



# Bereavement Support

Our pets are much more than just pets - they are family, friends, sidekicks, and teammates. Experiencing the loss of a pet is a very personal and individual thing. It can be more challenging and painful than we expect.

Grieving the loss of a pet can occur on a physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and spiritual level. It can be exhausting. Our hearts feel broken, our minds alternate from confusion to guilt. We spend a lot of time asking "could I have done something better or different?" These feelings are all normal.



## EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

Depending on your comfort level, there are many ways to express your feelings. Some ideas are to:

- Write about your loss in a journal.
- Write a private letter to the pet you lost.
- Create a memorial in a frame (or via your personal social media page.) These memorials can include pictures or videos of your pet, your pet's identification tags, or an urn containing your pet's ashes.
- Have a beautiful piece of jewelry created with a small portion of the ashes, or add the ashes to a pendant.
- Plant a tree in honor of your pet.
- Make a donation to or volunteer your time at a local organization of your choice.

While friends and family members can offer support, they may not understand the sensitivity of your grief. There are other ways to acquire the support and comfort you may need at this time. Many seek comfort through local animal grievance support groups or through a pet loss support hotline. It is healthy and even encouraged to talk about the life you shared with your pet as this is an important part of your healing process.

## WHAT DO I TELL MY CHILDREN?

This may be your child's first experience with loss and feelings of grief. This could be a good opportunity for you to teach your child to accept and express his/her feelings in healthy ways, free of expectation, and embarrassment. While it is tempting to try to protect your child from emotional pain, telling your child that the pet ran away or went to live with someone else could invoke feelings of abandonment and rejection. It is best to be as honest as possible with your child.



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## WILL MY OTHER PETS AT HOME SENSE THIS LOSS TOO?

Research shows compelling evidence that your other pets can sense the loss of another. Understand that during this time of loss and grief, your other pets may need extra attention and comfort as well.

Signs that your other pets may be experiencing grief can include, but are not limited to:

- Increased desire for attention
- Separation anxiety
- Decreased eating or drinking
- Increased vocalization
- Increased sensitivity to noise
- Searching for the missing pet

Some animals seem unaffected by the absence of a pet and that is completely normal. Treat these animals just as you always have.

Pets that are grieving and showing obvious signs of loss can be given special attention through extra pats and rubs, walks or time outdoors, and appropriate treats to encourage their appetite. Even giving them a blanket with the deceased pet's scent on it may bring comfort.

### NOTE:

It is important to be conscious of the duration and intensity of comfort-giving, as animals are quick to adapt to this special attention. Too much of this can reward and develop unwanted behavior. For example, giving treats each time the pet vocalizes or becomes restless will encourage that behavior.

Keep a close eye on elderly pets. Decreased appetite and thirst is far more serious in elderly animals and can cause life threatening issues.

Be aware of the changes in your animal hierarchies, especially dogs, that may occur following a pet's passing. If the deceased animal was a dominant animal, you may notice an increase in aggression with your remaining pets as they compete for status and dominance in their new arrangement. Talk to your veterinarian about these behavioral changes should they occur.



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## PET LOSS SUPPORT RESOURCES

### **Companion Animal Love, Loss & Memories (CALLM)**

The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center (VMC) offers a bereavement group to support those grieving the loss of a beloved animal. CALLM provides attendees with a supportive and confidential environment to share their story. Sessions are free.

Dates: The CALLM group meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of every month.

Register: Reserve a seat by calling 612-624-9372

Website: <https://bit.ly/3ks8Qg9>

### **Tufts University Pet Loss Support Hotline**

The Tufts University Pet Loss Support Hotline seeks to serve the community by providing a resource for people grieving the loss of a pet. Available Monday - Friday 5:00pm - 8:00pm and 24-Hour voicemail services.

Phone: 508-839-7966

Website: <https://vet.tufts.edu/petloss/>

### **Animal Humane Society Pet Loss Support Hotline**

Animal Humane Society's free Pet Helpline provides caring, compassionate advice and resources to address whatever animal issues you may be experiencing. Whether you need help managing your pet's behavior, or a referral for veterinary care, pet-friendly housing, low-cost spay/neuter surgery, or other local assistance programs, call the Pet Helpline at 952-HELP-PET (952-435-7738)

### **FamilyMeans**

FamilyMeans is a multi-service, nonprofit organization offering grief and loss support in the Twin Cities area.

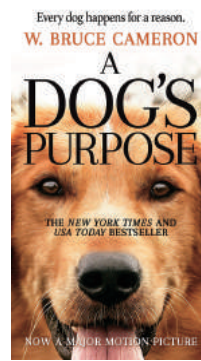
Phone: 651-439-4840

Website: <https://www.familymeans.org/#>



# Bereavement Support

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR ADULTS



*A Dog's Purpose*  
By W. Bruce Cameron

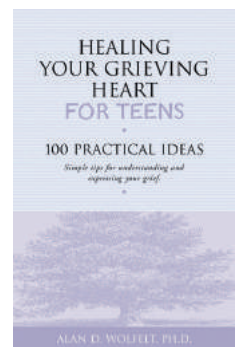


*Saying Goodbye to the Pet You Love*  
By Lorri A. Greene, PhD

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR TEENS

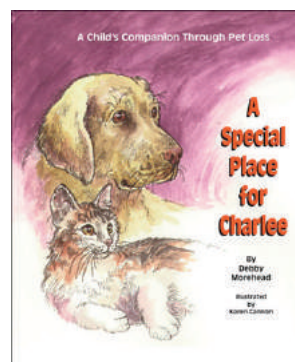


*Goodbye, Friend*  
Healing Wisdom for Anyone  
Who Has Ever Lost a Pet  
By Gary Kowalski



*Healing Your Grieving Heart For Teens*  
By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR CHILDREN



*A Special Place for Charlee*  
By Debby Morehead



*Goodbye My Friend*  
By Mary and Herb Montgomery