

PET HINTS

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Saying goodbye

For many people our pet is our best friend and we all know how hard it is to say good bye to a best friend.

Some pet owners may feel embarrassed to reveal their grief when their pet dies, fearing that their friends will tell them to pull themselves together as “it was only a dog or cat”. Dogs and cats give us years of unconditional love and companionship, so when they die it is not surprising that many people report that they feel a much higher than expected sense of loss and grief. Pet owners should not feel ashamed of feeling so strongly about an animal; crying, loneliness and depression are all natural reactions to death - including the death of a pet.

Research into grief has shown that there is a pattern to the way most people grieve, and grief for the death of a pet follows exactly the same pattern as the grief we feel at the death of a friend or family member.

First comes numbness, shock and disbelief which help protect us from the full impact. Within a few hours after the death of a pet an owner usually begins to experience intense sadness and often uncontrolled crying. However, grief usually peaks within 14 days and recovery can begin.

Some people feel a sense of anger. This anger can be directed at the veterinary surgeon who treated the animal or even the owner of the pet and can be accompanied by a sense of what ‘should’ have been done to save the pet.

People can become quite depressed at the death of a pet, and this can last anywhere from days through to months.

Importantly, if you feel like you need help, remember there are counselors available who can assist you.

It may also help to share the memory of your pet and to talk about and remember the happy times you had with them. Television Veterinarian, Dr Katrina Warren, created the website Our Wonderful Pets (www.ourwonderfulpets.com) so she could share the memory of her dog Toby and her cat Milly. The website allows owners to post tributes to their pets that have died and is a social forum to connect with other pet owners. It also features information and support services to help with the grieving process.