

# Lawnswood<sub>xo</sub>

Pet Cremation & Cemetery

## Pet Loss & Grief Support

Caring guidance  
for goodbyes







# Pet parents in grief

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It can be hard to believe how sad and lonely you can feel when your pet dies. To animal lovers, a pet is a member of the family—they ride in your car, sleep on your bed, they know your household routine, they recognise your voice –they know you and you know them. No wonder there's such a huge gap, an empty space, when they die.

So it's alright to be missing them, to be deeply sad and out of sorts – your best friend has passed. The grief of losing a much loved pet, a companion, is very real.

## **What can I do?**

Be kind to yourself. It may take weeks or months to acknowledge the full reality of your pet's passing. Everyone grieves in their own way and in their own time, so it's important to focus on what feels right for you.

Try not to compare your experience of grief with anyone else's while you prepare for the 'new normal'. Do what feels right and authentic to you. It's all a necessary part of adapting to the changes in your life and learning how to manage what's happened through the grieving process.

## **Treasure your memories**

Our memories allow our pets to live on in our hearts. When you are ready, take some time to look at and print past photos or write a letter/poem to commemorate your time together.

Share your special memories with your loved ones. Be real –try not to pretend you are okay or hide your true feelings.

## **Self-care & identity**

Part of your self-identity might come from being a pet parent, or having people associate you with your pet. You may be the person who walked their staffy around the neighbourhood, or the friend whose cat loved to snuggle onto laps. Adjusting to this change is a central part of mourning.

Prioritise activities that bring you some comfort and peace at this time to ease the emotional load. Doing your best to eat well, spending time in nature, keeping your body moving and getting enough sleep will help to recharge your mind and body.

## **Asking for support**

It is never too early to get support. Grief isn't something you just 'get over'. It's a journey to work through, which is why the support of family, friends and your wider community is so important. Talking with others who have recently lost a pet may also be helpful.

## **The sound of silence**

The silence in your home after the loss of a pet can be deafeningly loud. Being aware of the 'presence of their absence' will help prepare you for their loss and the flood of emotions it brings.

## **Your special bond**

Above all, you and your pet shared a special bond, one that others might find difficult to understand.

Some well-meaning friends or family members might say 'he was just a dog' or 'she was just a cat' without understanding the special bond you shared. Know that your grief is normal and the bond you and your pet shared deserves to be honoured.



# Children in grief

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## **Helping children grieve**

Naturally, you may notice a shift in a child's behaviour during this time. As an adult, it is important to let them lead their journey through the grieving process. Children are naturally inclined to show their feelings, and will teach you what they need to mourn in their own way.

Children will often show the full complex spectrum of grieving emotions with bursts of sadness. They will mourn, then play, mourn some more and then play again. They will let you know when they are ready to talk, cry or need a hug. This is a healthy way for young ones to move themselves from grief to reconciliation.

Try to model your grieving behaviour in a way that allows children to feel safe and comfortable in expressing their own feelings. Your empathy will give them permission to be themselves.

## **Saying goodbye, together**

Saying goodbye to a pet friend may often be a child's first experience of death. Know that crying and grieving with them validates their feelings of loss and can help build a trusted bond at this time.

They will want to be given a chance to remember their pet and relive the life they shared. This process will be an integral part of their grief journey.

To help honour your pet's memory together, you could set up a 'tribute space' in your home or garden to display all the items that remind you of your pet, such as photos, toys, stories, plants, special stones or similar.

Some pet owners also take comfort from arranging a memorial service to pay tribute to their pet. Let your child help you decide on readings, poems, letters or music to play at the service.

You can also create a personalised scrapbook, journal or photograph album together. As a family, you may also consider donating to a local animal shelter in memory of your pet.

### **Saying the right words**

Sometimes children may be nervous to talk about your pet if they think it will make you sad. You can let them know that, "Anytime you want to talk about Max, I am here. I love to remember him. Don't worry about making me sad". Your reassurance speaks volumes.

Remember, in talking to a child about the death of their pet, it is important to use the correct terminology to describe what has happened.

Using words like 'death', 'dead' and 'died' is more helpful to children than using words like 'sleeping', 'gone to the farm' or 'adopted by another family.' Pretending will only create confusion and unresolved feelings of grief for your child.

If adults can name their feelings, "I'm sad because Max has died", it can be helpful to children who are trying to understand their own emotions.

# The emotions of euthanasia

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There is no right or wrong choice, only a loving choice. Making the decision to euthanise your pet is enormously difficult and you may never feel truly 'ready'. Your veterinarian will be there to answer your questions and support you through this decision.

At this time, it is important to remember that you know your pet's emotions, feelings and lifestyle better than anyone. You will need to carefully consider all of these factors during this time.

If you have already decided to have your pet euthanised, trust that you have made the right decision with the information you have and with your pet's best interests at heart.

## **Making emotional decisions**

Whilst it may seem unbearably hard to stay with your pet during the euthanasia procedure, you will have the peace of mind to know your pet had the comfort of your presence during their final moments.

Before making your decision, it may be helpful to first speak to your vet about the euthanasia process. You can also receive [other helpful information](#) through:

- A quality of life assessment with your vet
- A pet hospice group who assist with pain management for your pet at home
- Friends who understand the importance of your pet
- Counsellors specialising in end-of-life pet care
- Pet loss support groups

## Consider quality of life

As a pet parent, knowing your pet is suffering, whether physically or mentally, will be part of your decision-making process when discussing euthanasia. Considering the following quality of life factors can be a helpful start:

- When my pet stops enjoying treats
- When my pet stops eating
- When my pet can no longer find their litter box
- When my pet can no longer find the door
- When my pet no longer wants to get up

Feeling guilt is common as the decision to euthanise will never be an easy one. Don't be afraid to ask friends and family for support during this time, and be gentle with yourself.

## A heartfelt choice

Making this decision for your pet will involve others who have been part of your pet's life, such as family members, friends, other pets and your vet. Understanding everyone's emotional connection with your pet will also help to guide you before, during and after euthanasia.

This is a good time to give everyone the opportunity to farewell your pet with final hugs or pats, or to give your pet a special treat or toy to create a truly meaningful goodbye. Putting together a 'bucket list' for them could be a nice way to cherish your moments together.

Having a chance to say goodbye to your pet with compassion, professional care and dignity at the end of their life can be a difficult but truly heartfelt choice.



# Pets in grief

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Studies have shown that many animals experience grief and show emotional responses similar to humans when they lose companions. It is important to be aware of their feelings and to support and give them time to mourn their friend.

## Changes in behaviour

Your pet may visibly show signs of mourning, such as:

- Changes in eating habits or loss of appetite
- Being restless, wandering aimlessly or having broken sleep
- Being quieter than normal in their communication
- Being more vocal than normal in their communication
- Constant searching for their pet friend
- Demanding more attention than normal
- Having no desire to be social or being lethargic

Where possible, your other pets should also be given the opportunity to say goodbye to their friend. It is distressing to a pet to see a member of the household leave and never return. If it is not possible, take a snippet of a lock of fur so that they will have something to smell to help them understand their pet friend has died.

Remember that your vet is always there to support your other pet through their grieving journey. Feel confident to reach out to them if their behaviour seems unusual or unexpected.

Some possible behaviours your other pets may show during this time include:

- Sniffing them to confirm the death
- Laying beside your deceased pet
- Trying to 'bury' the deceased pet by moving dirt with their nose or by pulling a blanket over the body
- Howling or whimpering
- Pawing at them as if trying to wake them up
- Bringing a favourite toy over to the deceased pet to play
- It may also be possible for your pet to show no signs at all

### **Their grief journey**

There are some things you can do to help your pet during this time, which can also help you through your grief, too.

These include:

- Keeping your pet's routine the same
- Giving your pet extra care and attention
- Giving your pet something with your deceased pet's scent on it for comfort
- Taking your pet on a favourite outing, such as a car ride
- Taking longer walks together, so your pet won't have to be alone
- Allowing your pet to sleep in areas that they would not have slept in the past, such as the deceased pet's chair or bed
- Talking to your pet about their lost friend – tell them how you are grieving too, and give them 'permission' to grieve as well

You and your pet are both grieving the loss of a friend. Allow yourself time and patience to mourn your special bond.



# Holding a goodbye service

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You may wish to have one last time to be with your pet after they pass. This allows you to see your pet at peace, to give children a chance to bring in special items for your pet and a time to begin your grief journey with a heartfelt goodbye.

Family members, friends and other pets may want to share a final goodbye with your pet too. After all, pets touch the lives of so many people during their time with us. Allow those around you the opportunity to come together, pay their respects and support each other. This can be done through:

- Special readings or remembrance poems
- Rituals you and your pet did to say 'I love you'
- A candle lighting tribute
- Sharing photos and videos of your pet and family together
- Gently and carefully petting them
- Bringing in approved small items to be cremated alongside your pet

## What's right for you

How you choose to memorialise your pet is up to you. Rituals, ceremonies and memorial pieces are unique to every individual and have special meaning to the relationship they shared with their pet. Others might not understand your need to create a memorial, but it's your decision, and it's important that you choose what helps you grieve your loved one.



# Making aftercare arrangements

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There is no right or wrong way to memorialise your beloved pet. What you and your family decide to do to pay tribute to them has to be right for you.

The first part of your decision is a practical one: Private Cremation with return of ashes to you or Private Cremation with dispersal of their ashes by our team.

Many factors will play a part in this decision and you may wish to speak with your family, friends and community for their thoughts.

Keepsakes are also a very important decision to make at the time of your pet's passing. These can bring a lot of comfort at such a difficult time and include paw prints, fur clippings and similar mementos that are distinctly unique to your pet.

You will have a number of options for their memorial such as:

- Urns (wooden, ceramic or metal)
- Memorial jewellery
- Memorial glass domes
- Teddy bears
- Garden plaques
- Framed tributes

Our caring team will always be here to help you, should you need support with making these final decisions.

# Questions you may have

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## **If I choose to cremate my pet, will their ashes be returned to me?**

When a pet is cremated, you can choose to have their ashes returned to you or not. If you choose Private Cremation you can select both memorial items and special keepsakes for your pet. Your veterinarian may talk to you about the options available to you.

## **What is Private Cremation?**

A Private Cremation commemorates your pet's life with:

- Cremation in their own private chamber
- Optional keepsakes (such as paw prints)
- Optional memorial products (such as urns and jewellery)
- Return of your pet's ashes, or optional dispersal of their ashes by our team

## **What is a Communal Cremation?**

A communal cremation offers the following for your pet:

- Cremation alongside other pets
- Ashes will not be returned to you
- Keepsakes and memorial options are not available with communal cremation

## Can I organise a keepsake?

If you think you would like a special keepsake (such as paw prints), or a memorial item that requires the inclusion of ashes (such as jewellery pieces) then a Private Cremation is essential.

## How can I be sure I will receive my pet's ashes?

To ensure the ashes of your pet, and only your pet, are returned to you, we have carefully developed our 7-Point Pet Tracking System to provide complete transparency throughout every stage of the cremation process. We assign a unique identification number to your pet at the time of booking and create an ID tag that contains your pet's details (name, breed and location). This ID tag follows your pet throughout their journey and is checked and double checked at many points throughout the process so you can be absolutely sure that you are receiving your pet's ashes.



## Where can I find further support?

Your vet, family, friends and community are all wonderful people to reach out to at this difficult time. Pet loss and grief specialty counsellors and psychologists may also support you with tools and resources during your grief journey. Our caring team is always here to help however we can with your pet's aftercare and memorialisation, so please feel welcome to reach out to us for caring guidance.

**24/7 Pet Loss Support Line—1300 431 450**

**Lifeline—13 11 14**

**Griefline—1300 845 745**

**Beyond Blue—1300 224 636**

