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Helping Your Child When the Family Pet Dies



Facing the death of a family pet can be one of the most traumatic events in a child's young life. The ASPCA Pet Loss Support program can provide advice on how to deal with the young members of your family. If you are unable to contact us right away, the following tips may help:

Understand that your child may feel a variety of emotions—from emptiness and sadness to guilt and anger at friends whose pets are still alive. Your children may worry that the animal's death is their fault, and may wonder what happens to animals after they die. Some kids may even worry that other children and classmates will ridicule them for loving their pet so much.

Here are a few activities that may help your child deal with his or her grief:

- It may help some children to draw a picture of their pet, or write a letter to their pet.
- Sometimes it can help to have a memorial service, including the entire family and friends who knew your pet. If you have a backyard, you can plant a tree or flowers in your pet's honor. Your children may want to help you plan this.
- It may make some children better to keep something that their pet really loved—such as a collar, tag or favorite toy.
- You and your child can gather up photographs of your pet to make into a photo album. This can be arranged chronologically, starting with pictures of when the animal was a baby. Your child can also include information about your pet's favorite toys, treats and things to do.
- Sitting down with the family and sharing memories of your pet can make your children sad—but it can make them laugh, too, and will help your child understand that everyone is feeling the loss as well.
- Although your child may not feel like it, it can help to engage in his or her regular activities—

- such as going to practice or rehearsal after school, playing outside or going for a bike ride.
- Give your child one of the books on pet loss from the list below. They are written specially for children, and discusses many of things included above.

Recommended Resources for Children

Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children, Linda Goldman;
Accelerated Development; Taylor & Francis Group, (800) 821-8312; 1994

Because of Flowers and Dancers, Sandra S. Brackenridge; Veterinary Practice Publishing Co.; 1994.

Dog Heaven, Cat Heaven, Cynthia Rylant; The Blue Press; Scholastic, Inc.,

Desser the Best Ever Cat, Maggie Smith; Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.; 2001

Goodbye Mousie, Robie H. Harris; Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing,

Grunt, Suzanne Schlossberg, Tamberrino, Centering Corporation; 2001

Jasper's Day, Marjorie Blain Parker; Kids Can Press Ltd.; 2002

Saying Goodbye to Lulu, Corinne Demas; Little, Brown and Company; 2004

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