

How to help cope with loss

Animals are a huge part of our lives, and it can be difficult to grieve when people say "it was just a dog/cat". The people who don't understand can often be very loud while being very wrong! Here are some ways to help you cope with this loss.

Be kind to yourself. You have just lost someone who was there for you all the time.

1 Always available, always happy to see you, always around. The loss is real, let yourself experience all the emotions, even the horrible ones. There is no time limit on grief.

Find someone who understands.

2 Your feelings are valid without needing someone to validate them, but it can be a relief to speak with someone who acknowledges your pain and how hard loss is. There are also online support groups specifically for pet loss grief support.

3 **Choose something that calms you** like yoga, meditation, tai chi, walking, sitting on the beach, Pilates, even a noisy shopping centre...anything that calms YOUR mind. Focus on breathing, releasing body tension, whatever works for you.



4 **Find a ritual that helps.** We have specific ways we mourn people we lose; viewings, funerals, cremation, burial, wakes, scattering of ashes...why not do the same for your deceased pet? One client created a funeral pyre for their deceased dog. It's not for me, but we all can find something that helps.

5 **Maintain your other routines.** Get up and have breakfast, shower, do your dishes. If you are forgetting to eat, set a reminder to eat three times a day. Forgetting to drink water? Fill a bottle and drink it each day. Go for a walk around the block every day-do something to remind yourself there is still a world out there.

Decide what you want to keep and what you want to get rid of.

You don't need to do it all in one day! I kept my previous dog's collar and favourite toy under my bed for YEARS. His feeding bowl and bed went in the shed, and the water bowls stayed in place as we have other animals. Do you want to donate it? Keep it for your next pet? Burn it in their memory? Put it in the shed or hide it until you can deal with it? You don't need to do it all in one day.

6 **Reflect on their life.** When did you get them? What are some memories that stick out? Which of these were good memories and which were bad? Has your perspective on these memories changed now that they've passed? What did they most enjoy doing? What were some of their personality traits? What will you miss the most? What are you glad is over? Do any of your answers surprise you?

7 **Get a paw print bracelet, a t-shirt with their face, name a star,** whatever brings you some happiness in this time. It's a rough time, if you find solace in a portrait or photo, then that's what you do for you.

8 **Set aside time to grieve.** We are all living such busy lives, it can become your coping mechanism to just not think about their passing. That means you don't deal with it, you just save the grief and pain for later. Life doesn't slow down, don't be angry because you can't keep up with it yet.

9 **Memorialise your pet.** Plant a tree or some flowers. It can be nice to have a place to visit where you can talk to them, or that reminds you of them when you see it. One day instead of crying, you look at it and smile. And you can talk about them without breaking down in tears. But you don't need to race towards that day.

10 **It is NORMAL to grieve, but if you find you are neglecting yourself and your life for what feels like an unhealthy amount of time, seek counselling. You're allowed to keep on living.**

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