



## Leaving Permanent Paw Prints on Your Heart

The death of your ever-faithful companion animal has turned life as you know it upside down and created a gaping hole in your heart. Feelings of despair may be indescribable and greater than expected following the passing of a pet. Life continues, but in a different way and at a slower pace because your beloved family member is no longer by your side. Friends and family will offer condolences, but only you truly understand your feelings and the scope of the loss, as they are distinctive to the relationship shared with your pet.

## Honoring the Extraordinary Bond

- When a person dies, a ceremony is held – you can pay tribute to your furry family member in a similar fashion.
- Memorial ceremonies help us to remember our pet, honor the special relationship, and provide the opportunity to say goodbye.
- Remember the love that you shared and make a difference in your pet's honor.
- You may wish to preserve your pet's memory and there are various ways to honor your loved one:
  - *Design a special gravestone.*
  - *Frame a portrait.*
  - *Create a video or scrapbook.*
  - *Build a pet memorial shadow box.*
  - *Write a poem or short story about your pet.*
  - *Plant a tree.*
  - *Make a donation in your pet's name.*
  - *Volunteer at an animal shelter.*

## Factors that Shape Your Grief

- How your companion animal died impacts the way you grieve – whether the loss was sudden, traumatic, or your pet was suffering from a long illness.
- When a daily routine is centered on the relationship with a pet, the death can also be profoundly disruptive to one's sense of home, purpose, and identity.
- What has been your response to other losses in your life?
- Did you keep your feelings of sadness to yourself or were you able to share your pain with others?
- Do you have a strong support network?

### **Comprehending the Grief**

- Grief comes as a result of love and is a tribute to the remarkable relationship you shared with your pet.
- Your grief for your furry loved-one can be more acute and intense than the grief you experience when a human dies.
- The expression of grief is an individual experience because no one felt the same love you shared with your pet.
- Grieving is an exhausting process, and the pain invades all parts of your life, but avoiding it is even more difficult.
- Sometimes, getting through the next few minutes is a huge accomplishment.
- Throughout your lifetime, you may continue to experience feelings of grief when you least expect it.

### **Overcoming Feelings of Guilt**

- When your pet dies, it is normal to initially be overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and regret.
- You might feel guilty regarding your actions and choices made concerning your pet's illness or injury.
- Holding on to guilt for too long has the power to keep you from moving forward.
- Focus on the many positive aspects of the relationship you had with your pet instead of the illness and loss.
- Find a way to let go of what you cannot control and be open to forgiving yourself.
- If you are having difficulty forgiving yourself, think about speaking with a supportive friend or counselor.

### **Transitioning through Loss**

- Process the emptiness you feel in your heart, as well as the absence you feel in your home.
- Try to find peace with the uncertainty of the loss.
- Acknowledgment of your new reality is powerful medicine.
- Speak openly on the validity of your grief.
- Be gentle with yourself as you grieve and be patient with those around you.
- As you move forward, the memories of your furry family member will comfort you.

### **Implementing a Self-Care Plan**

- Communicate with someone who recognizes the relationship you shared with your pet and how much you are hurting.
- Take care of yourself by eating healthy, hydrating well, acquiring rest, and exercising often.
- Incorporate nature into your daily routine to assist with lifting your spirits and restoring hope.
- Compose your thoughts and feelings in a letter or journal.
- Strive to reach out to a friend or loved one on a daily basis.
- Turn to music as a source of comfort and strength.
- Find a balance between the time you spend alone and with supportive people.
- Plan an activity each day that brings a moment of joy and will allow you to take a break from the sadness.
- Consider attending a pet loss support group or seeing a counselor.

### **Finding Peace after the Loss**

- While your pet's physical body is gone, the love, memories, and lessons learned will always be with you. What has your pet taught you that has made a lasting impression on your heart?
- Sharing your story is an integral part of the healing process.
- Reflecting upon the gifts received from your loyal companion animal sparks healing.
- Let the wonderful memories soften your sadness and bring peace to your heart.
- One day, the joy will outweigh the sorrow when you remember your pet with more love than pain.
- In the face of loss, moving forward is really a choice.

### **Supporting a Family Member or Friend**

- The greatest gift during this time of sorrow is your presence.
- Acknowledge the loss of the companion animal and listen with compassion.
- Invite your family member or friend to share stories, memories, and pictures.
- Take initiative and be specific with your offer to help.
- Be there when necessary but recognize when the individual wishes to be alone.
- Provide ongoing support weeks and months following the loss of the pet.
- Encourage your family member or friend to seek additional support.

### **How to Help your Grieving Pet**

- The remaining pet in your home may be deeply impacted by the loss.
- Take some time before removing items belonging to the deceased pet.
- Follow the daily routine as closely as possible to aid in reducing stress.
- Encourage your grieving pet to participate in some preferred activities.
- Share your concerns with your veterinarian and schedule an appointment.

### **When to Adopt another Pet**

- Allow sufficient time for grieving and wait to adopt until you are fully ready to love again.
- Try not to make any hasty decisions with adopting another companion animal, as your pet cannot be replaced.
- Involving the entire family in the decision to adopt a pet is vital, as the grieving process and timing is certainly different for everyone.
- Consider how your remaining pet would feel about a new addition.
- Determine your willingness to open your heart by becoming a foster pet parent.
- Adopting another furry loved-one may assist in healing your heart.
- Please remember, it is essential to let your next pet choose you.

For further guidance and information, please contact Jennifer Durn, MSW, LSW by phone (610) 666-1050 or [info@metro-vet.com](mailto:info@metro-vet.com).