



Ten Tips for Surviving Pet Loss

by

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Losing your dear companion to death is one of the most devastating things that will ever happen to you. You've lost your best friend and a source of completely nonjudgmental love. When I lost my heart dog Chant, I was inconsolable. Through the loss of many animals, both my own and those I've cared for, I've learned valuable lessons. If your loss is recent, I know it feels as if your guts have been ripped out. Please believe me: the acuteness of the pain will lessen in time.

Below are ten ways to take care of yourself and your family while you grieve:

1. Minimize contact with anyone who minimizes your loss. Mainstream society still regards pets as "less than." Seek support from people who understand your devastation. Reach out to a pet loss hotline and work with an experienced pet loss professional.

Ask for practical support, just as you would expect if a human being had died: help with meals, transportation and funeral planning.

2. Allow yourself to genuinely grieve. Let the tears flow. Anger is part of coping with death; work it out at the gym, in a journal, with paints or even by ripping newspapers apart. There is no time line for grief. It will come in waves and have its own cycles.

3. Take extra good care of yourself. Nutrition, exercise, hygiene, sleep, vehicle

maintenance and a social life are vital. Keeping up these basics will help you get through the grief. If you can afford to hire house cleaning help, book a massage or take a cab when you feel too down to drive safely, please do so.

4. Support children through the loss. Ask them to express how they feel. Provide art materials so they don't have to find the "right" words. Tell neighbours and teachers, so they may expect sadness or anger.

Be honest with your child. Tell them their pet died, and respect the ensuing emotions. They didn't go to sleep, get taken by God, or run away. These concepts frighten and confuse children. Tell them they'll see their pet again according to your belief system: in Heaven, at the Rainbow Bridge, in Nature, in another form, etc.

5. Hold off on drastic actions. If being around your pet's toys, dishes, etc. is difficult, put them away in a safe place. Don't throw them out, as you may regret this. Give yourself time to work through the initial crushing emotions.

6. Wait to adopt a new pet. It's natural to want to salve your emotions, but you're best to give a new addition to your family careful consideration. It's very common in the initial stages of grief, that we try to find a "replacement." Of course your precious pet can't be replaced. If you make a hasty decision, you may find it's unfair to both you and the new animal. Both of you deserve a well considered relationship.

7. One of the best remedies for grief is to be with others who are grieving. Find a pet loss group, or simply open the subject with other pet owners. Almost everyone who has a pet, has also lost pets. They'll understand.

Another healing avenue is volunteering at an animal shelter.

Shelter pets are usually in a state of bewilderment and grief. They don't understand why they've been abandoned by those they love most. If the thought of volunteering to give a grieving animal a bit of play time and sunshine doesn't drop you to your knees, try it out. When you *are* ready for a new pet, I guarantee they'll show up at just the right time.

8. When you're ready, create a memorial. Treasure your companion's memory with a scrapbook, special photo album, altar or garden.

9. Give yourself a break. While grieving is necessary, so is resting from grief. Linger in places that don't remind you of your pet. Unless yours was a service animal, they probably didn't go everywhere with you. Linger a bit longer at the coffee shop, read a book or use a computer *in* the library, stay a few minutes more at the pool.

10. Study and seek spiritual perspectives on pet loss and grief. Rainbow Bridge contact can be immensely comforting, as can reading literature discussing the fact that pets have souls.

I hope these ten tips have been helpful for you. In my experience, we never stop missing the

soft fur or feathers, the wise and loving eyes. However, we can take care of ourselves and also reach out to our dear companions in the spirit world for assistance. The excruciating initial pain does heal.

Thank you for having the courage to read **Ten Tips for Surviving Pet Loss.**

Warmly,

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