

The special bond with your pet

The relationship shared with your pet is a special and unique bond, a tie that some might find difficult to understand. There will be well-meaning friends and family members who will think that you should not mourn for your pet or who will tell you that you should not be grieving as hard as you are because it's "just a cat" or "just a dog." Your grief is normal, and the relationship you shared with your special friend needs to be mourned.

Grief can't be ranked

Sometimes our heads get in the way of our hearts' desire to mourn by trying to justify the depth of our emotion. Some people will then want to "rank" their grief, pitting their grief emotions with others who may be "worse." While this is normal, your grief is your grief and deserves the care and attention of anyone who is experiencing a loss.

Questions of spirituality

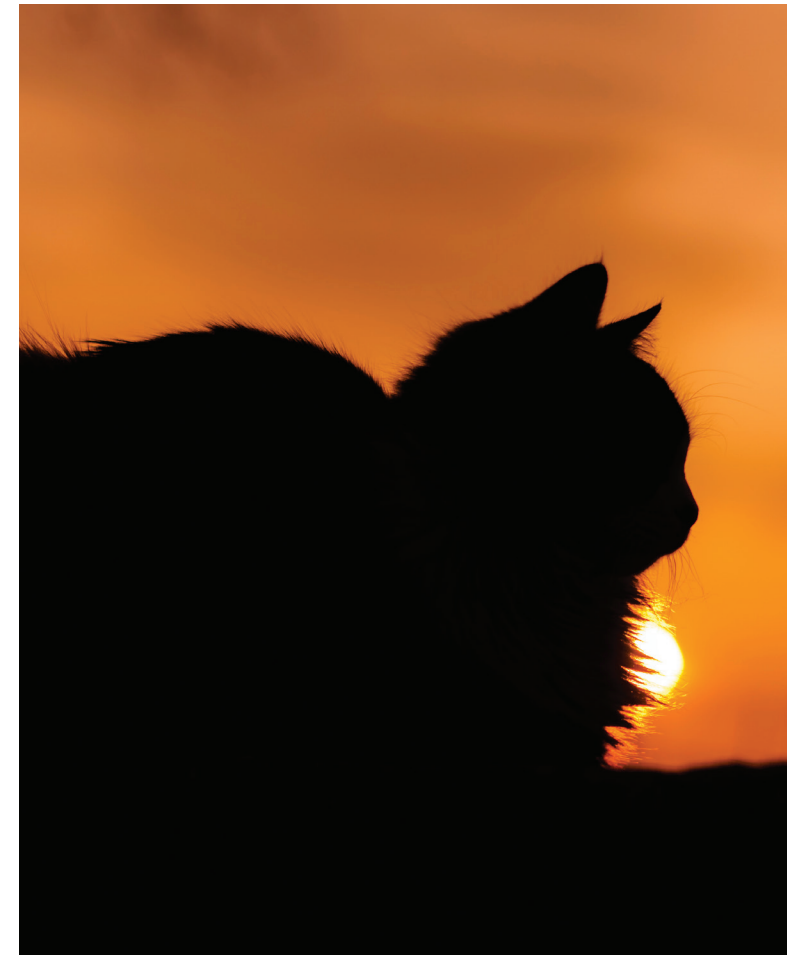
During this time in your grief journey, you may find yourself questioning your beliefs about pets and the afterlife. Also, many people around you will have their own opinions. It will be important during this time to find the answers right for you and your individual and personal beliefs.

Information provided by Coleen A. Ellis, CT, CPLP.

FOR MORE PET RESOURCES, VISIT:
American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org/PetOwners

PET LOSS AND GRIEF

*Brought to you by your veterinarian
and the American Veterinary Medical Association*



(C) 2022 American Veterinary Medical Association



When someone we love such as a beloved pet dies, the loss often causes grief and intense sorrow. By physically showing your grief, you actively mourn the death of your beloved pet. This active mourning will move you on a journey toward reconciling with the loss of your pet.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Your journey of grief will not take on a prescribed pattern or look like stages. During the period when you are actively mourning your loss, it may help to consider the following:

- **ACKNOWLEDGE THE REALITY OF THE DEATH**

Acknowledging the full reality of your loss may take weeks or months, but will be done in a time that is right for you. Be kind to yourself as you prepare for the “new normal” of a life without your beloved pet. Just as it took time to build the relationship with your pet, it will take time to get used to them not being there.

- **MOVE TOWARD THE PAIN OF THE LOSS**

Experiencing these emotional thoughts and feelings about the death of a pet is a difficult, but important, need. A healthier grief journey may come from taking your time to work through your feelings rather than trying to push them away or ignore them.

- **CONTINUE YOUR RELATIONSHIP THROUGH MEMORIES**

Your memories allow your pets to live on in you. Embracing these memories, both happy and sad, can be a very slow and, at times, painful process that occurs in small steps. For example, take some time to look at past photos, write a tribute to your pet, or write your pet a letter recalling your time together.

- **ADJUST YOUR SELF-IDENTITY**

Part of your self-identity might come from being a pet owner. Others may also think of you in relation to your pet. You may be “the person who always walked the big black dog around the neighborhood” or “the friend whose cat always jumped on laps.” Adjusting to this change is a central need of mourning.

- **SEARCH FOR MEANING**

When a pet dies, it’s natural to question the meaning and purpose of pets in your life. Coming to terms with



these questions is another need you must meet during your grief journey. Know that it is the asking, not the finding of concrete answers, that is important.

- **RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM OTHERS**

You need the love and support of others because you never “get over” grief. Talking or being with other pet owners who have experienced the death of a pet can be one important way to meet this need.

Be kind to yourself as you prepare for the “new normal” of a life without your beloved pet.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

The experience of loss is different for everyone and can present unique challenges.

The deafening silence

The silence in your home after the death of a pet may seem excruciatingly loud. While your animal companion occupies physical space in your life and your home, many times their presence is felt more with your senses. When that pet is no longer there, the lack of their presence—the silence—becomes piercing. It becomes the reality of the “presence of the absence.” Merely being aware of this stark reality will assist in preparing you for the flood of emotions.