

Coping with Loss

Our pets are such a strong source of comfort, unconditional love and companionship. The decision to euthanize our beloved friend is difficult and heart wrenching, and their limited time with us makes us want to hold onto the memories of joy they have offered throughout the years. Here at Pet Specialists of Monterey, we see the impact our pets have on us and the emotional toll euthanasia holds. Here are some helpful tools to aid in the grief process that you may experience.

Recognizing Feelings of Guilt

The word euthanasia comes from the Greek word meaning “peaceful” or “painless death.” As pet owners, we want nothing more than to relieve our pets from suffering and provide a comfortable environment in their last moments. However, it is natural to have some feelings of guilt associated with the difficult choice to euthanize. By changing your perspective, these feelings of guilt could change from a negative outlook to a more positive one. Remind yourself that it is not a matter of you taking your pet's life, but see it as a privilege and a gift to be able to spare them from the pain and suffering accompanying the process of dying.

Taking Your Time

The pressure to move on and get through your sorrow could be overwhelming, and it's important to take your time and let go at your own pace. This delicate and individual process is different for everyone. Remember that it is your choice how your timeline of grief will unfold, and for some that may include welcoming a new pet to the home, and for others that decision may not be an option, and that is okay, too.

Ways to Cope

While everyone copes with death differently, here are some suggestions to help you grieve:

- Talk to someone who understands your loss
- Meditate or take a mindful walk
- Eat well and spend time outdoors
- Write about your pet and your favorite memories with them
- Choose a new routine apart from the one you shared with your pet

How Will You Memorialize Your Pet?

Finding a way to memorialize and honor your pet's memory is a meaningful way to embrace the impact they have had on your life. Consider planting a tree in their memory, donating to your favorite animal charity, volunteering or holding a ceremony in their name. Cremation options such as personal jewelry, urns, and photo collages are common ways to memorialize your pet as well.

Helping Children Understand Euthanasia

Not only is the decision to euthanize your pet a difficult decision for adults, it is especially hard figuring out how to discuss it with children. Approaching children with honesty and compassion are essential in handling the goodbye process. Allowing your child to spend time with your pet giving hugs and sharing their favorite memories—through letters or drawings—is a way to make the process less painful and aid in the coping process.

Here are some strategies to help your child understand the passing of his/her pet:

- Be open and honest
- Let your child know it is okay to cry and feel sad
- Offer basic, age-appropriate explanations
- Help your child collect photos and mementos of their pet for a memory box
- Avoid getting a new pet before the grief process has occurred

Seeking Support and Talking It Through

Allowing yourself to feel the pain of the loss of your beloved pet is an important part of the grief process. The decision to euthanize your pet is a difficult one, and dealing with the accompanying emotions is a necessary step in coping with that pain. Along with seeking support from family and friends, there are various grief support outlets available for you as well to share your thoughts, feeling and memories. Here is a list of local support groups in the area specializing in pet bereavement:

- Papillion Center for Loss and Transition: papillon@papillon-center.org
- Max's Healing Hearts Community: [Facebook Support Group](#)
- ASPCA Grief Support Hotline: [\(877\) 474-3310](tel:877-474-3310)
- Birchbark Foundation Pet Loss Support Gatherings: www.birchbarkfoundation.org