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DEATH OF A PET

*"Sleep soft, my dear friend, for while I live
you shall not die"*

The bonds between a pet and its owner are many and varied. Frequently very close attachments are made between a pet and its human. It is totally normal (and acceptable) when the pet dies for the owner to experience a deep sense of grief. Love hurts.

You must allow yourself to grieve. Last year, 13% of dog owners and 18% of cat owners took time off work as a direct result of their pet's death. It is hard to face the pain and there is no universal depth of pain or a time limit or set pattern to grief. It is OK to be at one with your feelings as you prepare to 'let go' of your lost pet. The sadness is normal and will, indeed, fade in time.

Things to think about

Don't hesitate to seek support from understanding friends and family.

Don't discard immediately after the death, reminders of your pet (such as their collar, bedding or food bowls). You might find that, moving forward, they will give you comfort.

If your pet is about to be put to sleep (or has been), a basic knowledge of the how the procedure will be/was carried out will reduce your distress to some degree.

If your pet dies suddenly, it might be worth considering making sure that you see him or her one last time to say goodbye. This will be an important step towards acceptance.

If the pet's owner is elderly, the death of their companion may not only cause loneliness, but it may also serve as a painful reminder of their mortality. You may need to be aware of this as you support them.

If the pet belonged to a child, be guided by them whether to get another pet and when. Don't automatically think it best to 'replace' the pet.

After your pet has passed away, you may want to hold a funeral or memorial for them. This could involve burying something like their collar, scattering their ashes, saying a prayer, or simply taking some time to remember them. And if there is a loss without a body, consider holding something similar as a way of acknowledging and recognising your loss, especially if there are children in the family.

Once you've given yourself time to grieve, you might start feeling like you want to celebrate your pet's life and focus on the happy memories of your time together. There are lots of ways you can remember your special friend. Photos and keepsakes can be really lovely and can make you feel like your pet is still close. Or you might like to plant something new in their favourite garden spot.

Resources

There are many resources online including information on www.pdsa.org.uk or there is a good book, 'Absent Friend: coping with the loss of your pet' by Laura & Martyn Lee.

I am not an expert in grief but I am a pet lover so if there is any help or support you think I can give, please don't hesitate to get in touch. *Jane*

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