

CHILDREN AND GRIEF

The death of a family pet, be it Goldfish or Golden Retriever, can be especially difficult for a child. Particularly in these times of changing family structures, pets provide an important constant presence, offering nonjudgmental acceptance and affection. Children of various ages differ in their ability to understand the concept of death or to express their feelings. Here are some suggestions:

- ◇ Encourage the child to talk about their feelings. Listen to them.
- ◇ Be truthful and accurate.
- ◇ Don't hide your own feelings.
- ◇ Avoid using the phrase "put to sleep"
- ◇ Consult all family members who are old enough in making a euthanasia decision.
- ◇ Help the child to memorialize the pet through drawings, poems, pictures, etc.
- ◇ Let the child's teacher know about the death.
- ◇ Share a thoughtful book on the subject.
- ◇ Allow your child time to grieve before getting a new pet.
- ◇ Call the Helpline and request the free packet of information on children and grief.
- ◇ Remember, you yourself may find much comfort in talking and sharing at this time with your wonderful child!

The Rainbow Bridge

There is a bridge connecting Heaven and Earth. It is called the Rainbow Bridge because of its many colors. Just this side of the Rainbow Bridge there is a land of meadows, hills and valleys with lush green grass.

When a beloved pet dies, the pet goes to this place. There is always food and water and warm spring weather.

The old and frail animals are young again. Those who are maimed are made whole again. They play all day with each other.

There is only one thing missing. They are not with their special person who loved them on earth. So, each day they run and play until the day comes when one suddenly stops playing and looks up! The nose twitches! The ears rise! The eyes are starring! And this one suddenly runs from the group!

You have been seen, and when you and your special friend meet, you take them in your arms and embrace.

Your face is kissed again and again and again, and you look once more into the eyes of your trusting pet.

Then you cross the Rainbow Bridge together, never to be separated again.

Author Unknown

Please share this brochure with all family members and friends who may be mourning the loss of your pet. Not everyone expresses feelings openly, so don't assume there is no grief if a family member is not talking about the loss. Caring and sharing feelings together may help ease the pain for all.

**Pet Loss
Support
Help-line
(630)603-3994**

**The Loss Of A Pet Is
Just As Significant A
Loss As Losing A
Human Friend Or
Relative.
You Can Get Help
From The
Professionals At The
Chicago Veterinary
Medical Association.
C.V.M.A.**



The death of a beloved animal friend, whether furred, feathered or otherwise attired, a creature great or small, represents a very deep and significant loss to the loving human companion. Your veterinary caregivers have been uniquely privileged to observe the beauty and depth of the bond between pets and people, and are therefore very much aware of the pain upon the death, loss, or anticipated death of your pet. To help, the Chicago Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), has made available this Pet Loss Helpline. You may call and leave a message anytime. A trained volunteer will return your call between 7-9 p.m. weekday evenings. There is NO CHARGE for this service.

In addition to the Helpline, the CVMA now has a Pet Loss Support Group. The meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month, at the CVMA office in Hinsdale. They start at 8:00p.m. Please call (630) 325-1231 for directions and more information.

COMMON CONCERNS: Your feelings are natural and normal. A profound connection - a bond of love - has been painfully disrupted. This may well be one of the most difficult losses you will ever have to face. Sometimes the

death of a pet may seem even harder to bear than that of a person in the family; perhaps because the love from a pet is always unconditional.

IS THERE A RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO GRIEVE?

NO! Grief hurts, but it is different for every one. Grief may include the following:

- ◇ The Physical: Crying; fatigue; loss of appetite; palpitations; tightness in chest and sighing.
- ◇ The Intellectual: Denial; confusion; preoccupation; absentmindedness.
- ◇ The Emotional: Sadness; anger; guilt; anxiety and helplessness.
- ◇ The Social: Withdrawal and loneliness
- ◇ The Spiritual: Questioning and reaffirming one's faith

IS THERE A PURPOSE FOR GRIEF?

Yes! Grief and the feelings that accompany it are normal and necessary so the following can be accomplished:

- ◇ Accept your loss as a reality.
- ◇ Work through all the emotions created by your loss.
- ◇ Adjust to life without your pet's presence.
- ◇ Move on with life.

ARE THERE SITUATIONS THAT MAKE GRIEVING EVEN MORE DIFFICULT?

Yes!

- ◇ Loss of a pet who was the only companion.
- ◇ Loss of a pet who went through life changes with you, such as death or divorce.
- ◇ Loss of a pet who was a link to a lost loved one.
- ◇ Loss of a pet after a long illness.
- ◇ Loss of a pet to a sudden or violent death.

IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP MYSELF?

Yes!

- ◇ Talk with caring and understanding family and friends.
- ◇ Call the Helpline.
- ◇ Talk and cry as much as you want; tears release tension and assist healing.
- ◇ Do not neglect your physical needs. Eat well, rest, exercise or take a long warm bath. Avoid the use of alcohol or drugs.
- ◇ Find a way to memorialize your pet. Make a scrapbook, write a poem or song, plant a tree in their honor.