

## **Saying Goodbye: Coping with Pet Loss and Grief**

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Losing a pet can be one of the most difficult things we go through. They're not just animals, they're companions, comfort, and part of our everyday lives. Whether it happens suddenly, after a long illness, or through that tough decision we sometimes have to make, saying goodbye is painful. The grief that follows is real, and it's important to acknowledge it.

Earlier this year, I made the heartbreaking decision to say goodbye to my childhood cat, the one I got when I was 11, and who stayed by my side until I was 25. This loss has had a deep impact on me, and if you're going through a similar experience, I hope this article helps you understand the journey of grief, and offers practical ways to cope.

### **1. Grief Is Real, And It Looks Different for Everyone**

When a pet passes, grief is complex. You might feel sadness, guilt, anger, confusion, or even numbness. Some people experience these emotions right away, while others don't feel the impact until much later. No matter what you're feeling, it's okay.

- It's okay if you cry.
- It's okay if you don't cry at all.
- It's okay if you feel relief after a long illness.
- It's okay to feel like no one understands.

Grief isn't something you simply "get over." It's something you learn to carry. It's important to give yourself permission to feel what you feel without judgment. Grief is a normal response to loss, and grief is a normal and natural response to loss. It's helpful to allow yourself to feel and express what's inside.. If you can, try to find a space where you can give voice to your feelings, whether that's in private or with a supportive friend or professional.

### **2. Routines Shift, That's Normal**

Our pets become part of our daily lives, feeding time, walks, cuddles, so when they're gone, even the smallest shifts can feel unsettling. Leaving the food bowl out, hearing the silence where their tags used to jingle, or instinctively looking for them, it's a reminder that things have changed.

Be kind to yourself during this transition. Be kind to yourself as you adjust. It's okay if it feels "off" for a while. Find gentle ways to hold onto the memories you shared with your pet.

Some small actions that might help:

- Light a candle during the time you used to feed them.
- Write down a memory each day for a week.
- Keep a favorite toy, blanket, or collar in a place that brings comfort.
- Create a little memorial for them, a space to allow yourself to reflect and adjust to the change.

These rituals provide a way to honor their memory and help bring some comfort during the grief process.

### **3. Honor Their Life in a Way That Feels Right to You**

There's no single way to remember a pet. Some people may choose a small ceremony, others frame a favorite photo, or plant something in their memory. Do what feels right for you, what helps you feel connected to them.

For me, the vet made a small but meaningful gesture during our goodbye. After my cat passed, he placed a rose quartz heart crystal on her, to absorb some of her energy and offer a way for me to keep her close. I found that comforting, a reminder that love and connection can transcend even death.

Here are a few other ways to honor your pet:

- Create a memory box with their collar, photos, or favorite toy.
- Build a photo album or scrapbook.
- Write them a letter about what they meant to you.
- Donate to a rescue in their name or volunteer when you're ready.

Remembering and honoring your pet is a significant part of the healing process.

#### **4. Talk About It, Even If It Feels Weird**

Not everyone understands how deeply pet loss can affect us. But that doesn't mean you have to keep your grief inside. You deserve the space to talk about your pet and your loss, whether that's to friends, family, or even strangers who have been through the same thing.

Consider talking with someone who can offer support, such as a counselor, or joining a pet loss support group. Writing in a journal or simply saying your pet's name out loud can also help you feel more grounded.

#### **5. Healing Takes Time, And That's Okay**

Healing isn't linear. Some days you'll feel okay, others not so much. The emotional rollercoaster is part of the process. It's important to allow yourself time to heal without rushing it. Remember to be patient and kind to yourself

And if you're wondering whether you'll ever be ready for another pet, know that it's a very personal decision. Some people find comfort in rescuing again, while others need more time. Either choice is okay. Just remember, there's no replacement for the one you lost, but there's room for healing.

#### **Final Thought**

Losing a pet is never easy, but if you've recently lost one, know that your grief is valid. Your feelings are real, and you don't have to go through this alone.

The love you shared with your pet doesn't disappear, it just changes. And that bond will always stay with you, in the form of cherished memories and the impact they had on your life.

Saying goodbye is hard, but the love remains. Always.

*In honor of Chloe, my beloved companion*



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