

## GRIEVING A PET

It is no secret that pets play an important role in our lives. They bring us joy and show us unwavering and unconditional love. From the moment you meet, a special bond grows between you and your pet. This bond offers comfort, safety, and an emotional connection between you both. They make us feel not so alone in the world as we often spend more time with our pets than with friends and family. As a result of this beautiful bond, the death of a pet can be devastating, and we can feel heartbreak like nothing we have ever experienced. It may even feel as devastating as losing a spouse, parent, child, or close human friend. The loss can be profound, and the range of emotions is vast and overwhelming. Know whatever you are feeling is normal, natural and valid.

Pet loss can be one of the most challenging kinds of grief to process. Unfortunately, very few seem to understand the profound depth of our love for pets. Often, society views animal relationships as less than human ones and doesn't deserve the same attention when grieving. As a result, the profound depth of losing a pet is often dismissed and invalidated by those around you, resulting in you hiding your grief from them and plunging into isolation when actually, this is when you need connection and support more than ever. This type of grief is known as ***disenfranchised grief***. Disenfranchised grief is a term used to describe grief that is not acknowledged or validated by social norms. Your grief does not fit into the general public's attitude or value of who or what we should grieve, leaving you to grieve alone and misunderstood in isolation. To make things even worse, the companion that would have made you feel better and brought you comfort is why you are grieving in the first place. No wonder people feel overwhelmingly alone and isolated. They are!

Science has proven that grieving the loss of a pet may be harder than healing from the death of a human, and there are many reasons your loss can be difficult.

- Loving a pet might be one of the best relationships we will ever have. For some, it's your only meaningful relationship.
- Pets affect our hormones in positive ways, and their loss causes the opposite effects. Pets increase serotonin and dopamine (feel-good hormone), promoting calm and relaxation. They decrease cortisol levels (stress hormone) and lower blood pressure.
- Pets are often our social connectors, and if you live alone your only companion. They reduce loneliness and increase feelings of social support.
- Pets play significant roles in our day by providing structure and activity (feeding and walking schedules)
- They help you overcome setbacks and life challenges.
- Pets provide a sense of meaning and purpose.
- They are often our secret keepers.
- If your pet was a working, service, or therapy animal, you are also grieving the loss of a co-worker.