



Companionship

There are many ways that animals contribute to our lives and wellbeing. Pets can bring immeasurable rewards in the form of companionship, protection, relaxation and exercise among many other benefits. They may provide a link with events or people in our lives, and the bond we form with them throughout may be very strong.



Euthanasia... it's a big decision

We are responsible for the animal during its lifetime, and also during times of illness and death. It is natural to feel guilty when considering euthanasia. Sometimes we may feel anger that the animal cannot be saved and perhaps reflect... 'If only I had done... things could have been different'. It is important to discuss your concerns with one of our vets, who will be able to advise and guide you towards the correct decision. This should re-assure you that the decision you have made, whatever the reason for euthanasia, has been the most appropriate one.

Grief

Pets are very much part of our family, or an integral part of our lives, and we may mourn their death just as if we have lost a human friend or member of the family. The depth of emotion felt can often be unexpected, but if you consider the friendship that may have been lost, these feelings are not so surprising.

The grieving process is a unique experience for every individual. Initially, the reaction is often disbelief. It can be difficult to accept that our animal is no longer with us. Your house can feel so empty and it is a challenge to come to terms with the fact that your pet will not be coming back. Feelings of loss may be particularly deep if you have depended on your pet for emotional support. You may feel very sad and low for a while.

Sometimes, the loneliness is magnified by a lack of understanding from others. Other feelings may include a loss of confidence or anxieties about other animals that are in your care.

It helps to share your feelings with a friend, a member of the veterinary staff or someone else who has had a similar experience. It is helpful to realise that your reaction to losing your pet is a normal response; emotions can be considered a tribute to what your pet has meant to you.



The future...

After a while you will feel more able to direct your energies towards the future. Some people will want to fill the gap left by the loss of their pet sooner while others may not be ready to get another animal for some time and may feel as if they are betraying their dead pet by investing love in another one. This is a normal but transient feeling. Only you will be able to decide when you are ready to introduce a new animal into the household. We should understand that a new animal does not replace the pet that has been lost but brings into the home a new presence that fills the emptiness.



Helping children to cope

Losing a family pet may be one of the first deaths we experience as children. Children should be told the truth about their pet, and from someone they know. The death of the pet should be explained in honest, simple language that they will fully understand, avoiding ambiguous phrases like “put to sleep”. If possible, the child should be warned if their pet is terminally ill or if euthanasia is going to be performed so that they can ask questions, prepare themselves for the loss and say their farewells.

If your child wishes to be present at the time of euthanasia, or to see the pet's body afterwards, then please discuss this with your vet who will be able to offer advice. It is important to allow time for discussion at this very sensitive time; be prepared to show your feelings and talk about the animal's death.

Children may want to make some mark of remembrance to their dead pet. If burial of the body is not possible they may want to bury a memento, such as their pet's toy or lead, in a favourite spot and plant some bulbs or flowers. Some children may want to draw pictures or write poems. This will help them grieve and come to terms with the loss. Children who can grieve and then let go of their grief will be better prepared for future losses in their life.



Helpful books

Goodbye, Dear Friend by Virginia Ironside.

Robson Books ISBN: 1861050313

Death of an Animal Friend Society for Companion Animal Studies.

Blue Cross, Shilton Road, Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4PF ISBN: 0951545329

Absent Friend by Martyn and Laura Lee.

Ringpress Books ISBN: 1850540896

Pet Bereavement Support Service Telephone: 0800 0966606

Your initial call to this service is free of charge. IT offers local help and a sympathetic ear for recently bereaved pet owners. It is jointly run by The Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS) and the Blue Cross.

Make a tribute

This information sheet has been written with the help of PetSavers, a charitable division of the British Small Animal Veterinary Association. The PetSavers website has a Tribute Wall where you can make a page dedicated to your pet. Please contact PetSavers today about making a permanent tribute page by visiting their website online at www.petsavers.org.uk.