

When a Pet Dies

A companion handout for our 90 minutes together.
Follow along, jot notes, and take what helps.



Welcome. Losing an animal companion can be one of the hardest losses of a life, and one of the least acknowledged. You do not need to justify your grief here.

OUR GROUP AGREEMENTS

What is shared stays here

What we learn can leave.

Share what you wish

Passing is always okay.

No fixing, no advice

Unless someone asks for it.

Share the air

One voice at a time, and
leave room.

All losses count

Sudden or planned, any
species.

No comparing

There is no right way to
grieve.

OUR 90 MINUTES

1

10 min

2

15 min

3

15 min

4

25 min

5

5 min

6

10 min

7

10 min

1 Arrive and settle Grounding starter below

3 Understand Page 2

5 Stretch and breathe Optional break

7 Closing ritual Say their names

2 Check in Name, companion, one word

4 Remember and share Page 3

6 Coping tools Page 4

START HERE, 60 SECONDS

Place both feet on the floor. Rest a hand on
your chest or lap. Take one slower breath
out. Silently say your companion's name.

IF IT GETS TO BE TOO MUCH

Stop. Look around and name 3 things
you can see. Feel your feet. You may
step out and return whenever you
like.

Please read: this handout is education. It is not a substitute for therapy or medical care, and it does not
diagnose or treat any condition. Skip anything that feels like too much.



Understand: why this loss hurts

UNDERSTAND

You lost a relationship

Your companion was part of your daily life: the morning routine, the greeting at the door, the warm weight on the couch. When that ends, you lose the animal and the rhythm of your days. The pain reflects your love.

Why it can feel lonely

Some losses are not openly acknowledged by others. Grief scholar Kenneth Doka calls this disenfranchised grief. Comments like 'it was just a pet' can leave you hiding tears. If you have felt that, you are not alone here.

FEELING THE LOSS

Crying and missing them
Remembering, telling stories
Guilt, anger, yearning
Looking at photos

back and forth

TAKING A BREAK FROM IT

Routines and errands
Rest, food, movement
Laughing, seeing friends
Learning a new daily rhythm

Grieving is not a set of stages. It moves back and forth, and both sides are part of healing.

ILLUSTRATION

COMMON REACTIONS

BODY

- Heavy chest, tight throat
- Exhaustion, restless sleep
- Appetite changes

FEELINGS

- Waves of sadness
- Guilt and 'what if' loops
- Relief mixed with sorrow

THOUGHTS

- Sensing your pet at home
- Trouble concentrating
- 'Am I overreacting?'

BEHAVIOR

- Reaching for the leash or bowl
- Avoiding reminders
- Pulling away from people

MYTH VS REALITY

MYTH

It was just a pet.

REALITY

Grief follows attachment, not species.

MYTH

A new pet will fix this quickly.

REALITY

A new animal is a new relationship, not a replacement. There is no deadline.

MYTH

If euthanasia was kind, you should feel at peace.

REALITY

Love, relief, guilt, and sorrow can all be true at once.

Culture and context: Animals hold different roles across cultures: family, working partner, spiritual companion. Some communities have rituals for animals, others do not. Your bond counts.



Remember and reflect

WORKSHEET

Remembering my companion

Write as much or as little as you like. You may share from this page in group.

Their name _____ Kind of animal or breed _____

Years together _____ How they came to me _____

HOW THEY GREETED ME

THEIR QUIRKS AND HABITS

WHAT THEY TAUGHT ME

WHAT I MISS MOST

Draw, or tape a photo here.
Add a paw print, a tag, or a strand
of fur if you like.

The hard parts

Tick anything you are carrying today.

- ☐ Deciding on euthanasia
- ☐ Guilt or 'what if' thoughts
- ☐ A sudden or unexpected death
- ☐ Grieving alone, or feeling judged
- ☐ Other pets or children grieving
- ☐ Other losses stirred up again

Guilt and hindsight

Hindsight is clearer than the moment was.

WHAT I KNEW THEN

WHAT I KNOW NOW

WHAT LOVE WAS BEHIND MY CHOICES

Share if you wish

1. Tell us your companion's name and one thing you loved about them.
2. What has been the hardest part of the days since?
3. Where do you notice grief in your body or your day?
4. What is one small way you have honored them, or could?



Take care this week

COPING TOOLS

Too much? Stop. Look around the room, name 3 things you can see, feel your feet, and reach out to someone you trust. Every practice works with eyes open.

2 min



Say It Out Loud

A wave hits at home or at work.

1. Feel your feet and look around.
2. Rest a hand on your chest.
3. Say: 'This hurts because I loved you.'
4. Breathe out slowly and let the wave move.

10 min



Write Them a Letter

Guilt, or words left unsaid.

1. Start with 'Dear ___.'
2. Write thanks, sorries, and what you will carry.
3. Read it aloud, or keep it private.
4. Keep it, fold it, or bury it.

30 min



Make a Small Ritual

You want to mark the loss.

1. Pick a place, a time, and one or two people.
2. Light a candle, plant something, or walk their route.
3. Say what you are grateful for.
4. Close with a few quiet breaths.

HELPFUL THINGS TO HEAR

I am so sorry. I know you loved them.
Tell me about them.

THINGS THAT HURT

It was just a pet.
You can always get another.

At home: Fill the empty slot, like the 6 pm walk, with something small. Use clear words with children, like 'died'. Keep routines steady for other pets.

When to reach out: Consider individual support if intense grief is not easing after several months, you cannot manage daily life, or you lean on substances to cope. If you have thoughts of suicide, call or text 988 now.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Support: Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement (aplb.org). Lap of Love (lapoflove.com).

Books: Goodbye, Friend, Kowalski (1997). The Loss of a Pet, Sife (1993).

Research: Doka (1989), Disenfranchised Grief. Stroebe and Schut (1999), Death Studies, 23(3). Wrobel and Dye (2003), Omega, 47(4).

Group leader

Next meeting

Questions:

soulflotherapy.com/contact

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT RIGHT NOW

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988 **Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to 741741

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

This handout is education and does not replace therapy.