

you want the remains handled. GAVC offers only cremation, but this does entail a fee. If you have property where it is legal to do so, you can bury your pet, and Duluth city residents can also bring their pet to the city shelter for disposal.

Consider your personal and religious values when making this decision. It is best to consider this prior to euthanasia, rather than being forced to make a hurried decision.



### **What Should I Tell My Children?**

You are the best judge of how much information your children can handle about the loss of their pet. Don't underestimate them, however. You may find that by being

honest with them, you will be able to address some fears and misperceptions they may have about death.

Honesty is important. If you use the term "put to sleep," make sure your children understand the difference. Do not tell your children that the pet "went away," because the child may think they did something to make it leave and perhaps will wait for its return. This also makes it harder to accept a new pet. The child should be clear that the pet is not returning, but is happy and free of pain and suffering.

Never assume a child is too young to grieve. Do not criticize a child for crying, or tell him or her to "be strong" or not to feel sad. Be honest about your own sorrow as well. Discuss the issue with the entire family, and give everybody a chance to work through their grief at their own pace.

### **Will My Other Pets Grieve?**

Pets observe every change in a household, and will likely notice the absence of a companion. The survivor may most certainly grieve. Dogs will grieve for cats and vice versa.

Your surviving pets may need more attention to help them through this period. Remember that a new pet may not be welcomed initially by your old one, but new bonds will grow with time. The love of your surviving pets can bolster your own healing.

### **Should I Get a New Pet Right Away?**

Generally, the answer is no, as one needs time to work through grief and loss before attempting to build a new relationship. You may resent a new pet for trying to "take the place" of your old one. Children in particular may believe that loving new pet is disloyal to the old one.

When you do get a new pet, avoid getting a "look-a-like." Allow your new pet to develop its own personality. Don't give the new pet the same name or nickname. Avoid the temptation to compare the new pet to the old one. It can be hard to remember that your old companion also caused a few problems when he/she was young.

A new pet should be acquired because you are ready to move forward and build a new relationship. When you are ready, select an animal with whom you can build another long, loving relationship. This is what having a pet is all about.

### **Recommended Reading**

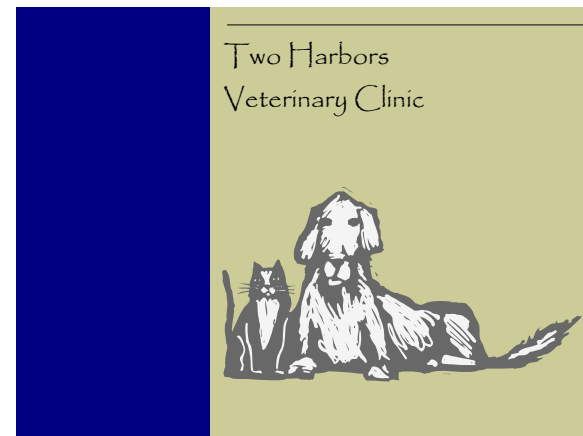
Zoe's Goodbye, Mary Schlangen, DVM, Beaver's Pond Press, Inc., 2005.

Dog Heaven, Cynthia Rylant, Scholastic, Inc., 1995.

Cat Heaven, Cynthia Rylant, Scholastic, Inc., 1997.

Goodbye, Friend, Gary Kowalski, Stillpoint Publishing, 1997.

Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet, Moira Anderson Allen, Alpine Publications, 1996.



## Tips on Coping with the Loss of Your Pet



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Anyone who considers a pet a beloved friend, companion, or family member knows the intense pain that accompanies the loss of that friend. These are some tips on coping with that grief, and with the difficult decisions one faces upon the loss of a pet.

### ***Am I crazy to hurt so much?***

Intense grief over the loss of a pet is normal and natural. Don't let anyone tell you that it's silly, crazy, or overly sentimental to grieve.

Our pets become a significant part of our lives, even if the time spent with them is short. They are a source of comfort, companionship, unconditional love and acceptance, fun, and joy. Don't be surprised to feel devastated by the loss of such a relationship.

People who do not understand the bond may not understand your pain. What matters is how you feel. Your feelings are valid, and they may be painful. You are not alone; thousands of other pet owners have gone through the same feelings.

### ***What Can I Expect to Feel?***

People experience grief in different ways. In addition to sorrow and loss, you may experience other emotions:

- Guilt
- Denial
- Anger
- Depression

These are normal emotions that many experience during times of loss, but unfortunately, they are frequently unproductive and prevent pet owners from resolving their grief. It is important to be aware of them, but not to dwell on them.

### ***What Can I Do About My Feelings?***

The most important step you can take is to be honest about your feelings. Don't deny your feelings, as by examining them and coming to terms with them, you can begin to work through them.

You have a right to feel pain and grief, as well as anger and guilt. Someone you know and loved has died, and you feel alone and bereaved. Acknowledge your feelings first, then ask yourself whether the circumstances justify them.

Ignoring grief does not make it disappear. Express your grief. DO what helps you the most. Don't avoid it by not thinking about your pet; instead, reminisce about good memories. This will help you understand what your loss means to you.

Some find it helpful to express their feelings in poems, stories, or even letters to their pet. You can rearrange your schedule to fill in times you would have spent with your pet; preparing a memorial such as a photo collage; and talking to others about your loss.

### ***Who Can I Talk To?***

If your family or friends love pets, they will understand what you are going through. Working through your feelings with another person is one of the best ways to put them in perspective and learn how to handle them. Find someone you feel comfortable grieving with.

If you need more help, ask your veterinarian or humane association to recommend a pet loss counselor or support group. Check with your church or hospi-



tal. Remember, your grief is genuine and is deserving of support.

### ***Euthanasia: When is it Time?***

Your veterinarian is the best judge of your pet's physical condition, but you are the best judge of the quality of your pet's daily life. If a pet is eating, appreciates attention and seeks it out, and participates in the family, many owners felt that it is not yet time. However, constant pain or unsuccessful or stressful treatments may be factors, and certainly the aforementioned factors may help a caring pet owner decide to end their pet's suffering.

Evaluate your pet's health honestly and unselfishly with your veterinarian. Prolonging your pet's suffering in order to prevent your own ultimately helps neither of you. Nothing will make this decision easy, but it is truly the final act of love that you can make for your pet.

### ***Should I Stay During Euthanasia?***

Many feel this is the ultimate gesture of love and comfort. Some feel relief and comfort by staying, watching their pet pass peacefully and accepting the finality of their death. Not witnessing the pet's death may make it more difficult to accept that he/she is really gone. But this also can be traumatic, and you must ask yourself honestly whether you will be able to handle it. Uncontrolled emotions can upset your pet.

### ***What Do I Do Next?***

When a pet dies, you must choose how

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