

## **Coping With The Loss Of Your Pet**

The pets we keep are very special to us. They bring immeasurable rewards and fill our lives with love and friendship and the bonds we form with them may be very strong.

We are responsible for the pet during its lifetime as well as during times of illness and death and it is normal to feel a sense of guilt or self doubt when considering euthanasia. It is important to discuss any concerns with your vet who will be able to advise you and guide you towards the correct decision.

Grieving for the loss of a pet, whether through death or enforced separation, can be a very sad and difficult time. Feelings of despair, loneliness or depression can be overwhelming. Pets are usually considered to be part of the family and we may mourn their death as if we have lost a human friend.

These feelings are normal and are a testimony to the special bond we feel with our pets. There is sometimes a lack of understanding from others and our grief can be a lonely experience.

Sometimes it helps to share your feelings with someone who has had a similar experience and who knows how distressing the loss of a pet can be. The Pet Bereavement Support Service was launched in 1994. It is a telephone helpline offering support through a national network of trained volunteer Telephone Befrienders who will listen with compassion and without judgement.

The helpline is open daily 8.30am to 5.00pm on 0800 096 6606. A co-ordinator will give out the contact details of the nearest available Telephone Befriender. Calls are charged at local rates whenever possible and all calls are treated in confidence.

### **Helping children to grieve**

Children in particular may feel the effects of the loss of a pet and this may be one of the first deaths they have experienced. They can form very deep attachments to their pet and may not obviously show signs of grief. If possible it is best to be open and honest about their pet as they may want to ask questions and prepare themselves for the loss.

Burials and funerals are often important for children, giving them the opportunity to say good bye to their pet. The ceremony helps the child to come to terms with the death and can act as a focus for their grief. Some children may want to draw pictures or write poems which could be placed on or in the grave.

Children who can grieve and then let go of their grief will be better prepared for future losses in their lives.

### **Practical steps**

Memorial websites are usually free and you may find it helpful to leave a message or post pictures of your pet.

There are many and various types of memorials which can be bought or you could mark a grave with a stone from your own garden.

Leaflets are available from our surgery and there are many books available from good bookshops.

- **Death of an Animal Friend**. This booklet is helpful for anyone faced with the loss of their pet. Produced by the Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS). Available from SCAS, The Blue Cross, Shilton Road, Burford, Oxon OX18 4PF

- **Absent Friend** by Laura & Martyn Lee. This is an instructive book looking at how to cope when the relationship with pets is broken. Published by Henston. Available at bookshops.

-**Goodbye, Dear Friend** by Virginia Ironside. Published by Robson. Available at bookshops.

Useful websites are:

[www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)

[www.poffins.co.uk](http://www.poffins.co.uk)

[www.lovedpetsgone.co.uk](http://www.lovedpetsgone.co.uk)

**Leaflets are also available on request from the surgery.**