

For Immediate Release

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Hospice of Santa Barbara Shares Tips on Coping with the Death of a Pet



Santa Barbara, CA, March 17, 2014— Our pets bring us so much support, companionship, unconditional love, and a consistency in our lives that it is very natural to grieve their death, as much as we do any other loss. The process for dealing with that grief is also very similar, if not the same, as grieving the loss of a family member or loved one.

Unfortunately, many consider grieving the death of a pet as indulgent, silly and an overreaction. The good news is that this attitude is quickly changing—especially in the U.S. According to a 2012 study by The Human Society, there were 164 million owned pets and 62 percent of American households included at least one pet.

“The more that people feel this loss personally, the more they will sympathize with others experiencing the same loss. This number is rising every day,” said Gabriela Dodson, LCSW, Director of Clinical Services at Hospice of Santa Barbara. “No one can tell us how or what to grieve,” said Dodson, “We, at Hospice of Santa Barbara, honor the feelings that come with the loss of any kind.”

Hospice of Santa Barbara offers some useful tips for anyone dealing with the loss of their pet.

- The grief process is as individual as the person, lasting days for one person or years for another. The process typically begins with denial, which offers protection until individuals can realize their loss.
- After these feelings subside, the pet owner may experience true sadness or grief. They may become withdrawn or depressed. Acceptance occurs when they accept the reality of their loss and remember their animal companion with decreasing sadness.
- Many forms of support are available, including pet-bereavement counseling services, pet-loss support hotlines, local or online pet-bereavement groups, books, videos, and magazine articles.
- Acknowledge your grief and give yourself permission to express it.
- Don't hesitate to reach out to others who can lend a sympathetic ear.

- Write about your feelings, either in a journal or a poem, essay, or short story.
- Prepare a memorial for your pet.
- Guilt is common reaction to the loss of a pet. Owners often ask, ‘did I do something wrong to cause the death?’, ‘Did I put my pet down too soon?’ When a pet is hit by a car, it can be especially traumatic for the owner.
- The loss of a pet may well be a child’s first experience with death which may lead to additional fears that other people he/she loves will also “leave”. Expressing your own grief may reassure the child that sorrow is ok and normal.
- Coping for the loss of a pet can be particularly hard for seniors-especially for those living alone. It is important that seniors reach out to friends and family (and, more importantly, that family and friends reach out to the senior). Seniors can be encouraged to call a pet loss support hotline, and perhaps volunteer at a local animal shelter. Getting a new pet may be too difficult for seniors.
- Other potential sufferers of pet loss are other surviving pets in the household. Surviving pets may show their distress by whimpering, refusing to eat and drink but this usually passes in a week or so. (If not, contact your veterinarian). Give them lots of TLC and maintain a normal routine. It’s good for them and good for you.
- No one can replace a pet, but the option of getting another pet should be done carefully. Rushing into this decision isn't fair to you or your new pet. You'll know when the time is right to adopt a new pet after giving yourself time to grieve, carefully considering the responsibilities of pet ownership, and paying close attention to your feelings and those of your family.
- When you're ready, remember that your local animal shelter is a great place to find pets who need a home.

Hospice of Santa Barbara will be providing a free support group for people who are grieving the loss of a pet beginning in April. The group is for anyone experiencing feelings of loss or depression after the loss of a cherished pet. Pre-registration is required. To register, please contact Virginia Moreno, MFT, at 805-563-8820. For more information about Hospice of Santa Barbara, visit www.hospiceofsantabarbara.org.

Hospice of Santa Barbara “volunteers” its free professional counseling and care management services to more than 700 children and adults every month who are experiencing the impact of a life-threatening illness, or grieving the death of a loved one. Hospice of Santa Barbara is also present on 11 local middle and high school campuses to work with children and teens who are grieving the loss of a loved one. For more information about Hospice of Santa Barbara, including volunteer opportunities, call (805) 563-8820 or visit www.hospiceofsantabarbara.org. Find Hospice of Santa Barbara on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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