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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER

2013 Edition

# Coping with the Loss of Your Companion Animal

Dear Friend,

This booklet contains general information about companion animal loss and the process of grieving. Many people who have suffered the loss of an animal find it helpful to talk with others who are facing similar experiences. The Veterinary Medical Center now offers a biweekly bereavement group (CALLM) for clients and community members who desire support around the loss of an animal. To obtain information about the group and to register, please call 612-625-4168 or email [diesc009@umn.edu](mailto:diesc009@umn.edu). Another option in the area is the Animal Humane Society's pet loss support group. This support group meets every other Monday at 7:00 p.m. You may call (763) 522-4325 if you would like further information about this group.

Support around the loss of an animal may also be found through one of the many pet loss hotlines in the United States. These lines are often staffed by veterinary students or professional counselors who have been trained in the human-animal bond and grief. A short list of these telephone hot lines, in addition to other regional and national animal loss resources, can be found toward the back of this packet.

I hope you find this information helpful. Thank you for entrusting the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center with your animal's care, and please let us know what we may do to support you during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Athena Diesch, MSW, LGSW  
Veterinary Social Worker  
Veterinary Medical Center

## Understanding Grief

Grief is one of the most normal and natural emotions that we can feel, yet it is one of the most misunderstood. Grief is a normal, and unavoidable, reaction to the loss of a treasured loved one. Because grief often involves very painful and difficult feelings, most of us think that our grief is wrong or “crazy” in some way. Nothing could be further from the truth. Grief is a very healthy psychological response that requires expression and acknowledgement. Attempts to suppress feelings of grief can actually prolong the healing process.

Our discomfort with grief comes from a variety of sources, but can often be traced back to how our own families have dealt with loss, and how society in general responds to a bereaved person. Unfortunately, many of the responses we hear reinforce the notion that grief is unnatural and perpetuate the myths that grief should be avoided and expressed only behind closed doors. Society tends to reward the more unhealthy responses (stoicism and avoidance) while punishing the more healthy ones (expression and acceptance). Some common responses we hear when a death occurs are as follows:

“Try to stay busy.”

“Big boys don’t cry.”

“No sense dwelling on the past.”

“You must be strong right now.”

“Support groups are for weaklings.”

“He had a good life. Think of all your good memories.”

“You still have other pets.”

“Count your blessings.”

“God needs him more than you do.”

“If you look around, you can always find someone who is worse off than yourself”

These responses suggest to us that we should not feel badly about our losses. They encourage us to avoid our feelings and put pressure on us to get over the loss as soon as possible. Grief just doesn’t work that way and cannot be put onto a time schedule. Everyone grieves in their own time and in their own way, and creating artificial deadlines or expecting grief to disappear overnight only creates more stress for the bereaved person.

These responses also minimize the griever’s pain and do not acknowledge the loss that the griever feels. They also suggest to us that we have no right to be upset or distressed about the loss. These kinds of responses can make a griever feel guilty or ashamed about being upset and reinforce the notion that grieving is wrong.

Other common responses like... *“life goes on...you’ll find new friends to love or Just go out and get yourself another dog”* suggest that loved ones are easily and readily replaced. They tell the griever to handle the pain by replacing the loss and forgetting the past. The notion of replacing a loss as a way of handling the grief comes to many of us from a very early age. Many of us can probably recall from childhood losing a favorite toy or beloved object and being told, *“don’t feel bad, we’ll buy you a new one tomorrow”*. Responses like these minimize and complicate the griever’s pain by insinuating that the loss was relatively unimportant and should be “fixed” by replacement.

Given that our society promotes many of these myths about grief, it is important to remember that a grieving person needs acknowledgement, validation, and support. One of the best ways to deal with our grief is to understand that it is normal and to not make any judgments about our emotions. There are times when we can handle these feelings with the support of family and friends, and there are other times when professional assistance may be very helpful. There are many professional counselors, therapists, and members of the clergy trained in the areas of loss and grief who can provide assistance through the grieving process. There are also many books, articles, and other resources about the grief process available in most public libraries and local bookstores.

Adapted from *Changes: The Support for People and Pets Program*,  
Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital (Durrance, Butler & Lagoni, 1997)

## **Manifestations of Grief**

Although grief responses vary widely from one person to another, there are many predictable manifestations of grief. These manifestations occur on physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual levels. Before, during, and after loss, grief may appear in several of the following forms.

### **Physical**

Crying, sobbing, wailing, shock and numbness, dry mouth, a lump in the throat, shortness of breath, stomach ache or nausea, tightness in the chest, restlessness, fatigue, exhaustion, sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, body aches, stiffness of joints or muscles, dizziness or fainting.

### **Intellectual**

Denial, sense of unreality, confusion, inability to concentrate, feeling preoccupied by the loss, experiencing hallucinations concerning the loss (visual, auditory, and olfactory), a need to reminisce about the loved one and to talk about the circumstances of the loss, a sense that time is passing very slowly, a desire to rationalize or intellectualize feelings about the loss, thoughts or fantasies about suicide (not accompanied by concrete plans or behaviors).

### **Emotional**

Sadness, anger, depression, guilt, anxiety, relief, loneliness, irritability, a desire to blame others for the loss, resentment, embarrassment, self-doubt, lowered self-esteem, feelings of being overwhelmed or out of control, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, feelings of victimization, giddiness, affect that is inappropriate for the situation (nervous smiles and laughter).

### **Social**

Feelings of withdrawal, isolation and alienation, a greater dependency on others, a rejection of others, rejection by others, a reluctance to ask others for help, change in friends or in living arrangements, a desire to re-locate or move, a need to find distractions from the intensity of grief (to stay busy or over-commit to activities).

### **Spiritual**

Bargaining with God in an attempt to prevent loss, feeling angry at God when loss occurs, renewed or shaken religious beliefs, feelings of being either blessed or punished, searching for a meaningful interpretation of a loved one's death, paranormal visions or dreams concerning a dead loved one, questioning whether or not souls exist and wondering what happens to loved ones after death, the need to "finish business" with a purposeful ending or closure to the relationship (a funeral, memorial service, last rites ceremony, good-bye ritual).

Adapted from *Changes: The Support for People and Pets Program*,  
Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital (Durrance, Butler & Lagoni, 1997)

## Factors That Can Complicate Grief

If one or more of these factors are present, the grief process may be complicated and more difficult to complete.

- No previous experience with significant loss, death, or grief
- Other recent losses
- A personal history involving multiple losses
- Little or no support from friends or family
- Societal norms that trivialize and negate the loss
- Insensitive comments from others about the loss
- Feelings of guilt or responsibility for a death
- Untimely deaths like those of children, young adults, or young animals
- Deaths that happen suddenly, without warning
- Deaths that occur after long, lingering illnesses
- Deaths that have no known cause or that could have been prevented
- An unexplained disappearance
- Not being present at death
- Not viewing the body after death
- Witnessing a painful or traumatic death
- Deaths that occur in conjunction with other significant life events like birthdays, holidays, or a divorce
- After death anniversary dates and holidays
- Stories in the media that misrepresent or cast doubt on medical treatment procedures
- Advice based on others' negative experiences with death or on inaccurate information about normal grief

Adapted from *Changes: The Support for People and Pets Program*,  
Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital (Durrance, Butler & Lagoni, 1997)

## **Growth From Grief: Recovery From The Death of an Animal**

People experience the death of a companion animal in unique ways. This model is a guide: some people progress through grief in this order, while others move back and forth from phase to phase or even skip a phase at some point in the process.

### **The initial awareness of loss phase**

This early phase is also called “anticipatory grief.” People realize that their present circumstances hold the potential for the loss of their animal and, even before their animal dies, they begin to display symptoms of grief.

### **The coping with loss phase**

In this phase, death is imminent and people are faced with making difficult decisions about facilitating or otherwise supporting the dying process.

### **The saying goodbye phase**

In this phase, people say goodbye to their animal in a variety of ways. Some choose to say goodbye before, during and/or after euthanasia, while some prefer to not be present at euthanasia but to view the body afterwards. It is not uncommon to feel stuck in this phase of grief. Many believe that once they say goodbye, they will forget their animals and lose the special feelings they had for them. This is also the phase of burials, cremations, commemorative rituals, and memorial ceremonies. Ceremonies and rituals are often a very helpful and meaningful way to pay tribute to the bond you shared with your animal.

### **The painful awareness of loss phase**

In this phase, people experience the full extent of grief: depression, loneliness, guilt, self-neglect. The adjustments they must make in their daily routines due to their animal’s death trigger feelings of grief over and over again. This is the time that the reality of loss sets in. It is normal for people to need extra support from their friends, family, veterinary professionals, or human service professionals at this time.

### **The recovering from loss phase**

In this phase, people redefine their relationship with their deceased animal and find themselves able to talk about their animal without feeling intense pain and sadness. It becomes easier to remember the good times and the special characteristics that made their animal unique. Some people may also feel comfortable investing in a new companion animal relationship during this phase.

### **The personal growth through grief phase**

In this phase, people find meaning in their animal’s death. They report a lesson learned or an attitude changed due to their experience with loss. People often feel they have grown emotionally and measure their personal development in terms of their recovery from the loss. At this point, people may also be able to have a new animal in their lives without feeling disloyal to the one who died.

This model was originally adapted from John Schneider’s book, *Stress, Loss and Grief (1984)* by Laurel Lagoni, M.S. and Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D. (additional revisions by the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center).

## **Help in Healing the Hurt** **by Kathie Maffitt**

Anyone who has loved and owned a pet will at some time experience pet loss. How it affects us and how we deal with it depends on many factors, including the situation leading to the loss and our own emotional makeup. We are almost embarrassed to mourn our lost pets, especially when we are exposed to human death and loss daily via the television or newspapers. We don't allow ourselves to grieve and so the hurt lingers unresolved. Reading this will, hopefully, help you sort out your feelings and examine your loss.

One problem in our society is that there is no way to put a value on our animal companions, other than fair market price. This, for most of us, just isn't a meaningful accounting. Years ago there was an outbreak of Newcastle's Disease in Southern California. All birds who even might have been exposed were confiscated and destroyed. A blue and gold macaw, who had greeted his pet-shop owner every morning for eighteen years was one of the casualties. Could the pet shop owners get another macaw? Probably. Could she replace her beloved pet? No, never. The newscaster reporting the story mentioned a reimbursement of \$2000 to the bird's owner, the market price at the time. It hardly seemed fair.

Basic human needs are satisfied by our pets. We love them. We care for their physical needs. We spend money on them that could be well spent elsewhere. We talk to them. We kiss them. And they, in return, need us, manipulate us, and just love us, unconditionally. This love makes us get up in the night to open the door, change litter boxes and birdcages daily, recover the destroyed sofa and fight fleas. If you need to wash your hair, forget to feed him, or blame him for something he didn't do, your pet still loves you. When you lose that gift, you have really lost something worth having. You are allowed to cry, feel awful, and hate the whole world. It's permissible.

In recent years, animals of all kinds have garnered attention for their value in aiding those mentally and physically challenged with communication and response. Prisons sometimes allow inmates to keep pets as a way to rebuild social skills. The elderly often depend on pets as sources of comfort and affection when families have grown and gone. Children see pets as their allies in a hard and hostile world of misunderstanding. It is this value that must be considered.

People are sometimes disturbed by the strong negative emotions they feel following a pet's death or disappearance. We almost feel guilty, as if we should only feel this distraught over the death of a human friend or relative. For many of us, our pets are our best friends. Grief is the normal reaction to any loss; a theft of money or property, for example. Death is the greatest thief, isn't it?

There are many feelings that accompany a grief reaction. We have emotions ranging from anger at our pet for leaving us to guilt at not having done more to save him. These stages of grief are typical and natural. At first, there is a numbing disbelief that may immediately follow the loss. This is a protective measure taken until the reality of the situation can be faced. When this realization hits us we may feel guilty, angry, depressed, lethargic, and disoriented. These



feelings, as painful as they can be, should not be buried, but dealt with. Denial of grief will most likely prolong it.

There are several ways to cope with hurt feelings and a broken heart. Talking to an understanding and sympathetic friend is helpful in reestablishing daily routines. Looking at photos and going to your pet's favorite play spot invite memories to be mulled over and cherished. A discussion with your veterinarian concerning the circumstances leading to your pet's death can help resolve uncertainties you may have. The important thing is to allow yourself the luxury of time. Grief and mourning have no set time limit. Each person dealing with a loss is different. We shouldn't compare ourselves to one another. If you feel you are having an abnormal grief reaction, it might be wise to seek counseling, rather than suffer in silence. It doesn't mean you are going crazy. Talking with someone you trust; a friend, doctor, or pastor will help you understand your feelings.

If the loss of your pet occurs suddenly through accident or similar mishap, you have been caught unprepared. With no warning, you are likely to suffer intense and profound grief reactions. If you think the accident might be your fault, you feel guilty; if you blame someone else, you are angry at that person. There is a feeling of horror and frustration that makes you replay the scene over and over in your mind, wishing for the chance to go back in time and change what happened. Even the best-trained or most predictable animals can be impulsive. It only takes once.

When children are involved in a pet loss situation, there are some special considerations. The death of a family pet may be the child's first experience with death of any kind. The child may be angry at his parents or the veterinarian for being unable to save the pet's life. He may feel guilty, depressed...all the regular adult reactions and emotions. There is a chance the child may worry about being abandoned by his loved ones. He may reason that if his pet can die and leave him, why not the people he cares about? It helps to reassure the child in a way that is appropriate to his age, that this will not likely happen.

Whatever the circumstances, never lie to your child about what has happened. If you try to protect your child by saying "Fluffy ran away," your child would spend a very long time waiting for Fluffy to come back, and feel betrayed by you when he finds out the truth. Reassure your child that grief and sadness are okay and allow him to express his feelings, whatever they are. Discuss your pet and communicate your understanding of the child's feelings. Showing your own grief may help your children express theirs. Be aware that pre-teen or older children may have difficulty in expressing sorrow over the loss of a pet, even if the animal belonged to them.

One of the most difficult situations a pet owner can face is the question of euthanasia or "putting the animal 'to sleep'" or "putting down." (I hate those terms because they can be confusing, especially to children, who may think that anesthetizing an animal for surgery will kill it.) This is an issue you should discuss with your veterinarian and concerned family members before the decision must actually be made, if possible. If your pet has been diagnosed as seriously or terminally ill, you should consider the quality of your pet's life. If there is more pain than not in your pet's day-to-day existence and the future prognosis is not good, euthanasia is an alternative your veterinarian may offer. Your pet probably has given you much happiness. You could repay

the debt by ending your friend's pain. It is a hard decision; we have been taught that killing is wrong. If the pain of an incurable illness can be controlled by medication, and you can afford it, by all means do it. Ask your veterinarian what he would do if the animal were his.

You are probably undecided about staying with your pet during the procedure. If you want to stay, then do. Being there you will see that it is a painless death and there is no awareness of dying on the animal's part. It may help you to think about that later. The important thing is that you be comfortable with your decision. If you have explored all alternatives, you will know you put forth your best effort for your friend.

My cocker spaniel, Casey, was 12 years old when she developed malignant tumors. After three surgeries, she seemed well, then developed an uncharacteristic cough. X-rays revealed an inoperable lung tumor. Our family was preparing to move across country by car the following week and I feared losing her in a strange town with strangers around me. I decided to say goodbye then, rather than lose her in some unknown place. It seemed like a sudden decision. It was a sudden decision. I wasn't prepared. I held her in my arms and cradled her head. I told her how much I loved her and what a good dog she was. When the veterinarian gave her the injection, I was still holding her. I felt her relax against me and her head drooped. Then she was gone. I looked at her face. She looked like she was sleeping, like the thousand times she had fallen asleep in my lap. The veterinarian mumbled something about a time to live and a time to die. He was upset and I was crying. I went home and packed up her collar, leash, placemat and bowl I had made her with her name on it. I still have them, nearly twenty years later. I thought the pain would never stop. But time did help, and I can speak of her now without tears and know I did the right thing.

Preparing a final resting-place or having some kind of memorial service puts a period on the final sentence in your pet's story. There is comfort in knowing you've taken care of last things. Several alternatives are available including backyard burial, cremation and public pet cemeteries. Talk this question over with family members, taking into account your financial abilities. Be sure to ask for the input of your children. Funerals may seem less frightening and mysterious if the child is involved in your plans for your pet. Writing a eulogy or tribute allows for unaired emotions to be vented. A memorial marker or stone is fine if you desire it, and a message of your own composition can be very satisfactory. Conversely, if you do not feel the need for any memorials, then please do not feel you are an uncaring pet owner. Each of us must handle this as our own heart dictates.

Sometime in the future you will probably begin wondering about getting another pet. This will be a decision that is yours alone and you will know when you are ready. Be sure that you do not actually try to replace your lost pet. This is impossible. There will never be another pet like the one you lost, so it is best to treasure the memories of that animal and then move into a new relationship with the new pet. Value your new pet for himself, and don't be disappointed if he doesn't want to sleep at the foot of your bed the way your other pet did. Give yourself ample time to adjust to a new personality. If your enjoyment of your new pet causes a twinge of guilt, realize that your pleasure in your new pet is not a betrayal of your old pet, but a tribute.

If you do not care to get another pet, it is perfectly all right. Sometimes it is only that particular pet you were fond of and not dogs, cats, or birds in general. If you are unsure, you probably aren't ready. Give yourself time. You will be able to think of your lost pet without pain. Sorrow, perhaps, but the hurt will be softened and replaced by happy images of life. Remember them, with love.

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## **Children and Grief**

**By Jeannine Moga, MSW, LICSW**

Guiding children through the death of an animal can be both tricky and tremendously rewarding. While many parents struggle with decisions around how (and how much) to talk about death with their kids, **not** talking about the death of a loved one can actually make the grieving process more difficult for children and adults alike. This is especially true when the death of an animal is a child's first experience with loss.

One of the most important things to remember is that children of all ages need simple, honest information about when a death has occurred and what death looks like. When discussing the death of an animal, use concrete words to describe what happens to the body during the process and avoid the use of jargon or "soft" terms. For instance, younger children may need to know that bodies stop working when they die (bodies can no longer hear, feel, see, or taste). Older children may need to know what condition led the body to stop working and why that condition could not be fixed by the veterinarian. Similarly, it is important to discuss euthanasia simply. Instead of using words like, "having Rocket put down" or "putting Princess to sleep" (which can leave kids confused about what it means to sleep or rest), it is preferable to explain euthanasia as something veterinarians do for animals who need help to die peacefully and without pain (or, for younger children, to help dying animals leave their bodies).

Additionally, there are a number of general guidelines for supporting children through the grieving process:

- **Offer to answer any question your child may have – even the silly, difficult, or complicated ones.** These questions may pop up at any point before or after the death of a loved animal. Be as open as possible about the details your child needs to know, as those details may help them to make sense out of what has happened. There are many books geared toward answering kids' nitty-gritty questions about death (such as "what is cremation?" or "what happens after a body is buried?"). Please see the resource guide at the back of this packet, or call VMC Social Work Services, for more information.
- **Give them choices about how they want to be involved.** If your family is preparing for the death of an animal, either through euthanasia or an unassisted death, explain what that death may look like and ask your child how he/she wants the goodbye to look and feel. Likewise, children can be given choices about whether they want to visit with remains after death and how they want to be involved in burial or memorialization rituals.
- **Listen without judgment.** There is no right way to grieve, and children may have any number of responses to loss (including tearfulness, nervousness, sleep disturbance, and impaired concentration at school). Invite your child to talk about the death of their animal, and make sure they know that their feelings are normal. Their animal was important to them, and it is okay to feel any number of ways when that animal is gone.
- **Support their grief, whatever the form.** Some children, especially those with less developed verbal skills, benefit from having non-verbal opportunities to process grief.

Creating a scrapbook, drawing pictures, taking clippings of fur, or making imprints of paws can give children an outlet for both their creativity and their feelings. Many ideas are listed in the next section of this booklet.

- **Make space for remembering.** Encourage children to share favorite stories about their animal and to remember the happiest times with that animal. Those memories are part of the natural healing process and can provide great comfort months, and even years, after an animal's death.
- **Balance the grief with laughter and joy.** It is healthy to give ourselves a break from the deep sadness that comes from the death of a loved animal. In fact, taking a break from grief to do something fun may actually help facilitate the grief process. Laughter is a wonderful healing salve, so make sure your child knows that being able to laugh and have fun does not mean they love their animal any less.
- **Embrace routine.** The death of a loved one is often very disruptive to a child's sense of safety and security. At such a difficult time, it can be comforting to know what to expect from each day. If your family has an established routine around mealtimes, bedtimes, chores, religious worship, and/or recreation, it will be important to maintain those routines now. It may even be helpful to integrate a ritual of remembrance into the daily routine. For instance, a family whose evening is spent around exercising or grooming an animal may choose to light a candle every evening in that animal's memory.

## **Memorialization**

### **Dedicated to and in loving memory of Barney...**

Below are a variety of ideas for memorializing a pet. The ideas were contributed by volunteers of the Pet Loss Support Hotline at the University of California at Davis, School of Veterinary medicine. I was inspired to create this when I learned of the impending death of my beloved cat Barney. Barney died on June 30, 1990. This is intended to be a living document such that ideas are continually being added to it.

*Leah M. Hertzell, Class of 1991*  
*UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine*

Take lots of photographs, and, when you think you've taken enough, take some more. Use the photos to fill an album, place them in your pet's favorite spots in the house, make a collage with them, fill a multi-picture frame with them, and carry pictures in your wallet.

Write a poem, story, song, etc., about and/or dedicated to your pet.

Write down your special memories of your pet. Add to these stories or anecdotes from friends and family. Alternatively, you could make a tape recording of the same thing.

Chronicle your pet's life with photos and/or by keeping a journal of its life.

Write a letter to your pet expressing feelings you may be struggling with.

Videotape your pet doing anything and everything – eating, sleeping, playing, and just sitting there.

Make something that reminds you of your pet, e.g., a drawing, a clay sculpture, a needlework project, etc.

Have a professional portrait, sketch, or sculpture done of your pet. This can be done after the pet's death from a photograph. You can also have a photo of your pet transferred to a T-shirt, clock, button, or mug (check advertisements in magazine like *Dog Fancy* and *Cat Fancy*).

Keep baby teeth, whiskers, fur (from shaved areas) and place in a locket.

Save shoes, tail, and mane hairs from horses.

Have fur spun to make yarn in order to knit/crochet something in memory of your pet. (See article in *Dog Fancy*, March 1990). Pet needs to have medium to long hair.

Keep pet tags. You can place these on your key ring so that you will always be carrying the memory of your special friend with you.

Have a plaque made to honor your pet. Place it in a special place—next to your pet’s ashes, on a tree near where your pet was buried, in the hospital where your pet was cared for, etc.

Make a donation in memory of your pet to a special cause.

Volunteer your time at a humane organization and/or help find homes for strays and unwanted pets.

Start a pet loss support group in your area.

Plant a bush, shrub, tree, or flowers over or near location where body or ashes are buried.

Place a bench with an engraved nameplate and/or inscription beside where pet is buried.

Place ashes in a potted houseplant.

Scatter ashes in an area that was special to you and your pet.

Place ashes in a locket with animal’s name engraved on locket. (Ashes need to be sealed in an airtight bag and then placed in locket, which must be airtight as well.)

Collect pet’s collars, tags, bowls, blankets, etc., and place in a special area in honor of your pet. Also place ashes, sympathy cards, etc., with them.

Send out cards with a photograph of your pet informing those close to you and your pet of your loss.

If the animal is not buried near you, take pictures of its grave and place these in a special spot which you can “visit.”

Adapted from *Changes: The Support for People and Pets Program*,  
**Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital (Durrance, Butler & Lagoni, 1997)**

## Resource List: Companion Animal Loss and Death

### **Pet Loss/Grief Counseling**

- *Center for Grief, Loss and Transition, (651) 641-0177*  
1133 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105  
[www.griefloss.org](http://www.griefloss.org)
- *Grief Connections, (952) 925-3533*  
4601 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416
- *University of Minnesota Veterinary Social Services, (612) 624-9372*  
Veterinary Medical Center, 1365 Gortner Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108  
<http://www.cvm.umn.edu/vmc/aboutVMC/clientsupport.html>

### **Pet Loss Support Groups**

- *Animal Humane Society, (763) 522-4325, [www.animalhumanesociety.org](http://www.animalhumanesociety.org).*  
845 Meadow Lane, Golden Valley, MN 55422  
This support group meets every Monday evening (except holidays) from 7:00-9:00 p.m. and is open to the public at no charge.
- *Animal Emergency Clinic, (651) 501-3766, [www.aercmn.com](http://www.aercmn.com)*  
1163 Helmo Avenue North, Oakdale, MN, 55128  
This support group meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 7:00-9:00 p.m.
- *Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories Group, (612) 624-9372*  
University of Minnesota Veterinary Social Work Services  
1365 Gortner Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108  
This support group meets on the second and fourth Wednesday evenings of every month, from 6:30-8:00 p.m., and is open to the public at no charge. All attendees must call in advance to be pre-screened and to reserve a seat.
- *Friends of Animals Humane Society, (218) 879-1655,*  
[www.foaonline.org/petloss.html](http://www.foaonline.org/petloss.html)  
1418 Highway 33, Cloquet, MN 55720  
This support group meets the 2nd Thursday of every month from 6:30-8:00pm.

### **Cremation Services**

- *Animal Humane Society, (763) 522-4325, [www.animalhumanesociety.org](http://www.animalhumanesociety.org).*  
845 Meadow Lane, Golden Valley, MN 55422  
Cremation services available to the public.



- *Midwest Cremation Services, (763) 753-5510*  
20323 St. Francis Blvd., Anoka, MN 55303  
Individual cremation services available to the public; personal viewing of cremation may be done by appointment.
- *Pet Cremation Services of Minnesota, (952) 925-1234*  
5249 West 73<sup>rd</sup> St., Edina, MN 55439; [www.petcremationofmn.com](http://www.petcremationofmn.com)  
Individual cremation with viewing available to the public; same day service is available.
- *Pets Remembered, (651) 633-4564*  
15 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. SE, New Brighton, MN 55112; [www.petsrememberedcremation.com](http://www.petsrememberedcremation.com)  
Individual cremation with family viewing available to the public; same days service is sometimes available.
- *Veterinary Hospitals Association, (651) 451-6669*  
370 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075  
Cremation services performed through member veterinary hospitals only; personal witnessing of cremation may be done by appointment and carries an extra charge of \$100.

### **Pet Cemeteries**

- *Animal Inn, (651) 777-0255*  
8633 N. 34<sup>th</sup> St., Lake Elmo, MN 55402  
Animal Inn operates the only pet cemetery in the Twin Cities with available plot space. The cost of a plot is \$225; the cost of a headstone is \$250. Caskets may be ordered for an extra charge.
- *Hillside Pet Cemetery, (612) 763-6367*  
6259 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW, Alexandria, MN, 56308
- *Pet Haven Cemetery, (218) 773-6585*  
7261 1<sup>st</sup> St. NW, East Grand Forks, MN 56721

### **Pet Preservation**

- *Freezedry Specialties, Inc., (763) 389-2299*  
4875 70<sup>th</sup> Ave., Princeton, MN 55371  
This company can provide you with information about freeze dry taxidermy processes, as well as names and numbers of reputable vendors. Most freeze dry taxidermy services are limited to animals under 40 pounds.

## **Caskets, Urns, and Memorials (★ Denotes local business)**

- **[www.celebrationsoflife.net](http://www.celebrationsoflife.net)** ★  
Personalized books based on your animal's own story
- **[www.followthemuse.com](http://www.followthemuse.com)** ★  
Garden stones and memorial cairns (rock sculptures)
- **[www.foreverpets.com](http://www.foreverpets.com)** ★  
Urns for dogs, cats, and horses
- **[www.glasspetmemorials.com](http://www.glasspetmemorials.com)** ★  
Pet memorial paperweights that integrate cremains, (612) 325-9665
- **[www.hedbergaggregates.com](http://www.hedbergaggregates.com)** ★  
Pet memorial garden stones, (763) 545-4400
- **[www.petstepstoheaven.com](http://www.petstepstoheaven.com)** ★  
Memorial stepping stones and benches
- **[www.preciouspetmemorials.com](http://www.preciouspetmemorials.com)** ★  
Natural stone pet urns and markers for your garden, (651) 442-9334
- **[www.perfectmemorials.com](http://www.perfectmemorials.com)** ★  
Pet urns and caskets
- **[www.petreliquaries.com](http://www.petreliquaries.com)** ★  
Hand-crafted mementoes designed to hold ashes, hair, or whiskers; made in silver or gold
- **[www.agelessmemorialurns.com](http://www.agelessmemorialurns.com)**  
Handcrafted, hardwood pet urns; personalization is available.
- **[www.ashestoart.com](http://www.ashestoart.com)**  
Design your own pottery urn
- **[www.bestfriendservices.com](http://www.bestfriendservices.com)**  
Animal urns, figurines, grave markers, and ash pendants
- **[www.celebrationforest.com](http://www.celebrationforest.com)**  
Living memorials
- **[www.cheerspottery.com](http://www.cheerspottery.com)**  
Custom-made ceramic urns

- **[www.custompeturns.com](http://www.custompeturns.com)**  
Custom-made sculpture urns
- **[www.doggiedoodles.com](http://www.doggiedoodles.com)**  
Custom-made stuffed animals in the likeness of your animal
- **[www.furryangel.com](http://www.furryangel.com)**  
Memorial candles and pictures frames
- **[www.mytreasuredpetmemorials.com](http://www.mytreasuredpetmemorials.com)**  
Death announcements and memorial cards
- **[www.starwishing.com](http://www.starwishing.com)**  
Name-a-star memorials

**National Support Hotlines** *Many veterinary organizations host volunteer- or student- run hotlines. We have chosen to list only the hotlines that are professionally staffed and widely available.*

- *American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) National Pet Loss Hotline*  
(877) 474-3310  
Calls are returned immediately 24 hours a day.
- *IAMS Pet Loss Support Center and Hotline*  
(888) 332-7738  
This national hotline is available Monday through Saturday from 8am-8pm.

### **Additional Resources**

- *The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement (APLB)*  
P.O. Box 106, Brooklyn, N. Y. 11230  
718-382-0690  
<http://www.aplb.org>  
The APLB maintains a national clearinghouse of information on pet bereavement, including a website and a counselor-facilitated chat room.
- *Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets*  
400 New Bedford Drive  
Vallejo, CA 94591  
Tel: (707) 557-8595, Fax: (707) 557-5555  
[www.pethospice.org](http://www.pethospice.org)  
This website provides basic information about home hospice care for animals.

- *Rainbow Bridge*  
 P.O. Box 53  
 Cape Canaveral, FL 32920-0053  
<http://www.rainbowbridge.com>  
 This website provides a “virtual interactive” memorial page, a pet loss forum, and links to other pet loss websites.
- *Pet Loss Support Pages*  
<http://pet-loss.net/>  
 This website, maintained by Moira Allen, includes state-by-state listings of pet loss services. A variety of other information about end of life issues, euthanasia, and coping with pet loss can also be printed from this site.
- *Marty Tousley*  
[Tousleym@aol.com](mailto:Tousleym@aol.com)  
<http://www.griefhealing.com>  
 Marty Tousley’s website is dedicated to online grief education courses, memorials, poetry, and resource listings for both human and companion animal loss.
- *University of Minnesota Veterinary Social Services*  
 Veterinary Medical Center, 1365 Gortner Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108  
 (612) 624-9372  
<http://www.cvm.umn.edu/vmc/aboutVMC/clientsupport.html>  
 This program provides clients, the general public, and veterinary professionals with information, grief support, and referral services around companion animal illness and death. Counselors are available from 8-4:30 pm Central time.

## Recommended Books and Audiotapes: Companion Animal Loss and Death

### **Adults**

- Abercrombie B. (Ed.) (2011). *Cherished: 21 writers on animals they have loved and lost*. New World Library.
- Adamec, C. (2000). *When your pet dies: Dealing with your grief and helping your children cope*. Excel Press.
- Anderson, A. & Anderson, L. (2005). *Rainbows and bridges: An animal companion memorial kit*. New World Library.
- Anderson, M. (1996). *Coping with sorrow on the loss of your pet* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Peregrine Press.
- Bronson, H. (2000). *Dog gone: Coping with the loss of a pet*. Bestsell Publications.
- Congalton, D. (2000). *Three cats, two dogs: One journey through multiple pet loss*. NewSage Press.
- Greene, L. & Landis, J. (2002). *Saying goodbye to the pet you love*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Kowalski, G. (1997). *Goodbye, friend: Healing wisdom for anyone who has ever lost a pet*. Stillpoint Publishing.
- Kowalski, G., Regan, T., & Wolfe, A. (1999). *The souls of animals* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Stillpoint Publishing.
- Nieberg, H. & Fisher, A. (1982). *Pet loss: A thoughtful guide for adults and children*. Harper & Row.
- O'Neill, E. (1999). *The last will and testament of an extremely distinguished dog*. Henry Holt & Company.
- Reynolds, R. (2001). *Blessing the bridge: What animals teach us about death, dying, and beyond*. New Sage Press.
- Sife, W. (1993). *The loss of a pet*. Howell Book House.
- Smith, K. (Ed). (1997). *Healing the pain of pet loss: Letters in memoriam*. The Charles Press.
- Tousley, M. (1997). *The final farewell: Preparing for and mourning the loss of your pet*. Pals Publishing.
- Wolfelt, A. (2004). *When your pet dies: A guide to mourning, remembering, and healing*. Companion Press.

## **Children**

- Buscaglia, L. (1982). *The fall of Freddie the leaf: A story for all ages*. Slack Book Division.
- Cardeccia, K. (2004). *Healing your heart when your animal friend is gone: A children's pet bereavement workbook*. Bree's Gift Publishing.
- Carney, K. (1999). *Our special garden: Understanding cremation*. Dragonfly Publishing.
- Carney, K. (2001). *They're part of the family*. Dragonfly Publishing.
- Davis, C. (2001). *For every cat an angel*. Lighthearted Press.
- Davis, C. (1997). *For every dog an angel*. Lighthearted Press.
- Heegaard, M. (2001). *Saying goodbye to your pet: Children can learn to cope with pet loss*. Fairview.
- Heegaard, M. (1988). *When someone very special dies: Children can learn to cope with grief*. Woodland Press.
- Mellonie, B. (1987). *Lifetimes: The beautiful way to explain death to children*. Bantam Doubleday/Dell Publishing.
- Rogers, F. (1988). *When a pet dies*. Putnam Publishing Group.
- Ross, C. (2005). *Pet loss and children*. Brunner-Routledge
- Rylant, C. (1996). *Cat heaven*. Blue Sky Press.
- Rylant, C. (1995). *Dog heaven*. Blue Sky Press.
- Tousley, M. (1996). *Children and pet loss: A guide for helping*. Pals Publishing.
- Viorst, J. (1971). *The tenth good thing about Barney*. Atheneum.
- Warren, P. (1992). *Where love goes*. Art After Five.
- White, E. B. (1952). *Charlotte's web*. Harper Junior.
- Wilhelm, H. (1985). *I'll always love you*. Crown Publishing Group.
- Wolfelt, A. (1983). *Helping children cope with grief*. Accelerated Development.
- Yue, S. (2012). *Snort's special gift: A family story*. Beaver's Pond Press.