

How to Cope Immediately After Pet Loss

Saying goodbye to our beloved animal companion is very challenging.

If you like, I'm here to help. We can talk about what you're experiencing in a one-on-one workshop, often within 24 hours of you contacting me (see details below). In the meantime, here's a guide to help you start navigating the heartache.

Where to begin?

We love our animal friends. Our relationships with them are special bonds unlike any other connections we have. They give us unconditional love, comfort and pure joy!

What is special and unique about the bond that you two shared? If you like, write your thoughts here.

Our pets often see us through the many transitions in our lives. They share special life events with us and may be the one constant and dependable relationship in difficult and changing times.

What important events have you and your beloved companion been through together? If you like, share your memories here.

We may spend more time with our animal companions than anyone else. We show them our true selves, and they bring out the best in us. Because of them, our ability to love grows.

What positive traits did your animal companion bring out in you? Feel free to jot down a few ideas here.

Our animal friends touch us deeply—it's a connection of the soul. As animal lovers, we're blessed to have a natural ability to give and receive from animals. Others may not understand the depth of the relationships that we form.

Who understands your grief and supports you right now? If you like, write their names here.

Is my reaction normal?

Having strong and profound feelings of grief after pet loss is normal. You may feel devastated, anxious and broken-hearted. Initial reactions may include anger, guilt and a fear that you cannot go on without them.

What helps?

Honor your feelings. Accept all of what you feel. Hold your heart with compassion. You are grieving a lost treasure, a part of yourself. *What do you feel?*

Take care of yourself. You know best what you need. Listen to you.

What can you give yourself for comfort? Are you taking care of yourself with food, hydration and rest?

Both sadness and joy can be in your heart at the same time.

Can you remember something about your animal companion right now that makes you smile?

Reframe the story. Only when honoring your grief, can you begin to tell your full experience of this unique and loving relationship—including all the joy, growth and gratitude you feel. You can choose to let go of the thoughts that block your peace of mind. You can then create the story that you want to tell yourself and others about your blessed bond. Remember, love is eternal. *What comes to mind about you and your beloved companion that you feel grateful for?*

How have you been changed forever?

Get support. Give yourself what you need. *Is there a friend you can talk to if you need to right now? Would it help you to explore www.petloss.net to see what other people do for comfort?*

Want to work through this with me?

In a personalized, one-on-one workshop, we can explore how you can face this heartache and the challenges of having a compassionate heart.

Private Workshop

- 2 hours
- Next-day appointments available, including evenings and weekends
- In person in Chicago area; also via phone or Skype
- \$225; cash, check or credit card accepted at time of service
- To schedule, call (708) 227-5330 or e-mail linda@drhindaharper.com
Visit drhindaharper.com for more details.



Linda Harper, Ph.D., is a lifelong animal lover and clinical psychologist in the Chicago area for over 30 years. She is the facilitator of WINGS, a pet loss support group sponsored by the Chicago Veterinary Medical Association; it meets at 7:30 p.m. on the first Wednesday of every month at 100 Tower Drive in Burr Ridge.

