

Supporting Human Needs & Honoring the Bond



Veterinary Social Work & Pet Loss

Chelsey Nisbet, MSW, ASW, Veterinary Social Worker

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Agenda

- ❖ Veterinary Social Work
- ❖ Pet Loss & Grief
- ❖ Disenfranchisement of animal loss
- ❖ Holding Space
- ❖ Resources & Close

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Veterinary Social Worker

- Education and trained for work with *people!*
- Guided by ethics, values, research & best practices
- Embedded in the hospital
 - + work as a part of the multidisciplinary team
- Client support:
 - Educational materials
 - Decision making
 - Emotional support
 - Quality of life discussions
 - Grief support
- Employee support:
 - Relieve emotional & grief load
 - Brief counseling – work or personal stressors (confidential)
 - 1:1 or conflict resolution or group
 - Wellbeing initiatives & training



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SAGE Campbell Successes



2021 Client Consults = 270 (9/24 – 12/31)

2022 Client Consults (YTD) = 629

Total since program inception = 899

- Majority Humane Euthanasia (present before and/or during) followed by Pet Loss/Grief Support followed by Quality of Life/End of Life Decision Making
- Approximately 50/50 ER & Specialty Services
- Majority DVM referrals

2021 Team Members Supported 1:1 = 32 (Q4)

2022 Team Members Supported 1:1 = 64

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ANIMAL-RELATED GRIEF & BEREAVEMENT



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**"GRIEF IS NOT A DISORDER,
A DISEASE OR A SIGN OF
WEAKNESS. IT IS AN
EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL
AND SPIRITUAL NECESSITY,
THE PRICE YOU PAY FOR
LOVE. THE ONLY CURE FOR
GRIEF IS TO GRIEVE." EARL GROLLMAN**

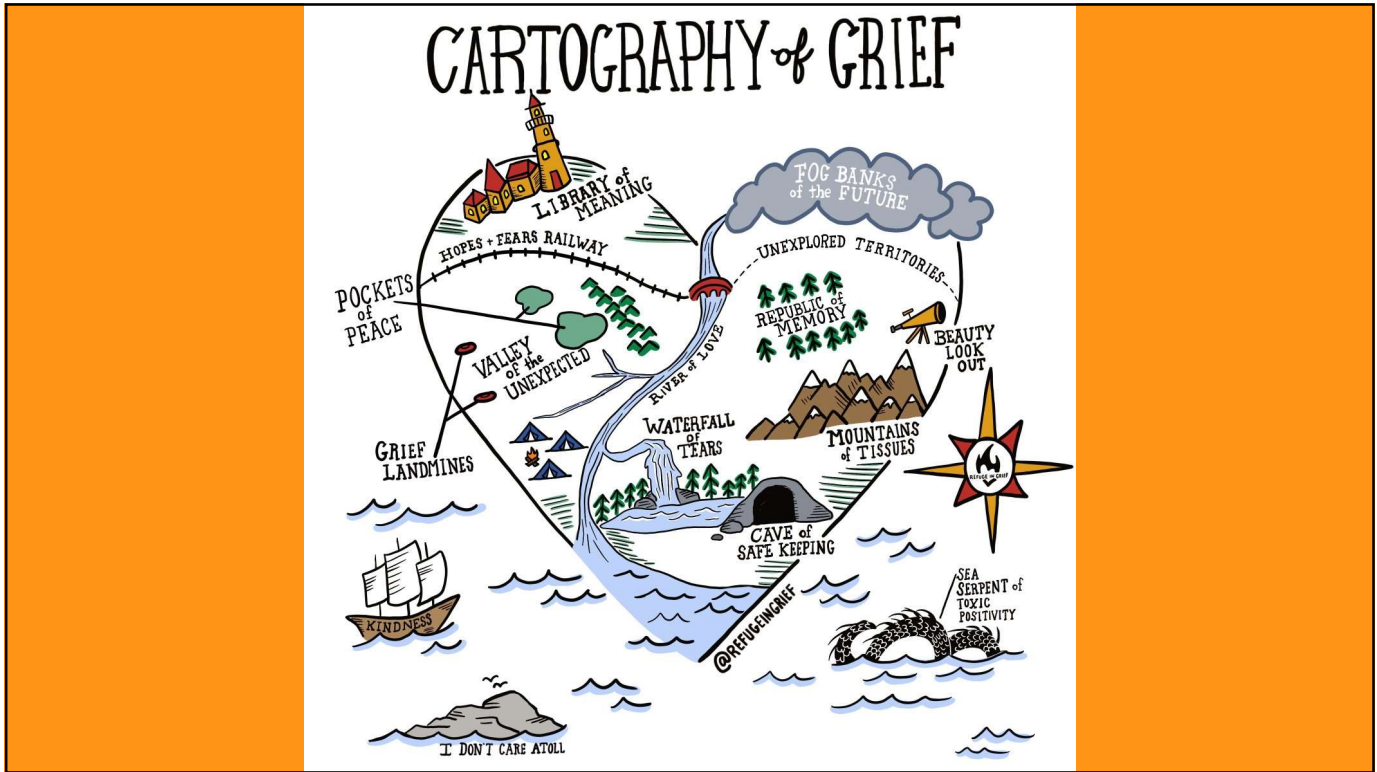
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What we
know
about
grief...

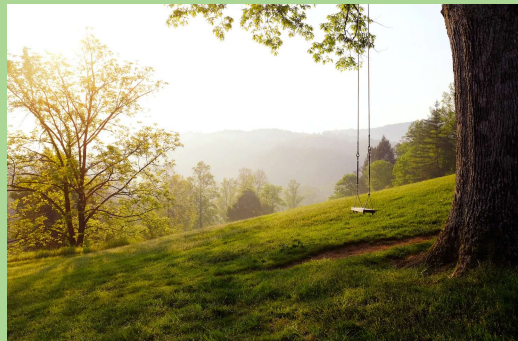
GRIEF RESPONSES:

- Physical
- Intellectual
- Emotional
- Social

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<p>Anticipatory Grief (Therese Rando)</p>	<p>We begin to grieve a loss even before it occurs</p>
<p>Re-grief (Vomik Volkan)</p>	<p>Can feel like relieving a previous loss</p>

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What we know about grief...

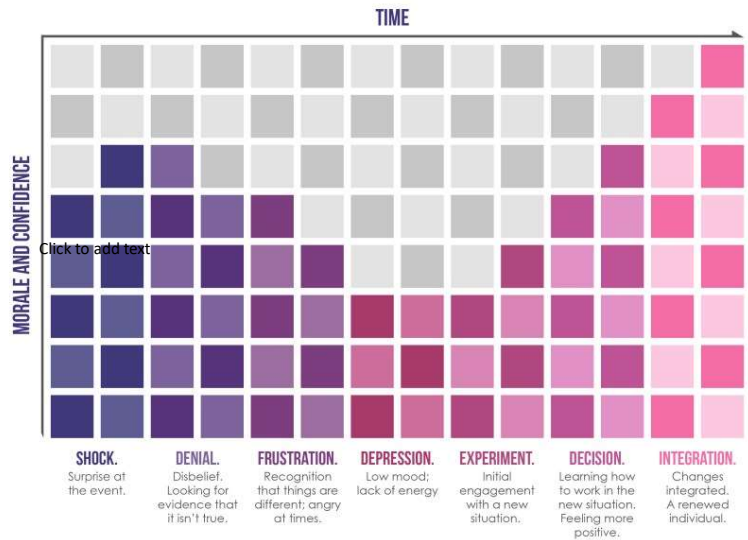
GRIEF RESPONSES:

...a wide array of grief responses can be considered normal!

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Stages were never meant to be linear or step-by-step.

KÜBLER-ROSS CHANGE CURVE®



* The Kübler-Ross Change Curve® is copyrighted & trademarked by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Family Limited Partnership.

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THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

SOME NON-LINEAR ELEMENTS

- Feeling isolated from others
- Anger (a valid emotion on its own)
- Identity confusion and self-discovery
- Renewed sadness around milestones
- Anxiety and fear of losing more people
- Changes in appetite, energy, concentration
- Numbness, fogginess, or being on "autopilot"
- Seeking therapy and/or community support
- Seeking meaning, healing tools, or spirituality
- Guilt, remorse, feeling responsible or regretful
- Desire to bear witness or share your own story
- Overtaken by grief "sneak attacks" or "waves"
- Intense need to be busy or distract from feeling
- Disbelief and shock regardless of the nature of death
- Contending with different reactions to the loss within the family unit
- Renewed grief from hearing of similar losses, including celebrity deaths
- Fear of how others will respond /not wanting to make things "awkward"
- Feeling rushed to return to work without adequate/any bereavement leave



@griefuncovered™

(Because many do not identify with each and every stage or experience them in order)

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HOW CAN I HELP NORMALIZE GRIEF?

- REMOVE EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR GRIEF
- DO NOT MASK YOUR GRIEF TO MAKE OTHERS FEEL COMFORTABLE
- HONOR THE LOSS NO MATTER HOW "BIG" OR "SMALL"
- AVOID GASLIGHTING YOUR OWN GRIEF
- SEEK OUT SUPPORT
- REMINDE YOURSELF THAT GRIEF IS NOT LINEAR
- CANCEL PLANS WHEN YOU ARE HAVING A HEAVY DAY
- GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO FEEL ALL OF YOUR FEELINGS

@GOING_WITH_GRACE  GOINGWITHGRACE.COM

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Things Grieving People Do That May Seem Strange but Are Actually Very Common

Find most movies and TV shows unbearable, and then proceed to watch the few "safe" options on repeat



Seek out intimacy and/or sex, or avoid it altogether



Wear the same clothes for weeks on end



Lash out at friends and strangers, like slow walkers or people who breathe too loudly



Have a hard time mustering up energy to respond to texts, calls, emails, and basically all forms of communication

Talk about it to everyone all the time



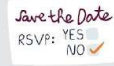
Not talk about it at all



Have nightmares and/or dreams in which they're still alive



Skip out on holidays, celebrations, and basically all social occasions



Lose track of time



16 · Welcome to the Grief Club

There is No Right or Wrong Way to Grieve · 17

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REFUGE IN GRIEF PRESENTS...

G R I E F
B I N G O

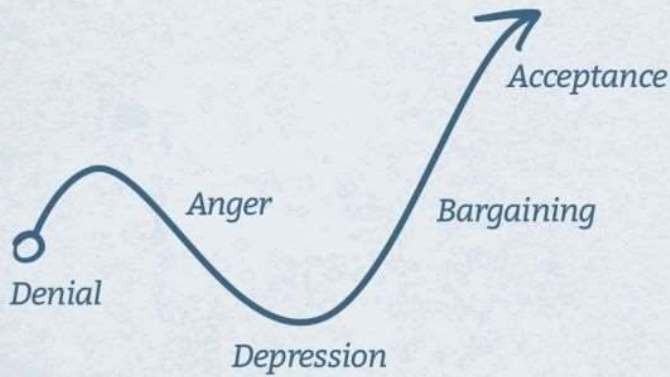
 LOST TRACK OF TIME	 LEFT MY KEYS IN A WEIRD PLACE	 LOST MY APETITE	 ABANDONED MY GROCERY CART	 LOST MY CAR IN THE PARKING LOT
 YOU'RE STILL YOUNG! ENCOURAGED TO MOVE ON	 MOVED AWAY	 WIDE AWAKE AT 3AM	 LOST FRIENDS	 SEARCHED FOR THEIR SMELL
 CRIED IN PUBLIC	 SURPRISED BY THE KINDNESS OF OTHERS	 REFUGE IN GRIEF	 CAN'T FOCUS TO READ A BOOK	 EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON BEEN TOLD...
 GAINED FRIENDS	 UNABLE TO FIND MEANING IN ANYTHING	 BUT... HOW ARE YOU REALLY???	 FOUND A MESSAGE IN THE CLOUDS	 KEPT THINGS AS THEY LEFT THEM
 ATE EVERYTHING IN SIGHT	 HAD UNEXPECTED MOMENTS OF PEACE	 FOUND COMFORT IN ANIMALS	 FORGOT THAT YOU WERE DEAD	 LOOKED FOR YOU IN A CROWD

@refugeingrief

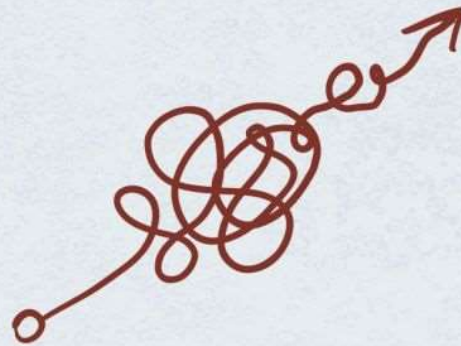
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Stages of Grief

The roadmap you expected:



The road you got:



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≡ GRIEF JOURNEY ≡

@GLITTERANDGRIEF

A LIFELONG EXPERIENCE AFTER LOSING A LOVED ONE

GRIEF ISN'T JUST A PERIOD OF TIME AFTER LOSING A LOVED ONE.

GRIEF CHANGES THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFETIME.

IT'S NOT A MOMENTARY FEELING. IT'S A JOURNEY.

UNSURE
SAD
LOST
BROKEN
HOPEFUL
NUMB
HEARTBREAK
PAIN

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Your life, and your grief,
are a work in progress.

There is no need to be finished.
There is no need to be perfect.

There is only you,
and the story of the love
--and the loss--
that brought you here.

Find ways to tell your story.

-MEGAN DEVINE

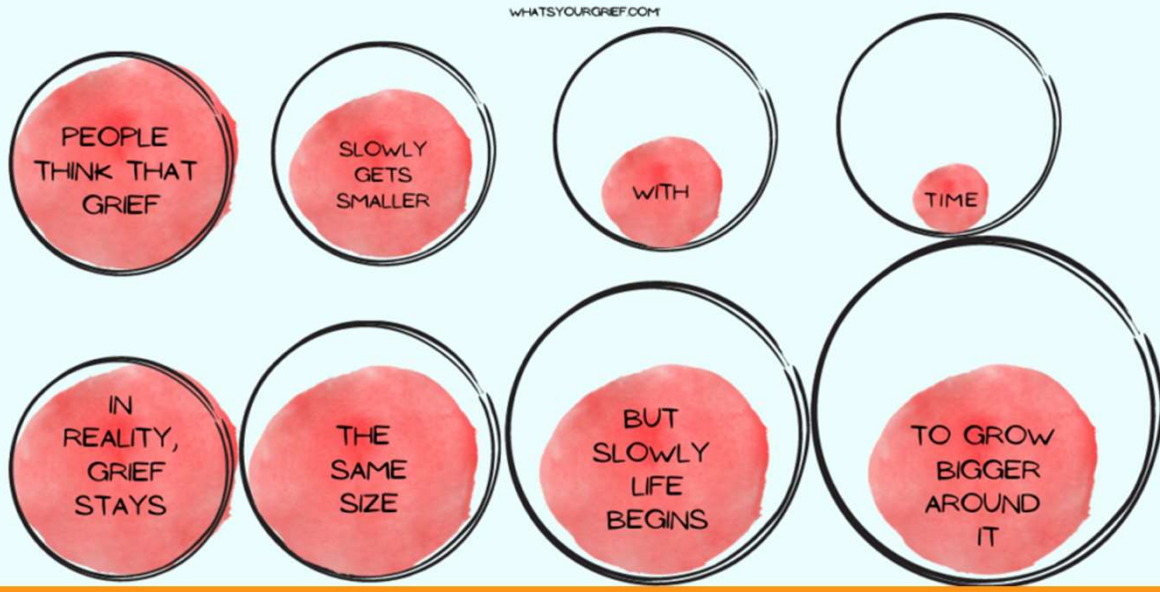


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'GROWING AROUND GRIEF'

(LOIS TONKIN, 1996)

whatsyourgrief.com



PEOPLE THINK THAT GRIEF

SLOWLY GETS SMALLER

WITH

TIME

IN REALITY, GRIEF STAYS

THE SAME SIZE

BUT SLOWLY LIFE BEGINS

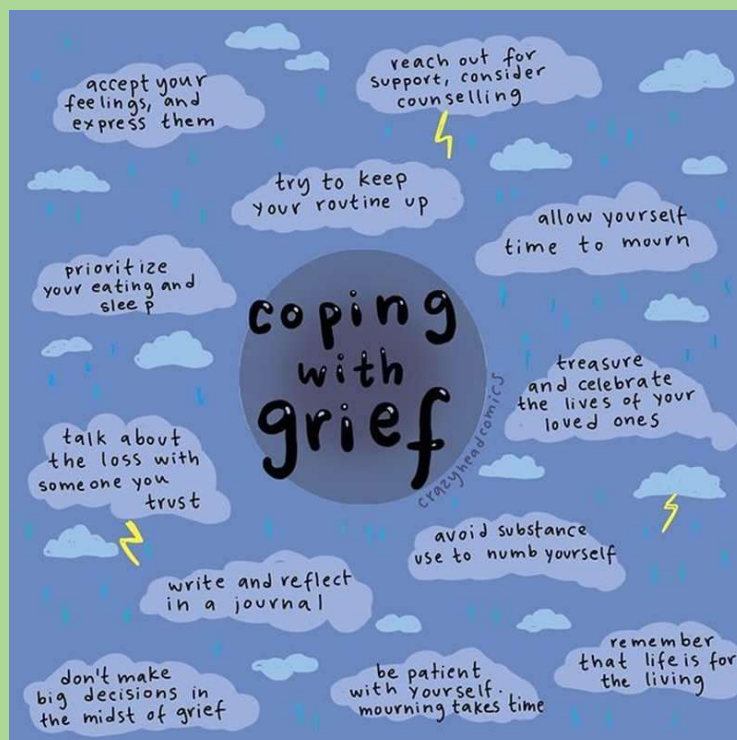
TO GROW BIGGER AROUND IT

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**MAYBE THE GOAL IS NOT
FOR THE GRIEF ITSELF
TO SHRINK IN SIZE
BUT FOR ALL OF THE
GOOD IN OUR LIVES TO
GROW DESPITE IT.**

@alexammadyarov

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≡ COPING WITH LOSS ≡

@GLITTERANDGRIEF

so often misunderstood.

BECAUSE IT GETS MISINTERPRETED AS "MOVING ON"

BUT **COPIING** IS YOUR ABILITY TO FUNCTION IN DAY TO DAY LIFE OR find joy amidst your grief. COPING DOES NOT MEAN YOU'RE OKAY WITH THEIR DEATH HAPPENING. IT MEANS YOU'RE learning to cope WITH SUCH A SIGNIFICANT LOSS.

IT'S A PART OF THE **grieving process**. NOT A SIGN YOU ARE "over it" BUT A SIGN GRIEF IS A PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE. Coping shouldn't make you feel bad. YOU'RE ALLOWED TO FIND WAYS TO COPE WITH YOUR **grief**.

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Intuitive vs. Instrumental

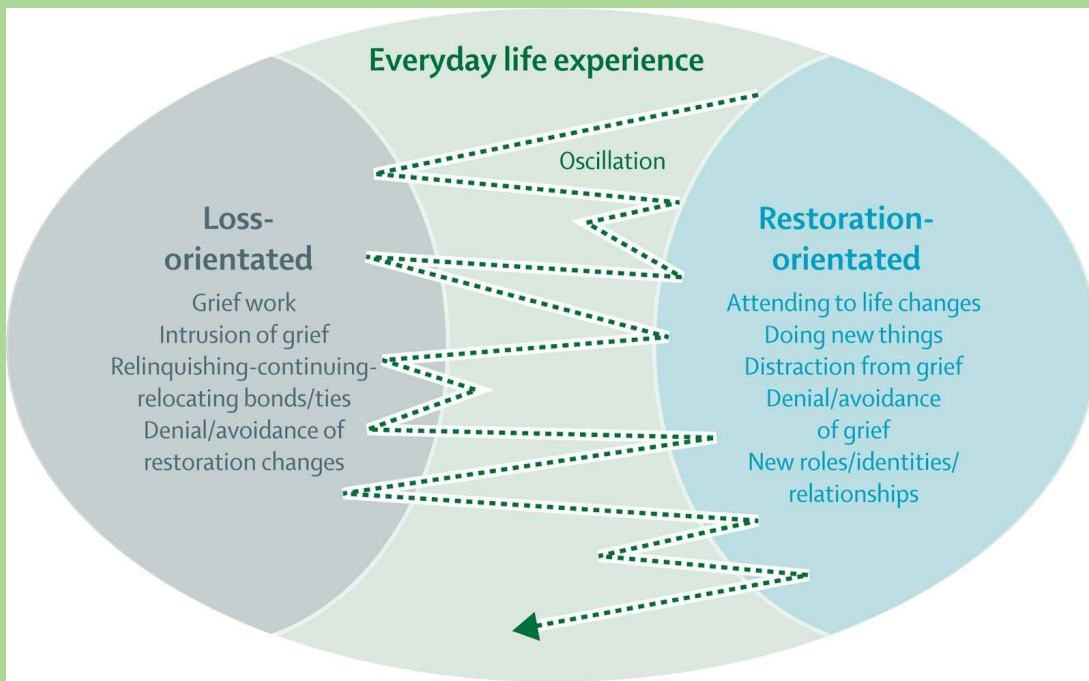


Instrumental Grievors

Intuitive Grievors

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Dual Process Approach (Stroebe and Schut)



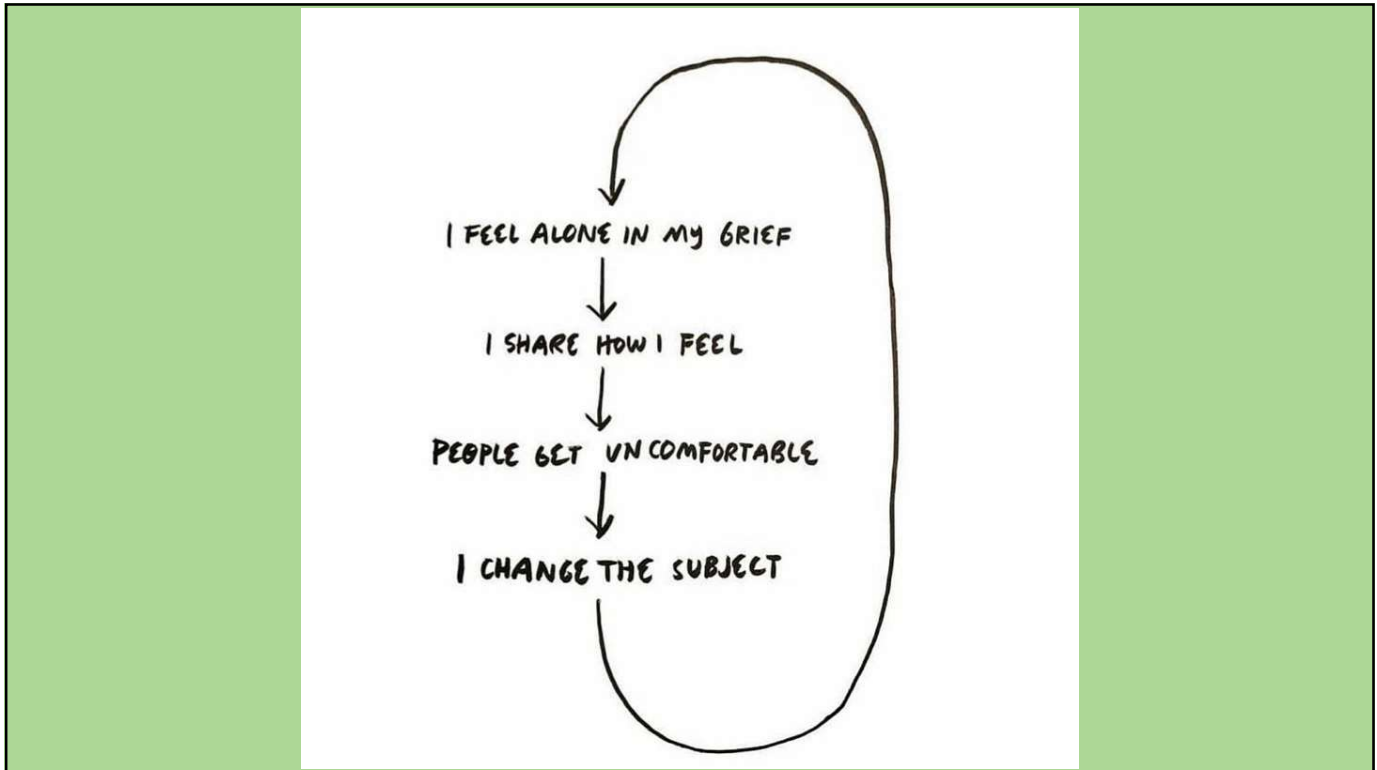
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The truth is that you inherently know how to grieve. Your heart, body and soul carry that wisdom.

The problem lies with the messages we get from society. The 3 day bereavement leave, the toxic positivity and the judgement... that's what makes us forget our innate wisdom.

EMPOWEREDTHROUGHGRIEF.COM

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Complicated Grief

Risk Factors

- Strong attachment to pet
- Violent, acute death of pet
- "bad" death of pet or person
- Recent, significant changes in life
- Limited support system
- Poor health

Protective Factors

- Ability to process the decline of pet
- Stable home environment
- "good" death of pet or person
- Strong coping strategies
- Supportive faith/belief system
- Strong support system



- Burke & Niemeyer (2012)

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Pediatric Considerations


- ❖ Often first death experience
- ❖ Strong attachments
- ❖ Model grieving
- ❖ Language
- ❖ Kids mourn in "doses"
- ❖ Developmental Considerations



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<h1>Developmental Stages & Grief</h1>		1-3 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can and do grieve but do not understand what death means • May experience sleep disturbances, regressive behavior, or explosive emotions • Should be told the pet has died and will not return • Reassure them that they did not do or say anything to cause the pet to die • Will typically accept a new pet very easily
		3-5 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some understanding of death but do not understand that death is final (may believe it's temporary or the pet is asleep) • May feel like they are responsible for pet's death. Reassure them that they did not do or say anything to cause the pet to die • Grief manifestations can include bowel or bladder disturbances as well as change to eating, playing or sleeping • Encourage expression of feelings through play, drawing or talking
		5-9 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have difficulty imagining death on a personal level and may visualize an angel, skeleton or monster • Expect questions and answer them directly • May express anger at the pet for leaving them (let them know it's okay to feel angry or any emotion) • Know death is irreversible and may bring up concerns about death of their parents or loved ones • Grief manifestations can include school problems, anti-social behavior, somatic or physical concerns, aggression, or clinging behavior
		10+ years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to understand death is natural and happens to all living things • May ask many questions and be quite curious about death • Preteens tend to keep many of their feelings hidden • Adolescents may have behavioral reactions and attempt to mask emotions from all but their friends. Encourage and respect their opinions and suggestions

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Helping Other Pets Grieve

- Distressed reaction that can mirror grief
- Also, normal to show no signs
- Routines consistent

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How different some of our
relationships would be if
grief were met with
validation.

@WRITINGGRIEF
AEM

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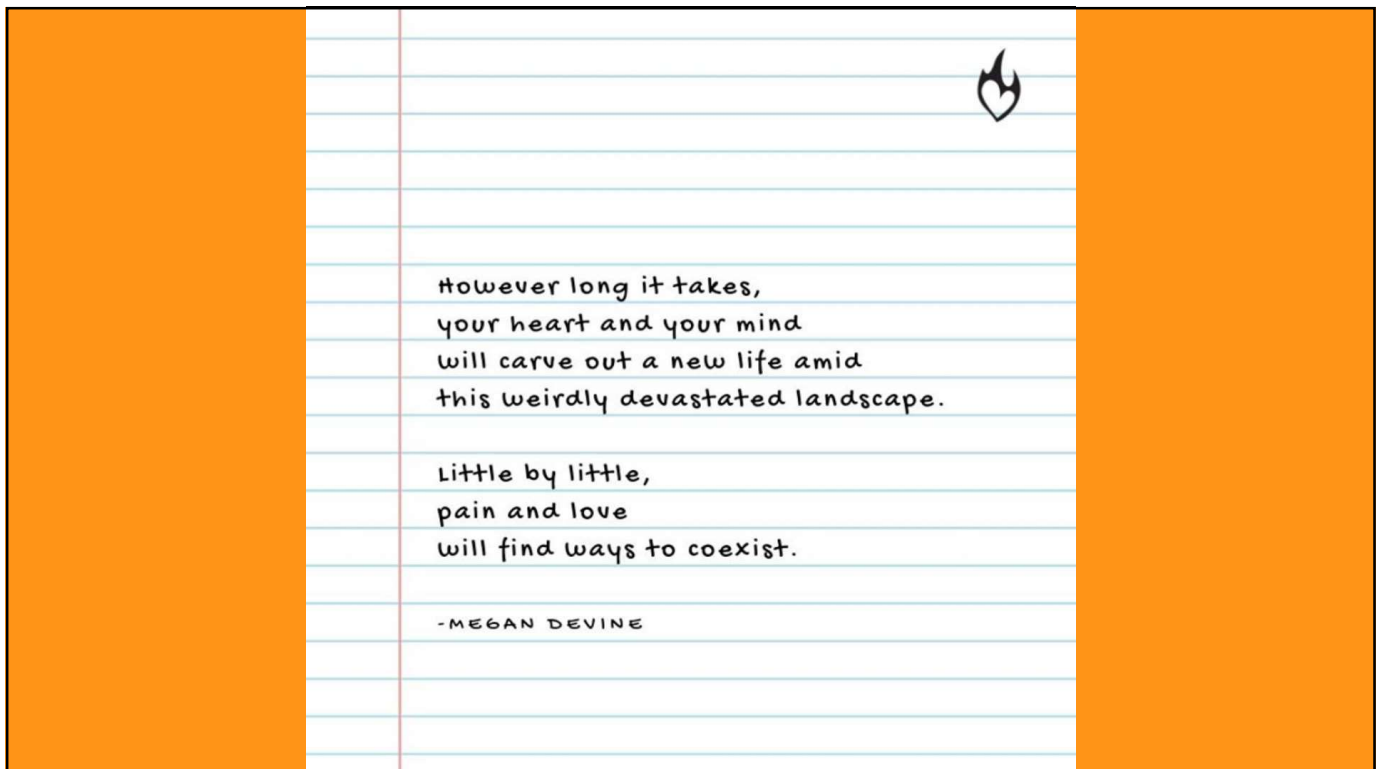
When someone is navigating grief...we must
resist the need to try and fix the problem...during
these sacred times, silence is our ally.

— Jada Swanson

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Pet Caregiver Support Group

<https://www.sagecenters.com/support-group/>



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Sources:

<https://www.ekrfoundation.org/>

www.mhanational.org/bereavement-and-grief

Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice by Kenneth J. Koda (2002)

"The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement: Rationale and Description". *Death Studies*. 23 (3): 197–224 by Stroebe, Margaret; Schut, Henk (1999).

Worden, J. William (2009). *Grief counseling and grief therapy : a handbook for the mental health practitioner* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Springer Pub. Co. ISBN 978-0826101204. OCLC 307513848.

Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the Ways Men and Women Mourn, Revised Edition by Doka & Martin (2010)

Life After Loss: The Lessons of Grief by Vamik Volkan & Elizabeth Zintl

Rando TA. Anticipatory Grief: The Term is a Misnomer but the Phenomenon Exists. *Journal of Palliative Care*. 1988 4(1-2):70-73. doi:10.1177/0825859788004001-223

<https://vetsocialwork.utk.edu/>

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/growing-around-grief/>



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Experiencing Grief Before the Actual Loss

Anticipatory grief, also known as pre-loss bereavement, happens when you know you will lose your pet, but it has not yet occurred. You may have some time to prepare such as days, weeks, or even months. Anticipatory grief can include a period of hopefulness when the diagnosis is being effectively managed. This form of grief is not often talked about but commonly experienced.

Keep in mind that letting go doesn't mean you have to stop loving your companion animal; even after they die. During this stage, some people begin to find a safe place in their hearts to hold memories and also focus on creating new memories in the time their pet has left. Others make a bucket list and do things that they have always wanted to do with their pet, as well as activities their pet loves to do more often.

The emotions that accompany anticipatory grief are similar to those which occur after a loss but can be even more like a roller coaster at times. Some days may be challenging; other days, you may not experience grief at all. Here are some common signs of anticipatory grief:

- ♥ Sadness & tearfulness
- ♥ Fear
- ♥ Irritability
- ♥ Loneliness
- ♥ A desire to talk about what is happening
- ♥ Anxiety
- ♥ Guilt
- ♥ Intense concern for your pet

Tips for Coping with Pre-Loss Bereavement:

Accept that this phenomenon is normal.

Feeling grief before a pet's death is expected. You are allowed to feel this type of suffering. It is a common experience that has been well documented, you are not alone in this.

Remember that anticipatory grief doesn't mean giving up.

There can be a feeling of guilt that comes with acceptance. Focus on what you are doing; such as: supporting, caring, loving, etc. You are shifting your energy to meaningful time together.

Reflect on and appreciate your remaining time together.

Utilize whatever time your pet has left to take care of any unfinished business. If you haven't spent as much time with your pet as you'd like, spend it now. If there are special treats or experiences that your pet particularly enjoys, use this time to provide them to your furry family member.



Be realistic about your pet's condition.

Don't bargain for a miraculous cure; you will only be disappointed. Instead, look for ways to provide comfort.

Communicate

Keeping the lines of communication open with your family and friends can help everyone better understand what you are experiencing. It is essential to express your pain and let yourself grieve. Finding someone you can share these feelings openly with is extremely helpful. Not everyone will understand; lean on those that do.

Be in the moment.

To live in the moment with your pet means being conscious, aware, and in the present with all of your senses. It means not dwelling on the past, nor being anxious or worrying about the future. When we concentrate our attention on the present, we awaken to fully experience our time with our beloved pet.

Acknowledge the losses, past and present.

People may say things that minimize what is happening. Consider journaling or other creative outlets to express emotions around things like acceptance of the impending death, loss of hope, loss of the future imagined, etc. A new loss will often bring up old loss; acknowledge this with new perspectives.

Connect with others who share similar bonds.

Caregiving and anticipatory grief can be a long road. Without proper support, navigating the grief may feel impossible. Ask for assistance from your friends, spiritual leaders, support groups, and professionals. Counseling can be helpful for people who need a place to process complicated emotions in a safe space. Psychologytoday.com or your primary care physician is an excellent resource for finding a counselor.

Relief is normal.

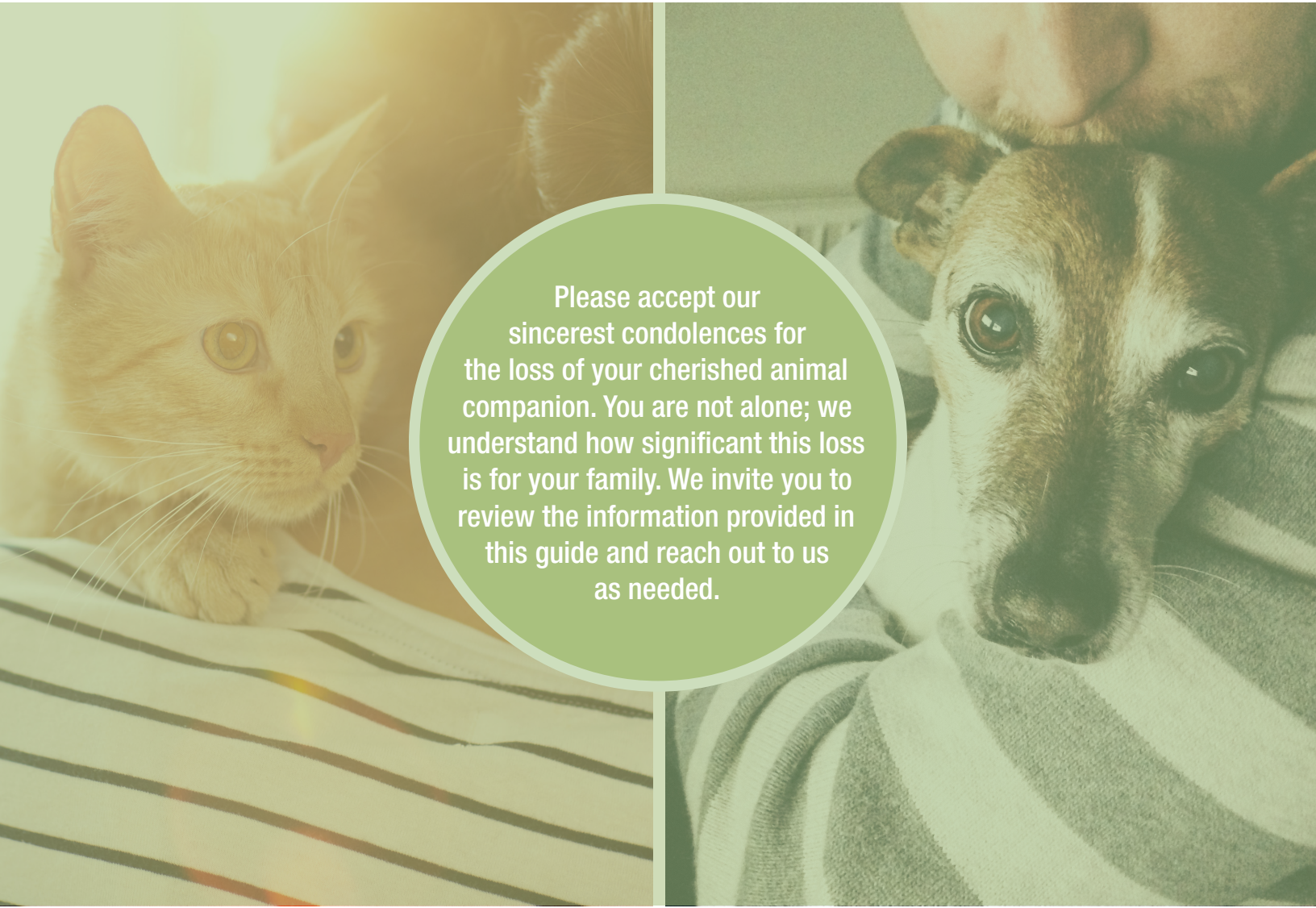
Feelings of relief after an anticipated death is a normal response after an overwhelming time in your life.

Our Social Work Team is always available to support & partner with you.

Information adapted from: Rando, TA, ed (2000)

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PET LOSS & GRIEF SUPPORT GUIDE



Please accept our sincerest condolences for the loss of your cherished animal companion. You are not alone; we understand how significant this loss is for your family. We invite you to review the information provided in this guide and reach out to us as needed.

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

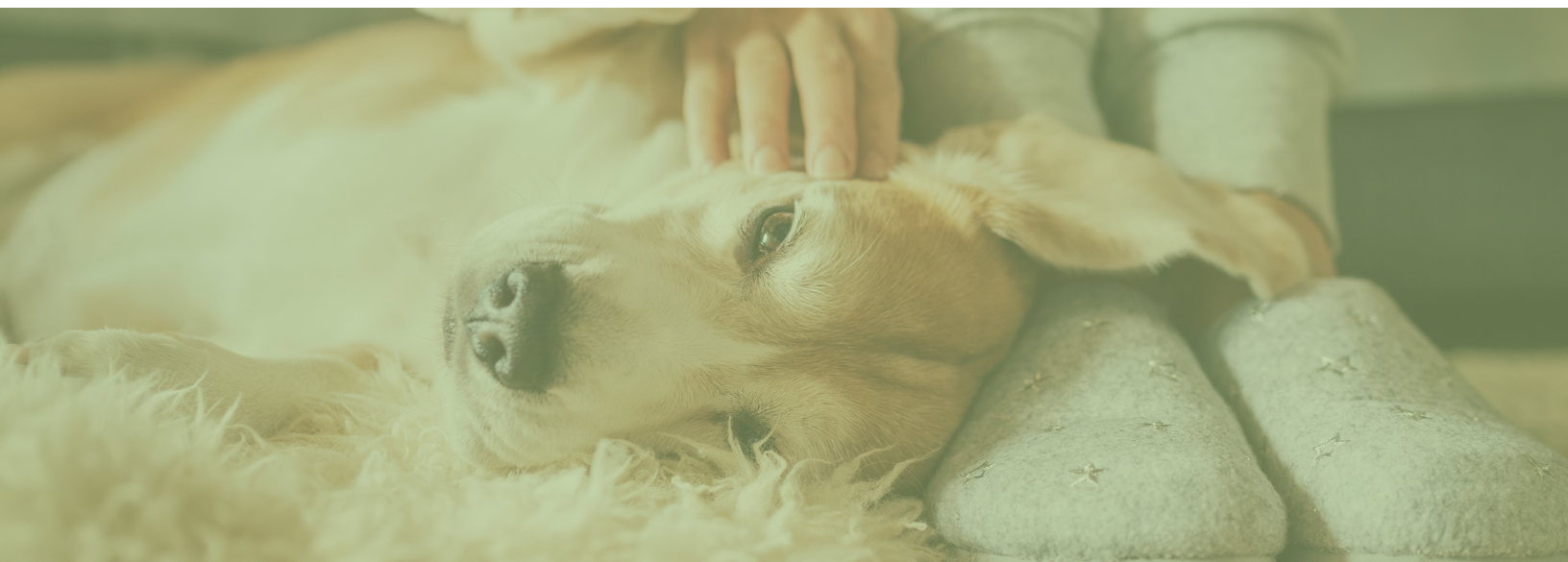
Grief is the response we have to loss, particularly profound when a strong bond or affection was present, such as with an animal. This response is not only emotional, but also can be physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, cultural, spiritual and/or philosophical in nature.

Subtypes of Grief

- ♥ **Disenfranchised:** Also known as hidden grief. Refers to any grief that is often minimized, invalidated, or unacknowledged by social norms, such as pet loss.
- ♥ **Complicated:** Strong grief that goes beyond at least six months and has other underlying factors (i.e., other losses during the same time, trauma, etc.). This type of grief can be tough to handle with everyday life and may need the help of a professional.
- ♥ **Re-Grief:** The theory that we feel all our past losses with new losses; it can come up suddenly and feel very intense. Pet loss, for instance, can bring up not only previous pets, but other losses within the family.

Emotional & Physical Manifestations

- ♥ Shock or Numbness
- ♥ Denial
- ♥ Anger
- ♥ Guilt
- ♥ Relief
- ♥ Anxiety or Panic
- ♥ Depression, Sadness or Loneliness
- ♥ Confusion or Difficulty Concentrating
- ♥ Sleep Disturbances
- ♥ Appetite Changes
- ♥ Muscle Tension
- ♥ Headaches or Stomach Aches



BILL OF RIGHTS FOR GRIEVING ANIMAL LOVERS

You have the right to:

- ♥ **Feel the pain of grief when the bonds with our pets are broken.**

The bonds we have with our companion animals are deep and strong; the pain we feel when those bonds are broken is real and worthy of our grief.

- ♥ **To feel shocked and overwhelmed by the intensity of our grief.**

The grief we feel at this loss can be far more intense than we ever expected, no different from that of losing another special family member or cherished friend.

- ♥ **To understand our grief reactions, feelings and behaviors as normal.**

Grief is a natural, spontaneous response to the loss of a significant relationship.

- ♥ **To express our grief in our own unique way, within our own time frame.**

The bonds we have with our companion animals are deep and strong; the pain we feel when those bonds are broken is real and worthy of our grief.

- ♥ **To have our grief recognized by others as significant and legitimate.**

The grief we feel at this loss can be far more intense than we ever expected, no different from that of losing another special family member or cherished friend.

- ♥ **To feel supported by others in our grief.**

Grief is a natural, spontaneous response to the loss of a significant relationship.

- ♥ **To honor the memory of our pets in whatever way we see fit.**

The bonds we have with our companion animals are deep and strong; the pain we feel when those bonds are broken is real and worthy of our grief.

*Information adapted from:
National Humane Society.Org*

GROWING FROM LOSS

Self-care is always an important practice to follow, but perhaps even more imperative during this trying time. Take care of yourself by following good nutrition, practicing a healthy sleep schedule, moving your body, and finding ways to relax that you enjoy. Be kind to yourself during this time. Honor your feelings. Allow sadness and joy to occur at the same time. Reach out to any friends or family that understand your bond and grief. Ask one of our friendly Veterinary Social Workers to talk.

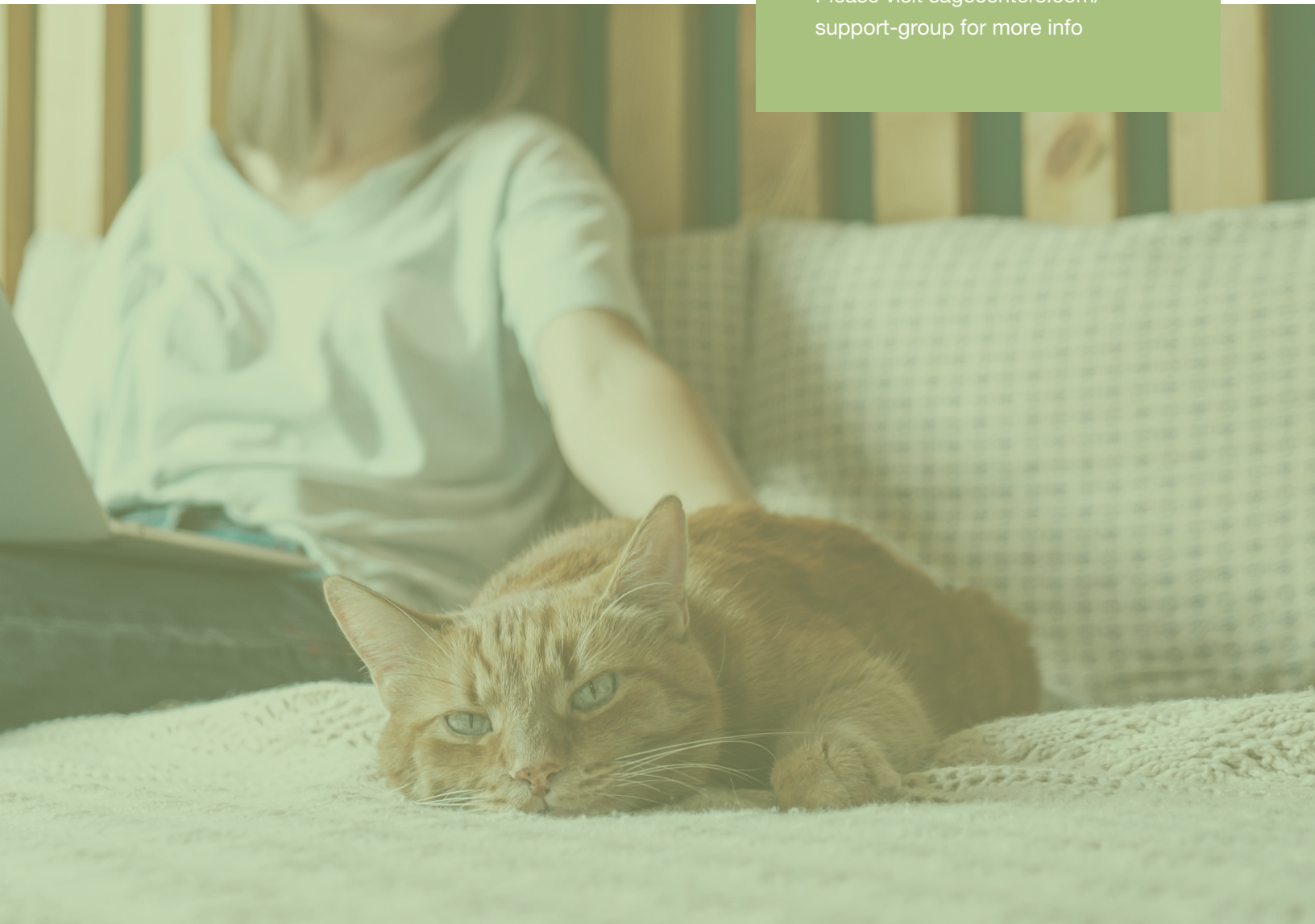


Pet Loss Support Group

We understand how difficult it is to say goodbye to a beloved, companion animal. We would like to offer you the support and help you may need.

We provide a pet loss support group at no charge.

Please visit [sagecenters.com/support-group](https://www.sagecenters.com/support-group) for more info



How Memorialization Can Help

Memorialization of a lost loved one is a deeply personal and individual process that can help start healing. It can be seen as a form of catharsis that can aid us in coming to terms with the loss. Further, memorial events in particular can allow for a time and place for friends and family to receive more in-depth support.

Memorial Activities

- ♥ Turn pet tags into necklaces
- ♥ Paint your own urn or garden rocks
- ♥ Plant a tree
- ♥ Photo book
- ♥ Shadow Box
- ♥ Tattoos

Memorial Jewelry

Various retailers, such as in-store jewelry artisans and online crafters on spaces like Etsy, offer customizable jewelry and keychains. You can take a photo of your pet's paw/nose print, upload them to the retailer of your choosing, and within a few weeks have a very personal memory of your friend that you can carry with you.

Create a Space

Create a space to honor your pet, to let yourself mourn and heal openly. This can be a garden space where you have buried/spread your pet's cremains, a quiet place in your home with photos of your pet, or even a small table with your pet's keepsakes on display.



**SAGE COMPASSION
FOR ANIMALS**
A CAUSE FOR PAWS

Give in Honor of Your Pet

Make a gift in memory of your beloved companion animal that will help animals and their families who are in need today. SAGE Compassion For Animals depends upon the generosity of donors to help in our work to prevent suffering and euthanasia by providing financial assistance to families with pets in crisis. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, any tax-deductible donation is truly appreciated and can be a beautiful way to honor your loved one's memory. To make a tribute donation and for more information, visit sagec4a.org

RESOURCES



Pet Compassion Careline

855.245.8214, 24/7 Grief Support



apl.org

Association for Pet Loss & Bereavement



pet-loss.net

Pet Loss Support Page by Moira Anderson, M. Ed.



rainbowbridge.com

A virtual memorial home and grief support community



lapoflove.com/pet-loss-support-resources

Informational resources to help you cope

“A person can learn a lot from a dog, even a loopy one like ours. Marley taught me about living each day with unbridled exuberance and joy, about seizing the moment and following your heart. He taught me to appreciate the simple things—a walk in the woods, a fresh snowfall, a nap in a shaft of winter sunlight. And as he grew old and achy, he taught me about optimism in the face of adversity. Mostly, he taught me about friendship and selflessness and, above all else, unwavering loyalty.”

— *John Grogan, Marley & Me: Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog*

Golden Eyes

Carol Walker

When golden eyes no longer glow,
and we both know it's time to go,
Don't look at me with eyes so sad,
but think of better times we had,
When sunlight did upon us shine,
and happy days were yours and mine,
And through the grass we both did run,
and on our backs we felt the sun,
Think not of this dark final hour,
think not of when our lives turned sour,
Think not of hopelessness and pain,
but think of joy and laugh again,
For in that final act of love,
you released me to heaven above,
Where finally from pain I'm free,
where one day you will join with me,
Where together again we will rejoice,
and you and I as with one voice,
Will in perfect harmony sing,
of the joy and pain that love can bring,
And remember me just as I will,
always think of you until,
At last, again I see your face,
grieve not, I am in a better place.

They Will Not Go Quietly

Unknown

They will not go quietly,
the pets who've shared our lives.
In subtle ways they let us know
their spirit still survives.
Old habits still can make us think
we hear them at the door,
Or step back when we drop
a tasty morsel on the floor.
Our feet still go around the place
the food dish used to be,
And, sometimes, coming home at night,
we miss them terribly.
And although time may bring new friends
and a new food dish to fill,
That one place in our hearts
belongs to them...
and always will.





Helping Children Cope with the Death of a Companion Animal

The death of a family pet is often the first experience with grief in children and teens. Naturally, kids develop strong attachments and bonds with companion animals, relating to them as siblings, playmates, confidants, and even protectors. Children need support and guidance to understand their loss, mourn, and find ways to remember their deceased loved one.

Strategies for Supporting Children

DO allow your child space to grieve in their own way. Children and teens will not grieve in the same way as an adult and should not be expected to. Be patient and open to discussion at any time.

DO NOT take over or push them. It's important to allow your child to lead their journey through the grief process. They will let you know when they are ready to talk, cry or show other emotions.

DO listen, without judgement, and encourage them to grieve. Be open to their questions as they explore their feelings. It is normal for "mood swings" in kids of all ages. Many young children don't understand that death is permanent thus needing to have multiple conversations about the same things.

DO NOT feel as if you must have all the answers; sometimes, just listening is enough. Be honest when you don't know something.

DO show emotion. Allow your child to see your sadness and tears too. Model grieving behavior in a healthy way, creating an environment where your child will feel safe and comfortable expressing theirs. Provide reassurance that your child is safe and will always be cared for.

DO NOT use euphemisms such as "put to sleep" or "left us" or "we lost Fluffy" as they only create confusion and unresolved feelings. Instead, respond with honest, simple, and direct language. Ex: "Fluffy died and won't be coming home."



DO maintain normal routines. When a child has consistent and predictable daily structure (mealtimes, bedtimes, daily activities), it reminds them that they are in a secure environment. If the death has created chaos, offer your child choices to restore a sense of control. Ex: involve your child in planning a memorial for their pet.

DO NOT expect your child to process the loss all at once. Kids process death in bits and pieces, over time. Children often mourn in doses and it's normal for them to have sadness and happiness spurts.

DO inform others of what's going on in your child's life. Ask neighbors, teachers, relatives and friends for extra support and understanding for your child right now and help in keeping a watchful eye on them during a difficult time.

No matter the age, children & teens will usually want to be given a chance to remember their pet. Decide how you'll honor your pet's life & keep his/her memory alive. Emphasis should be placed on the happy experiences that were shared by all.

Ways to Remember Your Pet

- ♥ Writing about or sharing memories
- ♥ Creating a journal, scrapbook, photo album or memory box
- ♥ Drawing/coloring pictures
- ♥ Making an ornament
- ♥ Painting the clay paw
- ♥ Reading a pet loss book/story
- ♥ Viewing videos of your pet
- ♥ Placing the cremains in a special area in the home with a lighted candle
- ♥ Planning a living memorial such as a tree or garden
- ♥ Filling out a memory book
- ♥ Celebrating the birthday of your pet
- ♥ Honoring the anniversary of your pet's death or other momentous days such as holidays

Developmental Stages & Grief

<p>1-3 years old</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Can and do grieve but will not understand what death means ♥ May experience sleep disturbances, bowel/bladder changes, be hard to soothe ♥ Should be told the pet has died and will not return ♥ Choose familiar and supportive caregivers for reassurance ♥ Will typically accept a new pet very easily
<p>3-5 years old</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Some understanding of death but do not understand that death is final (may believe it's reversible or the pet is asleep) ♥ May feel like they are responsible for the pet's death. Reassure them that they did not do or say anything to cause the pet to die ♥ Grief manifestations can include headaches, stomachaches, bowel or bladder disturbances as well as changes to eating, playing or sleeping ♥ Encourage expression of feelings through play, drawing or talking
<p>5-9 years old</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Have difficulty imagining death on a personal level and may visualize an angel, skeleton or monster ♥ Expect questions and answer them directly; what info is being sought after ♥ May express anger at the pet for leaving them (let them know it's okay to feel angry or any emotion) ♥ Know death is irreversible and may bring up concerns about death of their parents or loved ones ♥ Grief manifestations can include school problems, anti-social behavior, physical ailments, aggression, or clinging behavior
<p>9-12 years old</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Able to understand death is natural and happens to all living things ♥ May ask many questions and be curious about death ♥ Preteens tend to keep many of their feelings hidden but can articulate ♥ Interested in finding meaning and being a part of rituals and memorialization
<p>13+ years old</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Adolescents may have behavioral reactions and attempt to mask emotions from all but their friends as they are preparing for parental separation soon ♥ Encourage and respect their opinions and suggestions for memorialization ♥ May need to correct distorted information about loss; be honest ♥ Model and rehearse adaptive ways to cope

Sources: aplb.org, vet.osu.edu, therapistaid.com, thepetlosscenter.com

Helping Other Pets Grieve

Animals become attached when they share the same daily routines and leisure time; over the years, their bonds can grow to be especially strong. Pets that share an intense bond might play together, sleep together, eat their meals at the same time, and may shadow each other around the house. Separation may result in the surviving pet displaying a distressing reaction that can mirror grief. It is also normal to show no signs at all.

What Does the Research Say?

- ♥ The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) conducted the study, “Companion Animal Mourning Project,” which shed new light on the grieving process of dogs.
- ♥ The study concluded that 66% of dogs experienced four or more behavioral changes (such as decreased appetite, sleep pattern fluctuations, increased vocalization, and an increase in “clinginess” to their owners), after the loss of a housemate, which indicated that they too experience grief.
- ♥ The study also concluded that 65% of cats had four or more behavioral changes (such as decreased appetite, sleep pattern fluctuations, increased or decreased meowing after the loss of a housemate) which also indicated grief.



General Grief Symptoms

- ♥ Appetite changes (eating more or less than usual)
- ♥ Acting withdrawn or despondent
- ♥ Personality changes (aloof pet suddenly wanting attention & vice versa)
- ♥ Pacing or searching the house
- ♥ Hiding from or avoiding family members
- ♥ Aggressive/destructive behaviors
- ♥ Sleep pattern changes (sleeping more or less than usual)

Grief Manifestations in Dogs

- ♥ Whining or howling
- ♥ Signs of separation anxiety
- ♥ Excessive clinginess

Grief Manifestations in Cats

- ♥ Yowling or crying
- ♥ Changes in grooming
- ♥ Changes in bathroom habits

Keep in mind that some pets may not show any signs at all!

How You Can Help

- ♥ Keep routines as consistent as possible
- ♥ Keep your pet's diet & mealtimes the same
- ♥ Extra love and attention
- ♥ Talk to your pets; tell them what is happening
- ♥ If your pet enjoys company, invite friends over to visit
- ♥ Be patient with inappropriate behaviors
- ♥ Do more of what your pet loves to do
 - Exercise
 - Interesting toys
 - Extra time cuddling
- ♥ Talk to your veterinarian as needed
- ♥ Reach out to our friendly Social Work Team



Sources: Bauhaus (2018), Bender (2020), Lagoni (2008), Paretts (2019), Shojai (2020)