, supportive, respectful, non-judgmental person when they contact our Pet Loss Support Hotline. Our volunteers are also available to provide recommended reading material, and to help you think through any decision you may be facing concerning the death of your pet. Please note: As students, we cannot provide any medical advice regarding your pet's current or past medical conditions.

How do I tell my children?

Children grieve very differently than adults. A child's perception of death varies due to their age, maturity level, and personal experience. Understanding the level of emotional and cognitive development that your child possesses will help you explain what it means when a pet dies or a pet leaves the home. Using statements such as "put to sleep" or "passed on" may have very different meanings to different children, and can cause confusion.

To help your child understand the permanence of death and the grief involved with the loss, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Always be honest with your child.
- Encourage your child to talk about his/her feelings.
- Allow yourself to be honest with your own feelings.
- Alert your child's teacher or daycare provider as to the recent family sadness.
- Read a book with your child that addresses pet loss.
- Allow your child to grieve with the family. Show them, by example, that it is appropriate to be sad and cry.
- Emphasize the fact that nobody is to blame for the death/loss of your pet. Children tend to think in concrete terms and often wonder if they are somehow responsible.
- If possible, give children an opportunity to say goodbye. This will allow for a sense of closure.

Do animals grieve?

We may never know if animals feel the loss of other animals the same way we do. However, it is clear by their actions that they do respond to the absence of their companions. You may see changes in their eating and sleeping habits, they might appear depressed, or may constantly search for their missing friend. Many will need time and extra attention from loving owners to adjust to their new life. While we may not know the depth of their grief, we can help them get through the experience as they also help us.

When hope is not enough...

Although our hope would be for our companion animals to live a long, happy and healthy life, sometimes an illness, injury or even death can occur which can be devastating. Often times we are faced with the heartbreaking decisions of how to help our pets and how to help their suffering, and this can mean making difficult choices in the loss of your pet. Choosing to end the life of your pet can be one of the most difficult things you will ever have to do. Thinking about saying goodbye and the subsequent loss is sometimes so painful that you are unable to make any decision at all.

You don't have to figure it all out on your own. Get help from your veterinarian, pet loss counselors, and others who have gone through similar experiences. There are no right answers: just do what feels right for you.



*"What I would like to feel that, having once had me in the family, now she cannot live without a dog." **The Last Will and Testament of an Extremely Distinguished Dog** by Eugene O'Neill*

Our Mission...

The Tufts Pet Loss Support Hotline seeks to serve the community-at-large by providing both a resource for people grieving the loss of a pet, and an opportunity for our veterinary students to acquire the skills needed for supporting those experiencing pet loss and grief.

Donations...

We are supported primarily by private donations. It is the financial support of individuals, veterinary practices, private foundations, and pet-related industries that make the Pet Loss Support Hotline possible.

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vet.tufts.edu/petloss
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Healing Animals. Helping Humans. Transforming Global Health.