

## Pet Loss and Grief

A common aspect of owning a companion animal -- a part many people rarely discuss -- is the loss of a pet. When you lose your best friend -- the one you could always count on when you were down, the one who warmed you, played with you and made you laugh no matter how bad you felt -- it can be a devastating experience. It's important to grieve this loss and work through the emotions.

People grieve the loss of a pet in different ways. Most people will experience the seven stages of grief (shock, denial, bargaining, anger, guilt, sorrow and acceptance), but the amount of time spent in each stage may vary greatly. Here are some tips to help you through the grieving process:

- It's OK to cry and show outward signs of grief for your pet. The human-animal bond is very strong, and for many people, the loss of a pet is felt as deeply as the loss of a close friend or family member.
- Talk about your pet with friends and family, including the good times, the bad times and even the way it ended (if you choose). Sharing the wonderful memories you have of your pet will help you progress through the grieving process.
- Have a memorial service for your pet. Whether you bury your pet in your backyard, scatter his ashes in the woods or simply go to his favorite dog park, you can honor his memory by holding a service. Include the entire family, recall favorite memories or plant a tree or flower garden in your pet's memory.
- Make a donation in your pet's honor to your local animal shelter. Many shelters have a memorial donation program with either a wall or garden where you can have a brick engraved with your pet's name. Not only will you create a lasting tribute to your pet, but you will also be helping save the lives of homeless shelter animals.
- Join a pet bereavement support group. Check with your local animal shelter for more information on finding one of these groups or a pet bereavement hotline.
- Let yourself feel the pain and loss, but remember to also appreciate all the years you spent together with your beloved companion.