

• *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 Faith* - During this time in your grief journey, you may find yourself questioning your faith regarding pets and the after-life. Many people around you will also have their own opinions regarding pets and heaven. It will be important during this time for you to find the answers right for you and what your individual and personal faith beliefs are regarding seeing your pet in heaven again.



"Not the least hard thing to bear when they go from us, these quiet friends, is that they carry away with them so many years of our own lives."

-Unknown



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A Companion  *For Your Journey*

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*Pet Parents
and Grief*
To mourn and heal





What's Happening to Me?

Grief - "intense sorrow - as if by death; our internal feelings."

Mourning - "the showing of sadness at somebody's death; the external actions expressing grief."

Bereaved - "to be deprived of something valuable."

When something we love dies, we have a severing of a relationship causing us to feel grief and feelings of intense sorrow. By physically showing our grief, we actively mourn the death of that beloved. This active mourning will move your bereaved heart on a journey through grief and to grief reconciliation.

What Should I Do?

The Circle of Care Mourning Guide is central to your needs in the grief journey. These dimensions will not take on a prescribed pattern or look like stages. They are what your heart will need to actively mourn and to move you to a point of grief reconciliation. and a point of a "new normal," knowing that the "old normal" can no longer be.

Acknowledge the reality of the death.
Acknowledging the full reality of the 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. As you had time to build the relationship with your pet it will take time to get used to her 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. By moving towards this pain through "dosing" active mourning versus trying to push it away or ignore it will create a healthier grief journey.

Continue the relationship with the pet that died through memory.
Our memories allow our pets to live on in us. Embracing these memories, both happy and sad, can be a very slow and, at times, painful process that occurs in small steps. Take some time to look at past photos or write your pet a letter to recall your time together.

Adjust your self-identity.
Part of our self-identity might come from being a pet parent. Others may also think of you in relation to your pet. You may be the guy 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, we naturally question the meaning and purpose of pets in our lives. Coming to terms with these questions is another need we must meet if we are to progress in our grief journeys. Know that it is the asking, not the finding of concrete answers, that is important.



Continue to receive support from others.
We need the love and support of others because we 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.

Things to Remember

The loss of your pet will come with some uniqueness as well.

- *The Deafening Silence* - The silence in your home after the death of a pet will be excruciatingly loud. While the presence of even our smallest of animal friends takes up physical space, many times the presence is felt more with our 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.

- *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." When a bond is broken, grief will happen. Your grief is normal and the lost relationship you shared with your special friend needs to be mourned.