



Loving Memories: The Grieving Process

What a wonderful responsibility we take on when we bring a pet into our lives. With the help and guidance from veterinarians, we provide a loving, safe and healthy environment for our pets who share everything with us. Pets see us through marriages, divorces, and the birth of children. Pets endure separation and welcome us back as if we had been away forever. They are the best pals we have for accepting us as we are.

But one day, that constant will become one of our losses. And when the kind face and acceptance we used to turn to is gone, where do we go for comfort?

One of the most difficult and important parts of grief and loss is seeking to understand what has happened and that what you are feeling is all right. Your sense of loss may encompass your life and that is all right. You have that right to grieve and you can take as much time as you need. In a busy and demanding world, the trick is to take the time.

There are many stages of grief, and none of them are absolute. Time frames vary from person to person. Generally, the stages include:

1. Shock/disbelief/denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining (often with God)
4. Depression
5. Acceptance/resolution/recovery

Ideally these stages are supposed to progress from stages one through five in predictable fashion. But often this just doesn't happen. Many don't go through all of the stages, and almost everyone will be thrown back into and out of these stages before the healing truly begins. You may find yourself very close to resolution when a memory or anniversary of your pet's passing knocks you back into the anger or denial stage. Not only is this understandable but it is also a fact of life. Give yourself time.

If you feel that time is passing too painfully for you or you want some very special and caring support, there are many sources of support available to you.

- Your veterinarian. Your relationship with your veterinarian has just been very emotional and personal. Few people understand your loss like the staff who have cared for your pet and who have helped you make your decision. Some pet owners, when going through the anger stage of grief will blame their veterinarian for their loss. Talk this over with your pet's caregiver; it may help you come to terms with that part of your loss.
- Church or Synagogue. If you have a relationship with a pastor or rabbi, don't forget that they may be there for you. For many people, religion is a framework of life. Don't think that they would not want to hear that you lost your pet.
- Counseling. Seeking professional help is absolutely all right and very common. Grief and depression are just as real over the loss of a pet as they are over the loss of a person. Some professionals offer pet loss support groups. At a group like this you will be with other people in the same situation as you who understand your grief and can share your experiences.
- Friends and family. Don't overlook this resource. Many of them have been with you in your grief from the time of decision or the receipt of the terrible news. And most have known your pet as long as you have. It may be difficult to accept help, but if someone offers, think about accepting it.

Remember, with time your pain will lessen and the wounds of despair will heal. You will never forget your beloved pet; the many happy memories will always be with you.