

Natural and Normal Grief Responses

Grieving over the loss of a companion animal is very painful and at times can seem overwhelming. Many of us wonder whether we are grieving in the "right" way and worry whether the feelings being experienced are "normal."

Here are some of the more common responses to the loss of your companion animal which you may encounter now and for the coming months:

- ~ Feeling emotionally numb
- ~ Having difficulty believing that the death has really happened
- ~ Feeling tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest or in the pit of one's stomach
- ~ Having a loss of appetite or a desire to eat more than usual
- ~ Having a desire to smoke, drink or use drugs (especially tranquilizers) in a greater amount than before
- ~ Feeling restless and looking for activity and finding it difficult to concentrate and complete tasks
- ~ Having difficulty sleeping, waking early and often dreaming of your companion animal
- ~ Feeling exhausted and lacking in energy
- ~ Feeling low at times of birthdays, holidays and special occasions
- ~ Spending money on things usually not purchased
- ~ Feeling preoccupied with financial concerns
- ~ Telling and retelling things about your companion animal and the experience of his or her death
- ~ Talking things over with the deceased companion animal
- ~ Feeling mood changes over the slightest things; crying unexpectedly
- ~ Feeling guilty for what was done or not done or for not having done enough for your companion animal
- ~ Being angry or irritated at the wrong person, another companion animal still remaining in your life, the wrong circumstance or at the world
- ~ Feeling angry at your companion animal for leaving you
- ~ Having difficulty making decisions on your own

- ~ Sensing your companion animal's presence, believing you hear his/her bark or meow or footsteps, or expecting him or her to come back
- ~ Experiencing an intense preoccupation with the life of the deceased companion animal
- ~ Feeling a compulsion to "replace" the companion animal
- ~ Feeling as if you will never, ever get another companion animal because you cannot bear the thought of losing another one
- ~ Being pre-occupied with the health/safety of any remaining companion animals
- ~ Feeling as though life doesn't have any meaning
- ~ Feeling self-pity and not feeling needed

These are natural and normal grief responses. Crying and expressing your feelings to others is necessary and helpful. Accepting responsibility for moving through your pain is an important step in the process of healing.

Feelings of harming oneself or suicide are not normal and should be taken very seriously. Please seek professional help immediately if you think you might harm yourself or someone else. 1-800-784-2433 or local (608) 280-2600.

If you need more information or would like to schedule an individual appointment for support or counseling call Shaun O'Keefe at 608-228-0129.