

Thank you for loving me

How to Talk to Your Children About Pet Loss

A pet's death is often a child's first experience with grief. The loss of a beloved companion and playmate often creates a wide range of intense feelings that can feel frightening to a child. And yet, that range of feelings will vary greatly from child to child.

When our golden retriever, Bailey, was dying, I watched my children grieve in two completely different ways. My nine-year-old daughter needed to talk. She asked questions, drew pictures, and wanted to be close to Bailey—even at the very end. She processed her grief out loud, inviting us into it with her. My thirteen-year-old son, however, was quieter. He carried his grief deep inside. He chose not to say goodbye at the vet, instead wanting to remember Bailey as she was. He didn't want to talk. He needed space. Routine. Movement. He rode his bike and let tears fall that he didn't want anyone to see. His grief showed up as sadness and sometimes as irritability. And his quiet grief lingered longer than his sister's.

One child needed companionship in her grief; the other needed space. Neither was wrong. They just needed different things.

Having a loving parent or caregiver walk beside and gently guide a child through the loss of a pet can help the child better understand their grief and trust in the God who will hold them through it all.



**For further guidance and support, check out
*Thank You for Loving Me.***

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So how do we gently guide them?

1. Tell the truth with love.

Children need gentle honesty. Avoid platitudes like “they went to sleep” or “they’re in a better place” which can create confusion, anger, and fear. Instead, explain to your children in simple, age-appropriate ways that their pet’s heart stopped beating, their lungs stopped breathing, and they died.

Gentle truth builds trust. And in that honesty, we can remind our children that God loves them and their pet, that He cares deeply about their sadness, and that He is holding them close (Psalm 34:18).

2. Welcome their feelings—all of them.

Your child may cry openly, or they may grow quiet. They may ask questions or avoid them. They may feel sadness, anger, confusion, or even guilt. All of it is normal. Grief isn’t something to fix—it’s something to make space for. My daughter needed to express her grief out loud. My son needed to carry his more privately. Both were grieving deeply, just differently.

We can gently remind our children that they can talk to us, and God, about anything they feel. We can also share that even Jesus wept when He experienced loss (John 11:35). Tears are not a sign of weakness; they are an expression of love and pain.

3. Create space for remembering.

Healing doesn’t come from forgetting or from pushing our memories away. It comes from remembering with love. Some children will want to tell stories, look at photos, or create

something tangible like a drawing, a letter, or a small memorial. Others may engage more quietly, holding memories in their own way. Follow your child’s lead.

You might pray together, thank God for the joy your pet brought into your lives, light a candle, hold a funeral service, or share a favorite memory at the dinner table. These simple acts remind a child that love doesn’t end—it changes form (1 Corinthians 13:1-13).

4. Keep routines steady, but offer grace.

Children often find comfort in familiar rhythms, especially when something in their world has shifted. At the same time, grief can show up in unexpected ways, like changes in sleep, appetite, mood, or behavior. Try to keep daily routines consistent while allowing room for flexibility. Some days will feel heavier than others. Let your child know that both the hard days and the lighter ones are okay—and that God is present in all of them (Psalm 139).

5. Model hope-filled grieving.

Our children are always watching us. They learn how to grieve by seeing how we grieve. We don’t have to hide our grief from our children. Instead, we can model how sorrow and joy can coexist in a human heart. We can share memories, express sadness, and gently point them toward the hope and comfort we find in God. We can remind them that the same God who created their beloved pet walks with them, even now, in their pain. And we can show them God’s promises that, one day, He will make all things right (Revelation 21:5).

In the end, helping a child through grief isn’t about having the right answers. It’s about being present with them in their pain. It’s noticing the child who wants to talk and the one who doesn’t. It’s supporting the one who needs closeness and the one who needs space. It’s reminding them that they are not alone. It’s walking with them through their grief and gently directing their young hearts to the God who loves them and will see them through all things.

*If your child is still struggling with intense feelings of grief, or is experiencing disruptions at bedtime, during meals, or in school several months after their pet died, it may be helpful to reach out to a grief counselor for extra support.

