

Helping your child cope with the loss of a beloved pet

When kids grieve

As adults, losing a beloved dog or cat is expected at some point. We know their time with us is limited. Yet, even with this knowledge, when that dreaded day arrives, the grief can be unbearable and long-lasting. For many adults, losing a beloved pet is like losing a child. But to the child who slept with that dog or cat every night, or who's never known a day without his (or her) or devoted companion by his side, the loss is incomprehensible. How do you help your child accept that they will never see, touch, hear or hug their cherished companions ever again?

A family affair

Losing a beloved pet is a family affair where all family members feel a profound loss. While you're dealing with your own grief, you're also more worried about how your child will react.

How children cope

with the death of a pet depends on their age, depth of attachment to that pet, the circumstances around the pet's death (or disappearance) and understanding of, or experience with, death previously. If the pet has been sick for a while, you have some time to help prepare your child for its death. However, if your pet is hit by a car, or goes missing or is even stolen, the trauma and impact is must more severe. In either circumstance, there are words of comfort and age-appropriate techniques you can use to help your child process the loss, get through the trauma and eventually find a place of peace and acceptance.



Saying good-bye

Children and pets share an unbreakable, unspoken bond. In most cases, kids and pets are inseparable. While the loss of a dog or cat is usually the most profound, a child can love and become attached to any creature; a guinea pig, a lizard, a bird, and even a fish. When that sad day comes, how can you help your child understand and cope with never seeing and hugging their best friend?

Comforting your child

You are the judge of how and when to talk to your child about death. How much information you share depends on their age and ability to grasp the concept of death.

There are specific ways you can help prepare your child for the loss of a pet and

help them get through the grief when the pet dies.



Please see the reverse side for suggestions to help your child deal with the loss of a pet.



Helping your child through pet loss and beyond

- ♦ Talk honestly about death in terms they understand (with respect to age)
- ♦ If the pet is very sick, explain that the pet may need to go to sleep soon for a long time
- ♦ Explain how you don't want the pet to hurt or suffer
- ♦ Refer to a movie or book they are familiar with where the pet died
- ♦ Explain that sad things happen that we can't control; stories don't always have happy endings
- ♦ Make sure they get a chance to say good-bye to the pet and spend as much time as possible
- ♦ Encourage crying and grieving openly
- ♦ Have them draw pictures of the pet
- ♦ Create a scrapbook of favorite photos
- ♦ Plan a memorial service and ask the children to say something
- ♦ Write a story with your child about the pet
- ♦ Plan a time for the family to share their favorite memories
- ♦ Involve the child in choosing the urn or memorial keep sakes
- ♦ Make sure to read the Rainbow Bridge poem often
- ♦ Have the children read a special prayer or poem to read
- ♦ Discuss getting another pet when the family is ready



PawsInRHearts
Pet Loss & Life Celebration

The Rainbow Bridge

There is a bridge connecting heaven and earth.
It is called the Rainbow Bridge because of its many colors.
Just this side of the Rainbow Bridge is a land of meadows,
hills and valleys with lush green grass.

When a beloved pet dies, the pet goes to this place.
There is always food and water and warm spring weather.
The old and frail animals are young again.
Those who were maimed are made whole again.
They play all day with each other.

There is only one thing missing.
They are not with their special person who loved them on earth.
So, each day they run and play until the day comes,
when one suddenly stops playing and looks up.
The nose twitches. The ears are up. The eyes are staring.
And this one suddenly runs from the group.

You have been seen,
And when you and your special friend meet,
you take him or her in your arms and embrace.
Your face is kissed again and again and again,
and you look once more into the eyes of your trusting pet.

Then you cross the Rainbow Bridge together,
never again to be separated.