

Grief over loss of pet ^[1]

Alice,

There was a pet that lived at my parents' home since I was a child. He passed away over a year ago, and sometimes I still dream about him. How do I move past his death? Thanks you for your time.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Whether cat or dog, bird or reptile, many people consider their animal companions a part of their family. Some even find themselves having warmer feelings for their furry (or feathered) friends than for members of their extended family! So, it's no wonder you continue to dream about your childhood pet. Pets can be a source of comfort, companionship, unconditional love, and joy.

After losing a pet, it is normal to feel angry, sad, guilty, and/or confused. Grieving is a personal and highly individual experience, and the time frame of "moving past" the death can vary from weeks to years. Some people find grief comes in stages, while others find that grief is more cyclical, coming in waves, or a series of highs and lows. Either way, you should never feel guilty or ashamed about grieving for an animal friend. While there is no single right or wrong way to deal with grief, there are many healthy ways to move the healing process along. Here are a few helpful tips for dealing with the loss:

- **Be patient with yourself.** Allow the process to naturally unfold. The grieving process cannot be forced or hurried, and there is no "normal" length for grieving. While some pet owners take just a few weeks or months, others may take longer — and that is totally fine.
- **Celebrate the life of your pet.** There are plenty of ways to remember the good memories, such as preparing a memorial, making a photo album or scrapbook, planting a tree in your pet's memory, or writing poems, stories, or letters to your pet. What a better way to celebrate the joy that your pet brought to the world!
- **Be honest about your feelings.** The best way to work through your feelings is to accept and explore them. For example, while you may feel alone, sad, angry, or guilty, it is important to explore whether these feelings "fit" the loss. In other words, is there more to the loss than meets the eye? Did losing your pet remind you of any other experiences

you've had in your life?

- **Openly express your feelings with others** who had good times and/or a close bond with your pet. Reminiscing about the good times may help you understand what your pet's loss actually means to you.

It may be helpful to reach out to family or friends who love pets, as they may be the most able to understand the love you had for your pet and provide support. Remember, tons of people have gone through similar experiences. Your veterinarian or [local humane society](#) [2] may be able to recommend a pet loss counselor or support group. The [Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement](#) [3] also has a ton of resources which you may find helpful.

By embracing your emotions and staying true to yourself, not only can you help yourself, you can fully appreciate and celebrate the life of your pet as well.

Alice!

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