

The ASPCA Counseling Department aids pet owners facing the death of a beloved animal companion

Our companion animals are family members with whom we share a unique bond. It is difficult to imagine living our lives without them. Sadly, companion animals do not live as long as people do. Sooner or later, everyone who cares for a pet must face the illness, old age or accidental death of their beloved animal friend. We may have to deal with the difficult decision of whether or when to euthanize a very sick animal to spare him or her further suffering and provide a dignified, peaceful death. Or, because of our financial circumstances, we may be torn about what medical procedures should be done for an animal who has given us loyalty and love. These decisions are some of the hardest we may ever have to make, and are often fraught with confusion and guilt. It is important to be well informed and aware of all humane options in order to make the best possible choice on behalf of a pet.

Companion animal caretakers can receive help from the ASPCA Counseling Department with the following issues:

- Assistance with the decision to euthanize.
- Comfort and support at the time of euthanasia.
- Help with grieving the loss.
- Advice on dealing with children, the elderly or disabled individuals who are facing a death of a companion animal.
- Planning for the body of the animal after death.
- Helping the surviving animals in the household to cope.
- Assistance in establishing a relationship with a new pet.

Reaching Out

The ASPCA Counseling Department is a resource for social service agencies and humane organizations interested in establishing their own counseling services. Therapy groups headed by qualified professionals are being started at many shelters and veterinary hospitals.

Additionally, the Counseling Department understands how the loss of a fellow animal

friend can seriously affect another pet in the family. Working with ASPCA Companion Animal Services, the Counseling Department instructs people on what behavior might be seen in their surviving pets and how to help these animals adjust to the loss.

It is as natural and necessary to grieve for the loss of an animal friend as it is for any loved one who dies. And it is important to have compassion and support in one's time of grief. A pet's illness, accident, death or need for euthanasia can trigger powerful emotions. At such times, many individuals feel confused, frightened, angry, guilty and sad. These emotions are all normal.

The ASPCA wants to help if the animal you love has died or if he or she is ill, injured or elderly. The Counseling Department can assist with the major issues confronting a grief-stricken pet owner.

Recommended Reading

- "Coping with the Loss of a Pet: A Gentle Guide for All Who Love a Pet," Christina M. Lemieux, Ph.D.; Wallace R. Clark & Co.; 1988.
- "Pet Loss: A Thoughtful Guide for Adults and Children," Herbert A. Nieburg, Ph.D. & Arlene Fischer; Harper Perennial; 1996.
- "Dog Gone," Howard Bronson; Bestsell Publications, 6 Samba Circle, Sandwich, MA 02563; 1994.
- "Legacies of Love: A Gentle Guide to Healing from the Loss of Your Animal Loved One" audiobook, Teresa Wagner, Upper Access Books.

For Children

- "Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children," Linda Goldman; Accelerated Development; Taylor & Francis Group, (800) 821-8312; 1994
- "I'll Always Love You," Hans Wilhelm; Crown Publishers, Inc., (800) 733-3000; 1985.

- "Because of Flowers and Dancers," Sandra S. Brackenridge; Veterinary Practice Publishing Co.; 1994.
- "Dog Heaven," "Cat Heaven," Cynthia Rylant; The Blue Press; Scholastic, Inc., (212) 343-6100.

All of the above titles are available from their respective publishers; see each entry for contact information.

For further information about the ASPCA Pet Loss Support program, contact our Senior Director of Counseling Services at (212) 876-7700, ext. 4355. For immediate assistance, call the Pet Loss Hotline, (800) 946-4646, enter pin number 140-7211, then add your own phone number. To make a donation to the ASPCA or to become a member, please write to:

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In 1866, Henry Bergh established the ASPCA "to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals." Through education, legislation, advocacy, law enforcement, our shelter and animal hospital, the ASPCA's mission "is to alleviate pain, fear and suffering in all animals."



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