

http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/pet_death.html

My Pet Died. How Can I Feel Better?

A pet can be a great friend. Even if you're having a bad day, if you don't feel popular, or if you're having trouble at school, your pet loves you. No strings attached. Millions of families throughout the world own pets, which means that every day someone goes through the heartbreak of losing an animal friend.

Whether it's old age, illness, or because of an accident, animals – like people – will die sometime. Veterinarians can do wonderful things for pets. But sometimes all the medical skill in the world can't save an animal. And if a pet is in a lot of pain and will never get better, the vet may have to put it to sleep. This is known as euthanasia (pronounced: yoo-thuh-nay-zhuh). The vet will give the animal an injection (shot) that first puts it to sleep and then stops the heart from beating. Euthanasia allows pets to die peacefully without any pain or fear. But deciding to help a pet die is still a hard thing to do.

Coping With the Death of a Pet

Emotions can get pretty complicated when a pet dies. You probably expect to feel sad, but you may have other emotions, too. For example, you may feel angry if your friends don't seem to realize how much losing your pet means to you. Or perhaps you feel guilty that you didn't spend more time with your pet before he or she died. It's natural to feel a range of emotions when a pet dies.

If you're like a lot of people, you may have had someone say to you, "Sorry, but it was only an animal." So is it normal to get upset over the death of a pet? Absolutely. After all, by the time we reach our teenage years, many of us have grown up with our pets, and they're part of the family. Just like losing a family member, when a pet dies people can go through a period of grieving.

Grief can show up in many ways. Some people cry a lot. For others, the death may take a while to sink in. Some people temporarily lose interest in the things they

enjoy doing or want to spend some quiet time alone. Others will want to keep busy to take their minds off the loss. It's also natural to feel like avoiding situations that involved your pet – such as the park where you used to walk your dog or the trail where you rode your horse.

For many people, losing a pet can be their first experience with death. Recognizing and sorting out feelings can be a big help. Talking about a loss is one of the best ways to cope, which is why people get together after a funeral and share memories or stories about the person who has died. Acknowledging your grief by talking about it with friends and family members can help you begin to feel better.

There are also additional ways to express your feelings and thoughts. Recording them in a journal is helpful to many people, as is keeping a scrapbook. You can also write about your pet in a story or poem, draw a picture, or compose music. Or plan a funeral or memorial service for your pet. Some people choose to make a donation in a pet's memory to an animal shelter or even volunteer there. All of these ideas can help you hold on to the good and happy memories.

Everyone has to deal with grief sometime, and most people work through it given time. But if you're under stress or trying to deal with other serious problems at the same time, grief can feel overwhelming. If your sadness is intense or you think you're upset about more than the death of your pet, it can be a good idea to talk with a professional counselor or therapist to help sort everything out. It's normal for a death to raise questions about our own lives, but you may also want to talk to someone if you find yourself focusing on death a lot.

You'll never forget your pet. But in time the painful feelings will ease. And when the time comes, you may even find yourself ready to open your home to a new pet in need of a loving family.

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