

Animals & Grief

Part II

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Grieving the loss of a pet has an added burden. We fear that people will dismiss our pain because “it’s just an animal.” We hide our feelings because although the pain feels enormous, we think the loss looks small in comparison to other people’s human losses.

When we feel that grieving the loss of our pet is not a worthwhile grief, we risk what psychologists refer to as “disenfranchised grief.” This is a grief that is minimized and unacknowledged. It is a loss that might be seen as insignificant and therefore we hide it. The grief journey is a healthy process, but when grief is disenfranchised, it can interrupt a healthy grief journey. Thankfully, there are ways to cope with the loss of a pet that put our journey back on track.

First, acknowledge that the pain is real, justifiable, heart-wrenching pain. If someone dismisses that pain, it is likely because that person has never experienced the deep love we have for our pets. Be glad to have experienced that love.

Reach out to others who understand the pain. Whether in person or online, there are groups with similar shared experience who welcome us to share our grief journey. The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement “APLB” (APLB.org) offers resources as well as an online chat room to connect with those who understand our pain. Social media groups offer a place to share our feelings. Locate a pet loss counselor near you for one on one time.

Consider memorializing the loss. There are companies who will place a small amount of cremains in a charm for to have as jewelry. Donate to an animal welfare nonprofit organization. Have a painting or a t-shirt made from

a treasured photograph. In today's digital age, it costs little to make a keepsake from a photograph.

There are no cost ways to memorializing our pet as well. Organize a day when family and friends gather to volunteer at a shelter or clean up a park. Write a tribute to help process the grief. Post the tribute with favorite photos on social media.

Give it time. Grieving a pet is real pain that takes time to heal. There is no one-size-fits-all timeline. A family of four humans who is grieving the loss of one dog, will have four different timelines for grieving the one dog.

English novelist Sir Walter Scott understood our grief and famously wrote *"I have sometimes thought of the final cause of dogs having such short lives and I am quite satisfied it is in compassion to the human race; for if we suffer so much in losing a dog after an acquaintance of ten or twelve years, what would it be if they were to live double that time? The misery of keeping a dog is his dying so soon. But, to be sure, if he lived for fifty years and then died, what would become of me?"*