

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PET DIES

IS LOST OR COMING TO ITS END

Your Personal Recovery Guide!



Complete With Suggested Daily
Comfort Cards

Dedicated to Monty

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Introduction

Tip - Not every chapter will be relevant to your circumstances but each contains useful information on dealing with grief, so please read through the book to get the benefit of all the Comfort Cards.

Hello, my name is Denise Fiennes, and I am an experienced pet owner, and have been a member of the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (MBACP) for over thirty years, so I am used to dealing with people of all ages in crisis or extreme distress.

I have loved and lost many pets throughout my life. All gave me immense pleasure, love and companionship and many helped me through my own losses. All are remembered for their unique personalities, facial expressions, different talents and for the joyful times we spent together.

I have always had pets starting with rabbits and mice when I was a small child. Even the smallest pet was given a grand and tearful burial. For most of my adult life there have been many beloved dogs.

One of these was Monty, a small wire haired daschund, who lived with me in London, France and Kent where

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he was a Pet As Therapy (a PAT dog). As a therapy dog he visited young people in hospital who were suffering from depression or had behavioural issues. It was wonderful to see the effect Monty had on them and the fun they shared with him! He was killed tragically young and I grieved for him for a long time, and miss him to this day - he was a wonderful character and friend.

You probably have similar memories and I do understand that losing a pet can be very hard to bear and that this often sudden grief can turn your world upside down.

Pet loss can come in many forms. Your pet may be seriously ill and you are contemplating what action to take - or your pet may have slipped away due to natural causes and you want to know what to do. I had a case recently where pet loss was due to divorce and separation, which can be devastating for the person who has to give up the pet. Whatever the circumstances, you want to know how to cope.

This is why I have created your personal guide to recovery because grieving a pet for whatever reason is unique to you. No two people grieve in quite the same way.

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Perhaps you are reading this book in order to help a friend or a to learn how your children can come to terms with their loss. Whatever your reason, my aim to to help you and your family with proven, daily techniques to help recover in a healthy way.

I have suffered many other bereavements over time but I am fortunate because my work as a counsellor has taught me how to cope with them. Many people have wondered how I recovered from such tragedies, and I feel lucky that I had the long training I had, and that I can pass these skills on to others who may be experiencing grief for the first time.

Early in my career, I worked with a charity called the Dog's Trust - the largest UK charity working to re-home dogs (<http://www.dogstrust.org.uk>), and worked on the campaign "A Dog is For Life Not Just for Christmas" - it is still going strong today.

Those of us who love animals know how profound people's feelings are for their beloved pets - they are, truly, our lifetime companions.

As a crisis counsellor at the UK helpline charity, Childline, I often dealt with children who were sad and curious about the death of their pet. Talking to them in the right way, and at their pace, was essential whatever the age the child.

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These children, and the many people I have spoken to about death over the years, came to realise that there is a recognised process, let us call it a journey, that we take through grief before we can get back to some sort of tranquility.

This book aims to help you along that journey, and to help you to find your courage so that you can come to terms with what has happened to you, and so that you do not feel alone.

The job of a good counsellor is to assist people on their way through a journey of transformation, change and acceptance. You will never forget your beloved pet but you can work towards accepting what has happened - sooner rather than later.

Feelings of loss can be transformed into a life enhancing experience. This may sound odd but through grief you will learn more about yourself and others and become stronger and wiser.

These events may happen more than once in your lifetime and it is a good thing to know how to cope and how to help others in similar circumstances.

You may not be able to understand the depth of your feelings about losing your pet and your friends and family may be *aghast* at your reaction - how often have

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you heard 'it's only a pet...'? Try to deal with yourself and others in a loving, courageous and compassionate way as you embark on your unique journey to recovery.

Chapter 1

How this book can help you

Losing a pet can be just as painful as losing a much loved relative or friend. Some people would even say that it is worse! Grieving for a person is what is expected of us, a kind of social duty. But the death of a pet can be unexpectedly shocking and deeply personal. It is what I call grief ‘in spades’.

When shocking experiences happen people react differently. But what is certain is that if you are experiencing this level of grief you will feel devastated and very much alone. The depth of your grief will depend very much on what your pet symbolized for you. You could describe it as equal to the love that you shared with your beloved pet.

For example, your pet may be a substitute for the early years you shared with a spouse or partner who is no longer there. Your pet may have been your ‘baby’, a substitute for a human child or children who have flown the nest, or you may have become extremely devoted to your family pet because they can love you in a way you may never have experienced before.

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Almost certainly your pet was a playmate and companion - providing fun and entertainment and, of course, that unconditional love. In your agony you will be remembering all the fantastic times you had together and what you have lost.

Some of us consider ourselves to be quiet and withdrawn yet find it easy to be lively around our pets. For some of us it is easier to relate or interact with our pets than with other people! It may have been easier for you to trust and love your pet rather than humanity in general.

So when an animal dies we will miss the rituals of caring, petting and loving, feeding, and walking that we once shared very profoundly.

Your loss may involve other types of pets - a much loved horse or a beloved cat. You may have had a working dog, a guide or hearing dog. In such cases the relationship between you and your pet would have been particularly strong.

Alternatively, you may be dealing with a devastated family and weeping children. This could be their first experience of losing and grieving for a pet they have loved and learnt to care for personally. They may not understand why their pet has left them so suddenly, or what has happened to it.

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You may want to support a friend who has lost a rescue donkey or other beloved animal. You will need to know how to help and what to say. Just as harrowing is the case of a missing pet and the agonizing process of posting notices around the neighbourhood. As the weeks pass and the pet is not found there is the bitter realisation that it may not return. This is very hard to come to terms with and causes a particular type of heartbreak.

What makes a relationship with a pet different is that it is unconditional. More often than not, pets show you total love and it is so easy to return their trust and affection. Human relationships are infinitely more complex.

This ability to love our pets should be celebrated as part of the human condition and we should recognise that our willingness to open our hearts to another creature is truly a gift.

When a pet dies we can be too easily taken over by negativity and unhappiness and this is where we need help to find our balance again.

I hope that this Personal Survival Guide will sustain you through this dark period and will help you with your healing process in the immediate aftermath and the

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hours and days ahead. For some people grieving a pet takes a long time.

Remember that your journey will be much less traumatic if you know what to expect. You can come to understand that what you are going through is a completely normal experience and above all - that you are not alone!

Tip It can help if you send a **sympathy card** to a friend, make a contribution to animal welfare or buy a memorial for a pet, please visit the **links page** at the end of the book.

Chapter 2

The First Night - Your Beloved Pet Has Died

It is a sad but inevitable fact that *every* creature has to die. But this time its *your pet*. Even if we have had time to say goodbye its still an awful shock. But if it is sudden or tragic you may be overwhelmed by the power and depth of your feelings. I am going to explain briefly about the stages of grief so that you will be more prepared for what you might experience immediately after the loss, and in the days ahead.

Your first emotion will almost certainly be **shock - and disbelief** - not the shock of losing something you treasured such as a piece of jewellery but something much more profound. The pain of loss may be very intense and you may become mildly obsessed with events and feel helpless and very tearful or anxious. The impact of a pet's death can be dramatic and you may feel mild nausea or dizziness and lose the ability to eat or sleep.

Treat yourself kindly when you suffer from shock - as you would after an accident.

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Shock will turn to *disbelief* and a need to confirm that the terrible event has actually happened. You may catch yourself saying things like, “No, it cannot be possible”, “I only turned my back for a moment”, or “the dog was going to get better!”. This denial is a vain attempt to block out the reality of the event and a refusal to accept the facts.

This initial denial must inevitably change as you slowly comprehend what has happened. Our protective mechanisms help us to live under this cloud of disbelief and it may take some time for it to lift. For the time being you must try to keep calm and continue to treat yourself kindly. If you have to maintain some kind of routine or you need to put on a front, you can reassure yourself that you will find pockets of time for yourself.

You may cry out in vain as your feelings turn to despair. As you recognise the truth - that your pet has died, disbelief will give way to *anger*.

You look for something or someone to blame. It could be yourself, the vet, the driver of a vehicle, a careless family member, the pet itself, or the world in general.

You may find yourself saying ‘Why me, why my pet?’, ‘I don’t deserve this’, ‘I want my pet back’, ‘They did not do enough to save him’. These are such powerful

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emotions that you may feel guilty about your anger. Remember, this is perfectly normal in the circumstances and these feelings are all part of the process of dealing with loss.

Such feelings are debilitating and paralyzing and can, and invariably do, lead to a period of ***depression and yearning***. This comes after the initial anger has passed and the inevitability of life without your beloved pet sinks in.

It is important to remember that you will pass in and out of these stages of grief until you have recovered. You may say, I will never recover, and to an extent that is true. You will never forget but pain can be transformed and your loss will become more bearable.

Remember, there is no standard form of behaviour when grieving - so please allow yourself to accept that whatever happens, happens. Your recovery is unique and may be different to someone else's experience.

Recognising that although your feelings and behaviour are uncomfortable, you are following a traditional pattern of grieving with no set time frame can be very helpful. If people ask 'when are you going to snap out of it..' - don't even think about that comment - it is not a healthy option - grief takes as long as it takes! Your grief takes as long as it takes *you!*

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It is completely normal to yearn for a lost pet and to dream about a reunion - to see them one last time. You wish that just a few more days or weeks with them had been possible. You feel abandoned and long to hold that dear friend again. Practical issues seem overwhelming and you feel out of control and needy.

Wherever you look there are the sad reminders of your pets possessions, or even the clock tells you that you that now would have been feeding or caring time. As bedtime comes there will be no one waiting for a goodnight pat. You cannot bear to look at your pet's belongings or to give them away because they can bring you comfort when you are feeling particularly low.

Odd feelings may occur including loss of appetite or wanting to 'comfort' eat; peculiar pains may plague you or you may even suffer panic attacks. These are only physical manifestations of grief and should not be taken too seriously. If you feel seriously ill or overly anxious you should seek the help of a professional. This might be a doctor, religious leader or help line - they are all trained listeners. For many of us, being 'heard' is the most helpful thing of all.

After a while you may become annoyed with yourself and your 'heavy' feelings and want life to return to normal. But it may be too soon and you realise you

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cannot '*snap out of it*'. During this stage you can feel utterly non-productive or plain irritable. Lack of sleep and bad dreams may only add to your despair.

You may lose the ability to pay attention to things that once interested you and you become listless and bored or even snappy with other people. In extreme cases you become very apathetic and suffer mood swings. Those around you feel as if they have to walk on eggshells as you become overbearing and bossy and throw yourself compulsively into your work or tasks that sap your limited concentration.

We will work through all these stages until you begin to come to terms with the loss of a friend and companion – possibly of many years' standing - it all takes time. Eventually, you will want to think about ***resolution and acceptance***. This is a difficult stage because you must accept the finality of your loss but you will be able to move on and that is our goal.

I want to talk about this now because you may need the hope that things will get better but, just now, you may not believe it.

In reality, there is often a part of you that will never accept the loss completely and although you want to, you may find you are unable to move forward. We never forget the pets we have lost but if you are inert

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and your sadness continues, it may be wise to seek the help of a counsellor.

You gave such love to your pet but during this journey you must give love to *yourself*. You must also ask for it - when you need it - from others who you sense can support you.

As you assimilate the feelings of loss you begin to understand that you can move naturally towards acceptance. As the body and the mind work through these stages of grief, both become calmer and more stable and you become aware that things are changing. You are on the road to recovery.

As you progress you should have more energy and take a new interest life and the people around you. Now you can bear looking at photos of your late pet and can talk about them with friends and family.

These are good signs that the depression, anger and isolation are beginning to lift. You may continue to pass in and out of the stages of grief while recovery is in progress - feeling up one day and down the next.

Remember that knowledge is a powerful tool in recovery, and understanding these stages will help enormously. Make a note of all the stages written above so you remember them.

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For now, you will want to take things one day at a time. So let's begin.

Chapter 3

Day by Day - One Day at a Time

All of us go through difficult periods in our life when we feel weak and apathetic. These feelings can be particularly real when recovering from the death of a pet and we are unable to continue with our normal routine - pets create tremendous routine in our lives which we come to rely on and enjoy. The correct mind set is 'one day at a time..'.

You may have to carry on, in spite of your loss, with work and making day to day decisions. The most unexpected people may come forward to help you with your recovery.

This is a time when you need friends or neighbours to give you support, understanding and practical help. Choose wisely - not everyone who thinks they are being helpful are actually what you need just now. When you find the people who are what you need - recognise it and use them - they want to help you!

If you have made friends while sharing walks with your dogs or chatting with a neighbour about your cat, gerbil or other type of pet, now is the time to talk about your

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loss. Tell them your feelings and they will hopefully respond well. In fact you only want to be with people who respond well! You need to talk freely at this stage and there will be people who will listen to you and sympathise.

There will be friends who, although deeply sympathetic, cannot understand how anyone could be so affected by the death of an animal!

If this makes you angry try to be tolerant. It is not their fault - they are not the same as you - and only you know how intensely you feel your loss. These people mean well but cannot show you the emotional care that you need at this moment.

Politely avoid them, for now, and keep to those who DO understand - albeit on line in a forum or through social media, the people mentioned above or one particular friend or colleague at work.

Try to carry on with your daily routine. Cleaning and tasks around the house; caring for children and hobbies are a good distraction. Continue to be open in showing your grief and do not hide your feelings completely.

Above all take care of your own health and make sure that you are eating well and taking exercise. The period of acute grief will vary with each individual but by

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staying as mentally and physically fit as possible you will certainly shorten it.

People grieve in different ways and no-one likes being told to 'pull yourself together'. It is not about being brave and stoical but having the courage to express what you feel, at your own pace. There is no hard and fast rule about when we will feel better and how you will react as an individual on a daily basis.

Some people think that the arrival of a new pet can often shorten the grief process but be sure before you act and follow your deepest feelings - don't listen to others - if a new pet is the solution for YOU, then go ahead and get one but don't do it to please others.

Experiencing all of these profound feelings has a good side because smothering the pain will only lead to problems in the future. *Unresolved* grief can reappear in the future in many different and disturbing forms.

As a professional counsellor I have dealt with many people with unresolved issues. They may not have grieved properly for relatives or friends in the past and, sometimes, the death of a pet brings all of that back into focus. They may not have had the opportunity to talk about death in detail - their questions were not answered at the time and they have not been able to move on in their lives for a variety of reasons. If you feel this is true

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for you, or you would like to avoid repressed feelings, now is a good time to address these past experiences.

Finally, there is one big problem related to grief. I call it the 'If Only' syndrome. 'If only I had done more', 'if only I had noticed that symptoms earlier', 'If only I had looked harder', 'If only I had known what to do', 'If only I had closed the gate'. These 'if only' scenarios are endless and, because we think of our pets as completely dependent on us, we often blame ourselves for what happened.

The most troubling events related to blame are when you have had to make the decision to euthanize your pet. None of us ever wants to instigate it, but it is often the kindest thing to do. Yet we find it hard to forgive ourselves and suffer guilt and pain when we make the decision. Tell yourself that it was the *right* thing to do and in your pet's best interests. It may not feel right for you, but it is often right for them.

Chapter 4

Coming to Your Aid

This book is fundamentally holistic and my aim is to guide you through a difficult time, physically and mentally. My goal is to reduce the anxiety, pain and sorrow you feel over the death of your pet. I wish I could reassure you that the journey will be short, but the truth is you are an individual and I cannot say how long it will take before you are able to feel more peaceful, and to accept what has happened. Dealing with grief takes courage if you are to recover in a healthy way - I hope to help you with this.

If this is the first loss you have ever experienced, the positive side is that you will never have to go through it again unprepared. You are now acutely aware that loss is part of life, and what you are learning here you will be able to pass on to others.

Whenever we open our hearts to people or pets, we are putting ourselves at risk of pain in the future. When the worst happens it is helpful to understand that grief comes in waves.

You may feel as though hours have passed, where in reality only a few minutes have gone by. You may feel

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disconnecting one minute, numb the next, be shaking and overcome by painful feelings.

This is the *shock* I have referred to and you know now that it is completely normal so try not to be afraid if it feels overwhelming.

At first everything seems to remind us of our loss, pets in the street or ones who are looking out of windows as we pass. Every video or picture seems to carry images that torture and remind us of our loss. These images are 'mind sets'. Our thoughts are programmed in pictures to pick up recent events - things that are relevant and current in our lives.

On bad days it may be best to avoid familiar places, like the park or a field where we used to ride, the place our cat used to sit on the wall, or where a beloved dog used to lie in the sun.

If our pet was only a kitten or a puppy we might feel particularly devastated and regret that we did not have longer with it. Learn to ride these waves of grief and life immediately after your loss will be easier to bear. However, we may be perplexed at how feelings can linger and they can suddenly hit us months or years after the event. That is only a reminder that we loved our pet dearly and they deserve a permanent place in our hearts.

Chapter 5

Finding Your Courage - and Comfort

I am a great believer in imagery as words translated into pictures are more readily understood and imprinted on the brain. These images of yourself can either be still or animated. So I recommend that you create what I call **COMFORT CARDS** to use whenever you feel under particular stress. When you imagine or picture yourself in the positive circumstances you create or read about in the Comfort Cards you will feel some release and empowerment.

You can either use my suggestions throughout this book or create your own unique Comfort Cards. If you can draw your pet you can spend time making these cards uniquely personal. The words on the card may be addressed to your absent pet or to a part of you that feels vulnerable - a part of us that is often referred to as the 'inner child'.

Painting or writing simple words on a card or on the back of a photograph can be very therapeutic. You can then place the cards in a prominent position, or carry them with you each day as you progress on your journey

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through grief. You will have understood by now that during your journey your mood will shift and change.

During these mood shifts there is always a part of you that remains objective and 'sees' what is happening to you emotionally. This enables you to cope even when and if you are deeply depressed.

This part of you is what I call 'The Witness' and it is a valuable for giving you the strength and courage to recognise what you need to do in order to deal with your loss from moment to moment, day by day and week to week. You will always be able to 'witness' what is happening to you and that is the part of you that is still strong and dependable.

Affirmations too are powerful healing tools and, if you create a positive inner dialogue, you can tolerate your feelings and transform your thoughts and attitudes no matter how dark they are right now.

You may have spent some time talking about or thinking painful thoughts after the loss of your pet. You may have talked to your doctor or friends and family, but there will come a time when you take a pause from all this activity to catch your breath. You then start your journey in private as well as in public.

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Talking will still be a part of the grief process, but you need to deal with what may feel like an inner derailment and sometimes a deep psychic pain.

Take comfort from *my* collection of Comfort Cards and they will help you to find your courage. I am sure you can create many others.

COMFORT CARD 1

I can handle anything as long as I take things one moment at a time.

Sleeplessness is often caused by tension and anxiety. Let us remind ourselves of how we might feel physically as we grieve. We may feel physical manifestations of anxiety and tension that can appear alarming. Our hearts beat faster, our brains swirl with activity and negative thoughts, we feel sick and fearful, angry, helpless and alone.

At this early stage we can feel very ‘spacey’ and isolated. Life is a blur and we may feel as if we will sink beneath a mass of duty, bad feelings and weakness. We will not sink, but we must manage our physical feelings and our whirling brains in order to do what we need to do in life. We must manage these feelings too in an effort to garner a little strength and understanding of what is happening. Knowledge is key....

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At every stage of grief you can begin to heal yourself. Use your physical and mental resources to diminish your sense of despair. This is the first step towards healing a gaping wound of loss. Even though you are experiencing negative feelings you can build an inner dialogue based on hope.

Believe in your ability to cope and in life in the future. You may not feel brave enough right now but you *are* - and remember *The Witness* - the part of you that is strong and dependable.

You are on the way to becoming a pet loss survivor. Look at COMFORT CARD 1 again - you can handle your feelings *in this moment*.

COMFORT CARD 2

I am brave enough to cope.

Begin by staying calm. Take few long deep breaths. Remember that fear and anxiety are centred in the Solar Plexus and stomach. As you breathe slowly allow the fear to be released from these areas of your body. In that one moment you have begun to find your courage; you have begun your unique journey through pet loss and have become your own best guide.

COMFORT CARD 3

I will listen to my body - it is trying to protect me.

You cannot behave normally until you allow yourself to rest and respond to what your body is asking you to do. You may want to push away those closest to you simply because you feel vulnerable or out of control. Or you may want to cling to those you love. It is important to find comfort in solitude *or* closeness; whichever helps you to feel calmer. Listen to what your body and mind want and need - they are trying to protect you.

There is no 'should or 'ought' about how you feel.

You will remember looking at your pet and thinking 'you give me so much and I love you so much!'. It is very hard to lose that unconditional love. You will feel the loss of our pet very deeply and even hugging a cushion or sitting by an open fire will give you comfort as you shed tears. Find what it is that gives you comfort - it is different for everyone.

From the beginning of our existence and as young children we long for the kind of love, acceptance and affirmation that we had from our pets.

Sadly, this may have been missing in our own childhoods and we may have had to make do with a lot

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less from our human relationships. Our pets give us a loving bond and we will feel this loss even more if we have been in relationships that did not affirm us as human beings.

Through pet loss we will learn things about ourselves. We may also learn to forgive those who did not give us what we wanted or yearned for. Perhaps they did not know how to give us what we needed and wanted. Grief for our pets often touches other areas of sadness in our lives so that our feelings appear even more intense.

If there are people who are able, and want to help, cuddle and love us now in our time of need and loss, we should try and accept their support. It may feel awkward but accepting love and kindness may help us to heal old wounds as well as this new pain.

COMFORT CARD 4

I will release my emotions

One way of releasing tension is through tears. Allow yourself to cry and concentrate on the *reason* for your tears. That sounds obvious because we feel we are crying because we have lost our pet!

Throughout your grief you may cry tears of frustration, guilt and sorrow. We have seen how grief can tap into

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old injustices - we cannot compartmentalise pain to such a degree so try and see if there are other wounds that you are nursing through pet loss. Recognising and understanding these will be healing too.

Engage with the dialogue in your mind when you cry. Allow silence into your life - then you can listen more closely to what your mind and body is telling you. Above all else - release your emotions through tears. In this modern world it is often uncomfortable for people to switch off and allow some peace and silence but it is important to do so in these circumstances. Allow time 'to be' rather than 'to do' - to be doing things *all* the time is not healthy, particularly when we are grieving.

You may feel a great waves of emotion, which seem incredibly deep. Be assured that if you face these deep feelings, rather than reject them out of hand, the tears will subside and you will have released some of the pent up emotion that needed expression.

While you may feel exhausted you will also experience a sense of relief, and it is at this point that you will be able to rest properly. At first you may rest for only a short time but, gradually, it will be possible to rest for longer periods. When you recognise all the feelings associated with the grief process as manageable and not

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life threatening you will move forwards towards recovery in a healthy manner.

Try not to push your feelings away but embrace them so that you are not fighting grief as well as loss. Many people are fearful of pain and will do anything to avoid it, but the longer you avoid real feelings, the longer the healing will take. It is often difficult for people to accept that feeling uncomfortable is sometimes necessary. Grief often feels lonely.

COMFORT CARD 4

When lonely, I will seek the help of others.

Picture yourself talking to others and getting their support. Use this book and the cards to help, but do not forget help-lines, forums on the Internet, social media and face-to-face professional help. Do not hesitate to turn to these sources for assistance and comfort.

You may feel that this is being weak or that people will think less of you but, on the contrary, there will be those who may have gone through the same thing and are very pleased to help. They will regard you as the loving human being you are for having cared so deeply for your pet.

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I call these people we turn to the chosen 'significant others' because they will help your recovery and will, therefore, become significant in your life. I can only re-iterate, it is important to choose well - you want people who will not nag you, judge you or smother you.

COMFORT CARD 5

I will restore my energy through rest and relaxation and diet.

Picture yourself at rest. Do not over stimulate your mind with too much television, mobile phones or emails. Do not feel guilty if you need to take an afternoon nap or to be alone for periods of time. This is not only normal, but necessary for the brain and for the body to re-adjust.

Take short walks, no matter what the weather or, if this is too painful, exercise for a short time to music as this will encourage your mind to respond positively and you will be temporarily distracted. You may prefer yoga or a more gentle, peaceful way of exercising. Comfort eating and alcohol will induce depression and anxiety. Keep those things to a minimum if you can.

Here is a Yoga technique that many have found helpful and powerful:

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Lie on your back on the floor. Turn your feet and palms outwards – legs slightly apart.

Start to concentrate on your breathing – feel the fear, anger and upset in your Solar Plexus and begin to breathe evenly and deeply. Let your head drop slightly to one side. Keep breathing, long and deep breaths.

Concentrate only on your breathing. The mind will continue to whirl for a while but try feel and picture each breath going in and out and relax and clear your mind.

At first you may find it impossible not to cry, so just allow this to happen (you now know this is a release).

With practice you will be able to drift into a deeply relaxing, restful state, which might last anywhere from a few minutes to even 15 minutes. You will awaken when your mind is rested. Lie still and wake up slowly - get up slowly and stretch.

COMFORT CARD 6

Look at nature

Picture yourself in a peaceful, tranquil and healing place and let your mind and body respond to these positive images.

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Exercise, such as gently swimming in a pool or river can be soothing as can walking on the beach or through a beautiful area - away from where you exercised your pet. Exercising to music, pilates and yoga help release pent up emotions. You can join a gym, work out in a class, or walk with a friend or a walking group like nordic walking.

Chapter 6

Help a Friend and Help Yourself

Counselling the bereaved is often difficult, even for professionals, and talking about the death of a person or an animal is not easy.

If you have a friend who has lost a pet your response can be very important. They will have invested a great deal of time, effort and devotion to their pet's happiness. Busy housewives for example often share quality time with a beloved pet as a form of quiet communication, play or exercise. Throughout the day they talk to them as they would a child.

If your friend has lost a pet and is devastated, encourage them to talk to you and try and listen carefully to what they are saying. Give them your full attention until they have said what they want to say - repeat some things to them so that they know they have been heard - this is a counselling skill known as empathetic listening and reflecting back. I talk about this in more detail below.

COMFORT CARD 7 for those who want to help..

I can listen to others and respond to their needs

Never underestimate the power of listening. Even very inexperienced counsellors are told that their first priority

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is to be able to listen. So *listen* to your bereaved friend. Knowing that you have listened and sympathised will help release their anxiety and give enormous comfort.

When talking to them, it is important not to turn the conversation onto yourself or tell your own stories of loss. Imagine if a professional did this - it would be terribly unhelpful! Your friend will be having enough difficulty dealing their own feelings - they do not want to hear about yours!

They need to experience the the release that *talking* to some one else brings. One tip is to look at them and make eye contact constantly so that they know they are being heard. You are not listening to them with empathy if you are busying around or playing with your phone. Try not to 'fix' their feelings but adopt a solid listening technique which is useful in many circumstances in life.

When your friend has spoken for a while and pauses, has made a statement and then pauses again to let their thoughts settle, you can use a counselling technique known as 'reflecting back'. By repeating what they have just said - for example - 'when you first heard the news from the vet that must have been a terrible shock and you must have felt x or y..'. This may feel odd but it

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leaves your friend in no doubt that you are actually listening and not just being polite.

If you can, repeat their exact words. Another typical example would be:

Friend: “I feel terrible because I should not have left the door open even for a few minutes! We live near a main road and I should have been more careful.”

You: “You feel you should not have left the door open and it feels terrible to realize that you could have been more careful”.

Friend: “Yes, it is all my fault!”

You: “You feel it is all your fault; we all make mistakes and we feel terrible about them. Tell me more about what happened...”

Allow them to continue and begin to acknowledge their feelings. “Tell me more”, gives a message to your friend that you are interested and sympathetic. It gives them permission to speak openly and encourages them to tell their story in their own words.

Stay quiet, as this silence gives them time to put their thoughts in some sort of order. This is important as their thoughts at this early stage are likely to be in chaos. It

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may feel a little uncomfortable for you, but let the silence remain until your friend begins to speak again.

The more your friend is heard and acknowledged the easier it will be for them to accept their guilt and sorrow and progress along their journey through grief.

You may be tempted to distract your friend by making a cup of tea, keeping them busy or chatting about other things in an attempt to help them 'feel better'. You feel embarrassed and awkward, or do not know what to say, but you must avoid the urge to keep them busy or distracted until they have had time to cry or to talk. Wait until an appropriate time and then make a cup of tea or suggest a walk - or a hug!

Proceed at their pace and try not to interrupt constantly, but do give occasional words of reassurance. Talking and listening is so important at this stage.

Your friend may express feelings of profound guilt - it is important for you to understand that this is how they feel and acknowledge it kindly and calmly.

You may find they break down and want to cry or they may even sob uncontrollably. Be assured that this will pass and understand that it is part of a healing process. Try not to 'jolly them out of it' but remain calm, quiet

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and offer comfort. You will be giving them a valuable gift.

You can provide practical help too, such as helping with cooking and shopping and getting them professional help if they are increasingly depressed and unable to cope.

Tip – Another relaxation tip is to ask your friend to touch the centre of their chest with their fingertips and place their thoughts there. This will help their fear and anxiety to dissipate. You may also ask them to touch their ears and massage along the edges, as this will not only stimulate energy sources but will help to calm them.

COMFORT CARD 8

I will transform my guilt and the fear and guilt of others

Guilt can last a long time, especially if a family member blames someone else for what has happened to their pet.

COMFORT CARD 9

I may feel guilty but I know that I am not responsible for everything

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No one would *knowingly* have harmed their beloved pet, but guilt may be a prominent feeling and will have to be managed. If you become a significant person in your friend's recovery you will be rewarded by a deepening friendship and understanding between you. Helping a friend to deal with guilt can help you to become even closer. Help them to understand they are not responsible for everything that happens in life. If they feel justifiably guilty they need to work towards forgiving themselves - no one is perfect - we make mistakes. (see the Affirmation below).

COMFORT CARD 10

I can learn how to manage my feelings of loss

Remember the breathing technique - and use it whenever you need release.

Lie down and breathe slowly and naturally. Starting at the feet, concentrate on relaxing each area of the body in turn, your legs, buttocks, and torso. Feel your heart pumping more slowly as the tension leaves your upper body and arms. Then feel it beating even more slowly and gently as your throat, face, chin and scalp relax. You may feel as if you are floating and you may drift away completely for a few minutes. Allow yourself to do this and dismiss any negative thoughts.

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As you awaken take deep breaths then stretch your arms above your head, stretch and tense each part of your body in turn, gently roll onto your side and finally sit up. Calmness will descend on you.

Then, make this powerful Affirmation.

Affirmation:

My ability to deal with my loss is growing daily. I look after my body and my mind. What I set out to do, I can complete.

As my journey continues I now feel closer to my pet.....(name your pet). I know is in a peaceful place and I seek that peace for myself. I will persevere and use my inner courage through all difficulties. My body is strong and my mind firm. I feel less overwhelmed now and I know my pet would want me to heal and enjoy loving memories of our time together.

Make sure the statements you are making are as affirmative and affirming as possible. They will be accepted by the subconscious and are an important part of the healing process.

Negative, punishing thoughts will upend you and interrupt the healing process. Grief unbalances you and

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you need to calm your mind. It is worth reiterating that you would never have harmed your pet willingly so feeling guilty and blaming yourself needs to be put in perspective. No one can go through life without unfortunate things happening - this does not make you a bad person.

Chapter 7

Helping a Child

When I worked for the children's helpline (ChildLine in the UK), we talked about not 'bandaging' bad news for a child. I was trained to listen carefully and to answer their questions without offering direct advice or skipping over the painful parts of their stories. Bandaging means skipping over difficult, uncomfortable facts instead of addressing them directly and calmly.

It is not easy talking about death to children. Not only may we be in distress ourselves but we may be tempted to 'blank out' or carry some of their pain. We hate to see our children suffer - but there *is* suffering in life and we cannot protect our children from life events and therefore growth.

Children deal with grief gradually but 'bandaging' a child's emotions is not the answer because they *know* when they are being sidelined, or *know* when something is *not* being said. It is important to make sure that those around the child, their friends and schoolmates, know what has happened. They have suffered the death of a pet - one they have cared for and cared about and they have thoughts and feelings to deal with.

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Children need to express their emotions openly and through tears or talking. They may feel that they are in some way responsible for the death of their pet. Adults should recognise this if a child becomes quieter than usual and does not want to go out to play. They may be carrying a heavy and unreal sense of responsibility.

Each child in the family will respond differently and grieve in his or her own way, appropriate to their age. Letting children express themselves naturally is both healthy and respectful but telling them to pull themselves together and 'be brave' is not very helpful. Help your children understand that all creatures die and that sadly, their pet is not coming back.

As a result of owning, loving and caring for an animal, they will have experienced a tremendous amount of pleasure as well as learning about respecting a fellow creature who is dependent on them and the family for its needs.

Children are very sensitive to atmosphere and many clients have said to me, 'The children know nothing about what is going on, we have been very careful about that'. In fact, children are very aware of events around death - they can soon tell if their grandma has been crying and is covering it up when they come into the

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room, or if people are whispering. They are acutely aware of the empty kennel, cage or stable.

Parents are often nervous of being too blunt and will use such expressions as 'going to sleep' or 'going away'. Only you can judge whether or not this approach is appropriate. But using words like 'going away' can cause separation anxiety in the child.

At worst the child may become afraid of going to sleep at night in case you suddenly 'go away' but if they understand that this was a natural time for a pet to die or that it had a very sad accident and died, they are more likely to accept that as being true and real.

You should try and always use clear and simple words when talking of pet death. You can help the process by explaining, when they see a dead insect or bird, that all creatures must die at some point whatever their age.

Naturally, the death of a pet may throw some very sensitive children into turmoil leading to behavioural difficulties. If you have suffered a loss when young and it was badly dealt with then you will not want to make the same mistake with your own child. Unresolved issues from our past can lie in wait until another opportunity presents itself for them to surface again. We have seen that the death of a pet is one example of this.

COMFORT CARD 11

My own past may effect how I can support my children, or myself, in the present crisis

The calmer you are, the more you will be able to talk to and help your children. A very young child may ask if it is their fault that their pet has died because, maybe, they were 'cross' with it the day before, or something else happened that caused the child to think this way. They may feel some guilt, anxiety and confusion.

Young children can concentrate on such problems for a few minutes until they want to return to play so they may ask bluntly 'So, my pet is not coming back to play anymore?' Do not be surprised if they proceed to play as if nothing has happened. This is normal, but they are likely to return to the subject later. Be calm and direct and use simple words by way of explanation.

Even with older children, their attention span is often quite limited on the subject of death and separation. They may ask a few questions and then carry on with what they were doing or ask if they can have something to eat. *You* may be feeling wretched yourself but you can be assured by answering their questions as directly as you can they will be satisfied for the time being. Later they may ask if God has taken their pet away and why.

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What you say in response may differ depending on your beliefs.

Sometimes anger may surface, particularly with slightly older children whose reactions to grief and loss may echo your own. They may have known the pet for much longer than the smaller children and are suffering more profoundly, so give them all the extra attention, cuddles and reassurance they need. By mirroring their emotions you are showing compassion and recognising their sadness. This may be another occasion for tears. This is both normal and healthy, as you know, and will speed the healing process.

Some children might feel the loss very profoundly and they may ask you uncomfortable, deep and searching questions. They may want to know exactly what happened to their beloved pet.

Whatever they ask, try to deal with it there and then so they do not think you are ‘hiding stuff’ or patronising them. You may be afraid to cry in front of your child but know that it is OKAY to do so. They are learning about love and loss and the process of sharing all of that with you is *very* valuable in the immediate and long term future.

For children, as well as other family members, the loss of a pet can bring back memories of other close relatives

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they have lost such as grand parents. Even though suffering yourself you must find your courage and be a role model for your children at this difficult time.

Teenagers, are often reluctant to show emotion in public and tend to hide their feelings but you can take the lead in helping them express their grief.

At first, an older child or young adult may deride the entire grief process, particularly if they have been away from home travelling or studying. And yet, the truth may hit them when they have some quiet time to themselves. That is when you can help by explaining that it was *not* 'just a pet' but a valuable member of their family and that you have all lost something precious.

They may feel free to express the sorrow they were reluctant to show and they may want draw, paint or write a story about their pet - for themselves or for younger siblings. This poem illustrates our choices so clearly..

You can shed tears that she is gone or you can smile because she lived.

You can close your eyes and pray that she'll come back or you can open your eyes and see all she's left.

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Your heart can be empty because you can't see her or you can be full of the love you shared.

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember her and only that she's gone or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.

You can cry and lose your mind, be empty and turn your back

or you can do what she'd want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

When the time is right you will be able to love and go on...

Another useful tip is to encourage your child to make a **MEMORY BOX**, where they can keep photographs, tack, collars, favourite toys, leads, rosettes, videos, DVD's etc to remind them of their lost pet. They can open it from time to time and add new poems, stories or drawings. The Box can be decorated with an insert for a photograph in the lid. Alternatively it could be made of wood or you could use a small antique casket. See the links page for pet memorials.

Chapter 9

Keep a Journal or Diary

Bereavement following the death of a pet is such a special kind of grief that some people like to communicate with their pet by writing a letter or poem telling them just how much they meant to you or your family.

Creative writing can be very comforting. It can also help to work through strong feelings of fear, remorse, guilt and sadness. In your journal of you individual journey you may find extracts from stories about grief or poems like the one above. In that poem we can see how negative feelings can be contrasted with memories of the good times and, at the right time on our journey, this will help to put things in their true perspective.

Alternatively you can write a letter to yourself from your pet, imagining how he or she felt about your time together - and then write a reply!

If you decide on a journal, choose a book which in colour, shape and texture appeals to you. Start it from when your pet first arrived and what their existence and friendship has meant to you over the years. You can

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include your thoughts from the time you were on your way to the breeder, the pet shop or rescue centre.

Do not forget to include any photographs you have of your early days together. Write down your thoughts and memories of those occasions, being sure to include the people who were around, the places you visited, the rides you went on and events you shared - such as a sponsored dog walk for charity or horse show where you won a prize.

Your journal should reflect memories of those happy times and it can become one of the 'significant' daily phases of your recovery process. It could be your own private place where you can express your most honest feelings and inner thoughts knowing that no one else is going to read them. It can become one of the most important of your healing tools.

I have seen people write the story of their pet on Facebook or Instagram - there are many ways of keeping these memories and enjoying and sharing them.

Do not be afraid to remember the bad times too - your pet may not have always been good or healthy, and you might have been through many ups and downs over the years. In general, animals and pets are upbeat, interested in life and curious. That is why they make such good companions and are a pleasure to feed,

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exercise, care for and love. They teach us lessons about discipline, responsibility, duty of care and most of all, love.

Some pets are workers such as guide dogs, working or hearing dogs and, of course, horses have often been sporting buddies or worked with us. There are many examples of these close working relationships and the loss of these pets is particularly painful.

The urge to tell your story again and again is a natural part of grief and if you feel an impulse to do this, then you must do it. While writing is one way of accomplishing this, a support group is another.

Chapter 9

Support Groups and Forums

Each time you tell your story you release a little more anguish and help the healing process. If you feel you do not have a supportive family or that you cannot burden friends with the same story, or details about your pet loss, then consider visiting a support group.

There you will find friends and people prepared to listen to you just as much as you are willing to hear them. It is a good and safe place. Additionally you will be in a place to express your feelings. Make sure that the group suits you and your needs - if not try another.

Comfort Card 12

I will open myself to others who can help me - wherever they are in the world

Hopefully, you will find it enormously therapeutic if you are able to tell your story as often as you wish in an environment where people will understand only too well.

The hurt inside you can be released as you talk or listen to other people's stories. You can take great comfort in

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sharing aspect of your life with others when you are ready to do so. This may also save you anguish at home or at work if you feel you must 'carry on' and not show your feelings too much - or that people in your every day life are impatient with your need to express yourself.

Forums can help you by giving you encouragement and sympathy. Try not to have expectations about what will happen – you may experience extraordinary support and understanding when you need it most - or you may simply find it too much! Go into it knowing that there will be people there who have survived pet loss and want to make connections with people who are hurting. It may work for a while and then you might want to move on.

Chapter 10

Pets Who Lose Companions

Humans are not the only ones to suffer grief. Sometimes other pets in the household miss their dead companion too. Because of your own feelings of sorrow, you may give your remaining pet less attention. They in turn may seek a quiet place where they become withdrawn and lonely and appearing apathetic and listless. This is particularly true if it is your 'preferred' pet that has died and the survivor reminds you of your loss.

You should understand their bewilderment and give them the space they need but extra love and attention when they ask for it. Try not to change their routine too much and make their daily walks shorter. Play with them as usual and give them frequent cuddles. Accept that their way of healing from animal depression is instinctive and, with love and care, they will respond when they are ready.

Sometimes the only solution is to get them a new animal companion but do not feel you have to rush into this. If you feel that you cannot cope or cannot love a new pet at the moment or do not feel ready for the responsibility, do not be tempted to go out and buy one straight away.

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It is very important that the energy levels between animals are right - sometimes a new puppy or rescue dog can be too much for the pet that is left behind - they may feel hen-pecked or bullied - just ensure that you introduce your old pet to a potential new one to see how they get on. the best balance is a new pet with a lower energy level than the existing one. You do not want to make your remaining pet jealous or unhappy.

Alternately, you may find that your remaining pet bounces back from the loss more quickly than you anticipated and appears normal after only a few days. This is often the case if your remaining pet has been the sub-dominant one and suddenly responds to being the centre of attention.

Animal depression can also occur if a pet loses a human companion. Sadly, there are many stories about dogs who become inconsolable after such an event. With both pet and human loss the animal may keep vigil for hours at a bedside or stable. They may even hide in a companion's favourite place, only coming out to eat or drink.

There are even tales of dogs and cats who, when they visit the cemetery where the pet or human is buried they seem to gain some kind of relief, as if they finally understand that their companion has gone.

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While this can be heartbreaking for an owner who is also grieving and in mourning, it is something that can be shared with an animal and you can give and share extra love and understanding.

You may have read of the extraordinary story of elephants who came from miles around to pay homage to an old bull elephant who had died in the wild. For the first time their rituals of grieving and paying their respects were filmed for posterity. The depth of their emotions and the respect shown for the old boy were truly amazing. This leaves us in no doubt that animals too need to grieve and receive comfort from others.

Often when animals are in a depressed state, they prefer their own company, and yet at other times they just follow their owners around looking melancholic and lethargic. This depression can be worked through not only with extra love and attention but by making sure they see other animals and by maintaining a reassuring daily routine.

Chapter 11

Time to Say Goodbye

Euthanasia is not a subject we like to talk or even think about but there comes a time when we have to face it. When we take on a pet there is an unwritten rule that we will look after their best interests to the very end.

COMFORT CARD 13

I can save my pet any further suffering

When it is impossible to save a life then we owe it to our pet to give it a peaceful and painless end. Sometimes a pet will make a decision itself and will hide in a suitable place to just fade away, but for the most part pets cannot decide for themselves that ‘the time is right’.

Write down your thoughts and fears at this sad time in your journal and be assured that you can face what is to come with dignity and courage.

When we anticipate the death of a pet it is normal to think about how we will react and cope when it actually happens. Many family members will try to mentally rehearse how they will respond. How will they cope without their pet?

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Such anticipation can trigger feelings of depression and guilt. This is a natural process that gives the family more time to adapt to the reality of their impending loss. Yet it can be used as a positive time to say a proper and sincere 'Good-bye' to your pet and to show extra love and gratitude for its contribution to family life.

Sometimes we get into an emotional muddle and need to seek professional help from a support group or counsellor. It is a time of great stress but you can expect to feel the following:

- That we will make the wrong decision
- We might not be able to cope
- We might say or do the wrong thing
- We will make it painful for others
- We will regret our decision.

There is no doubt that the decision to end your pet's life, and suffering, is very difficult. But remember that your pet is probably in pain, is listless, uncomfortable and not enjoying life anymore.

We are almost always bound to live far longer than our pets and this day is, more often than not, inevitable if

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our pet develops an illness. It is better to ensure that they die peacefully and painlessly in order to preserve its dignity.

The final decision must be made initially between you and your vet. It is never an easy one but your vet will give you a thoroughly professional viewpoint and above all, be objective. Your pet is, of course, unaware of this, so it is up to you to be brave and take this step, on good advice, when it is necessary and cannot wait another day.

COMFORT CARD 14

I accept the challenge in my pet's best interest

Because of your courage your pet will soon pass on peacefully and your courage will have helped a distressed animal in this painless and peaceful process.

It may help to involve family and friends in supporting you at this difficult time as they have shared your pet's life with you. You may not have a family or friends who are very 'pet minded' so seek the advice and comfort you need from your vet and animal forums or blogs. Together you can discuss the animal's current state and assess the true situation. Here's check list you can discuss together:

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Is the animal tired and listless all the time.

Is your pet drinking excessively?

Is your pet in excessive pain?

Does your pet have a good quality of life?

Has its personality changed?

Does it look sad?

Does your pet pace up and down and pant?

What does your vet say, do you need a second opinion?

Have you considered alternative treatments?

Is the current treatment working well enough?

Are vet fees a consideration? (You might be able to get assistance.)

Are you finding it difficult to cope and would it be better to foster your pet?

Are you putting off making the final decision because your life would be different, even unbearable?

Are you putting off making this decision because you are just afraid of saying goodbye?

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PET DIES

Would you prefer to be alone when the time comes to put your pet down, or should you invite a family member or friend for support?

Is your pet behaving badly and could this be addressed by training, rather than euthanasia?

This is without a doubt one of the most difficult decisions you will ever have to make as an animal lover. If you have the luxury of time, you will want to consider which vet would best perform the euthanasia and whether you wish them to do it at your home or their surgery.

Try to be comforted by the fact that the process is both swift and painless wherever it takes place. When you talk to your vet make sure you understand each other so you do not end up in an awkward situation with a vet who wants to do something differently, and or against your wishes.

When the end comes you must decide whether or not you want to be with your pet. From my own experience I find that most people prefer to be present. They see for themselves that their pet's passing is very quick and the animal feels nothing and simply goes to sleep.

Timing is important so make the appointment to suit family, friends and your own personal needs. Remember

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too that the impact on your family may be quite profound and you need to take into account what your own state of mind will be in the immediate aftermath.

As the time approaches you may want to talk to your friends and family about saying goodbye or just consider it on your own. For some people, their pet *is* their only family and this makes it all the more difficult. Where this is the case try and find someone you trust to help you at this time.

Your vet will tell you when the end is near or that there is little hope of recovery. At this point you need a clear and open discussion so that you fully understand the diagnosis and options open to you including surgery. The animal's interests are paramount and more invasive tests may only add to their suffering and on the advice of your vet may prove fruitless.

If you have bravely decided to be present while the vet carries out the euthanasia this will be a challenging time. Try to contain your own tears and talk lovingly to your pet using their favourite words – you can cry later. You can say goodbye during the process as your pet quickly slips away into sleep. Know that your pet's eyelids may not close so you will have to ask the vet to do this for you, or you may want to make this your final physical 'goodbye'.

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None of us likes to think about what will happen after our pet dies. You may be too distressed to think about what to do next. Seek advice about how to dispose of the body. Others may be willing to make the necessary arrangements for you or help with decisions on pending issues. Many people find it comforting to keep a clipping of their pet's fur and this is probably best done at this stage. Your children may even want to put some hair in their MEMORY BOX.

There are pet cemeteries in most towns and cremation is also a possibility. You may have chosen instead to have a favourite place for the burial. You could ask a friend or family member to collect the body and bring it to the burial site. Making these arrangements are important for your future coping mechanisms. Later in this book you will find some helpful links for pet forums, on placing your pet on a Memorial website, caskets for the garden and other suggestions to help you remember your friend.

If you know others people who have already been through the processes that you are now enduring, seek them out as they are likely to be happy to help you face these difficult times. You may need to talk to someone in your workplace so that they understand that you are in crisis. People can be very understanding and kind but as you will have read earlier, you also need to be kind to

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yourself. Support at this time is so important as you may feel your heart is breaking.

COMFORT CARD 15

I am thankful for the deep love and attachment I shared with my pet and will deal with sadness and anger appropriately

Visualisation

Visualise a beautiful, remote garden. There is a space reserved for you. This is where you can lose all the pain, anguish, anger, frustration associated with the loss of your beloved pet.

Notice all the glorious things growing there and choose a flower, shrub or tree and sit in front of it. Look at it, touch it and sense its fragrance and beauty. Imagine what it would be like to be that plant, to be rooted in the ground, blown by the wind and warmed by the sun. As the sun begins to set, feel the evening breeze and notice the stars emerging and then the bright moon. Let the healing stillness sink in. Now imagine dawn breaking and the morning dew on your face as you turn towards the sun. Smell the fragrance of the flowers around you and be aware that a new day has begun.

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Know that you can return to this garden at any time. Breathe steadily and move your fingers and toes. Stretch a little as you turn from one side to the other and then open your eyes. Remember, you can return here at any time... your pet is at peace.

Chapter 12

Celebrating Your Pet's Life

It can help enormously to do something to honour and celebrate the life of your pet, or organise a gathering for friends and family. If you have had your pet buried in a pet cemetery or you wish to scatter their ashes in a special place, you could hold the memorial service at that spot – a place that might have special meaning for you and your pet. Whatever you decide to do, it should be a very personal occasion. It could take the form of a ‘service’ using your own words or traditional religious ones. You can also give others the opportunity to add their own goodbyes to share their own memories and stories of the pet.

You may choose to scatter or bury the ashes and this can be very symbolic and comforting. There are also many delightful rocks, paw print stones or crosses that you can put in your garden (see products and links). Additionally, you could put a plaque on your stable door, or you might decide to plant a shrub or a tree in memory of your pet.

Another idea for a pet memorial is to have a headstone made or place a sculpture in the burial area. You can even create a special garden or place with a seating area

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or a water feature. This way you will have your own sanctuary where you can go any time to be close to your old friend.

You may visit on anniversaries, share quiet moments, tend the area or simply sit and contemplate, remembering the happy times.

My friend Anna who had lost her cat, found a beautiful wooden sculpture at a country show that reminded her of the pet. She placed it in a 'meadow' area of her garden where the cat used to play, hunt and rest. She has found this a comforting spot where she can enjoy the beauty of nature and fondly remember her cat.

Other items such as your pet's favourite bowl, blanket, toy or lead, can be put in the Memory Box until you are ready to pass them on.

Another idea is to make a donation to an animal charity or adopting a pet in their memory. The Dog's Trust (www.dogstrust.org.uk) run a sponsoring program. Alternatively you can leave a bequest to this or another charity in your Will. There is also a website that allows you to honour your pet for up to two years, by submitting a photograph and a short written piece about them. It can be quite comforting for adults and children alike to click on the site and see their own beloved pet mentioned and commemorated (see links page).

Chapter 13

What if Your Pet is Lost or Goes Missing?

What we all dread is a missing pet. You have no idea where it has gone or what has happened to it. This is another form of bereavement and grief. It is almost the worst energy draining experience that the body can endure as the mind races as you examine and picture all the terrible things that might have happened to your animal. Has it been killed on the road, is it trapped somewhere, has someone taken it? But the worst aspect is simply *not knowing*. The fear and anxiety may make you anxious about other things and people in your life.

When a pet goes missing there has been no opportunity for farewells. This can leave the owner angry, confused and deeply distressed. Remorse, guilt and regret also play a part if a pet escaped or was lost, for example, during a walk. This makes grieving particularly difficult because the shock, numbness and disbelief at losing a pet in these circumstances can last for a long time.

The loss can also lead to prolonged depression as various scenarios are rehearsed again and again in the mind, with no proof of outcome. You can also liken this

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type of experience to the trauma of losing your possessions in a fire, becoming a refugee or losing a relative in action during a war, with no body to bury.

Such a loss can make you feel powerless and unable to act or to resolve the situation. In these circumstances, you may become stuck in your anger and may need extra help to see you through. You will need to express the anger appropriately. A good way is through physical exercise such as walking, running, kickboxing (or whatever works for you personally). This will help you to release the pent up energy and fury.

Lets start at the point where you realize that your pet is lost. Trying not to panic, you do everything you can to find it. You may find yourself running frantically calling and searching, touring the streets, stopping strangers, and then suddenly trying to calm yourself and *think*.

You then pin up notices and talk to everyone in the area including the Police, vets, animal rescue organizations as well as searching the Internet (see Links). You may feel emotionally numb and this can help get you through these early stages. There may be chemical changes in your body as your anxiety levels soar. You might also find that you have to deal with other people calling and friends dropping in to see how you are coping.

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It is not uncommon to imagine that you have seen your pet only to be mistaken and shaken by the experience. The disbelief that your pet may not return or could be found injured can turn into denial. Even months later you may still believe that your pet will return.

As time goes by, numbness can induce an inertia, which is difficult to deal with. Sometimes people seem to know instinctively that their pet has not survived. Sadly, in most cases where the animal is not found after days or weeks this proves to be true.

As the initial numbness wears off you may go through a very difficult stage when the obsessive worry become unbearable. You go over and over it in your head, wondering, questioning, imagining and making assumptions. Inevitably, many of these thoughts and assumptions will be wrong but the feelings of isolation and despair are all too real.

Guilt and anger are common bereavement reactions and survivors may berate themselves for not having done things differently. This can be particularly acute when pets suddenly disappear. You begin punishing yourself for not having paid enough attention. It is you and no-one else who is responsible for the loss.

This is the point where you must deal with the situation firmly. You can take a leap of faith this has nothing to

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do with being religious, instead it is about what you feel is innately right. Having taken that leap of faith you can begin to place the chaos and disorganization into a narrower framework of possibility and likelihood.

Now you can attempt to manage the loss just as you would if you knew for certain what had happened. This is not being disloyal to your pet, but is necessary for you to move on. Remember, your pet loved you and would want you to be at peace with yourself.

The time will come when you have done everything possible to find your pet - it is important that you remember to rely on your instincts at this time. Trust yourself and try saying one of the following statements (or whatever it is that your instincts are telling you).

My pet has been rescued and he is content and is being looked after .

My pet has had an accident and he is now at peace.

I have to give up this frustrating quest and let my pet go.

I will approach solving this problem with intelligence and strength.

I know my pet has gone and I will remember him with love and affection and commemorate his life.

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Keep in mind that anniversaries can be particularly difficult because the facts are not known for sure. You Comfort Cards will help you.

COMFORT Card 16

I must accept that sometimes there are no answers to the questions “How?” “Where” and “Why?”

Now begin steering your thoughts in a more positive direction. To help you, here are some thoughts from other survivors of grief that you may identify with...

‘I still think about it but I am fairly satisfied that I know what happened. I may not be right but I feel that I am and that makes it easier’.

‘I sought professional help because I felt I was going mad. I was taught to ask myself questions that my brain could find solutions to – in other words I shifted my perspective away from the negative in order to survive and move forward.’

‘I was judging myself too harshly and my guilt was keeping me stuck. It just was not true that I was to blame completely, but I just did not want to give up my grief and anger and face what I would have to think and feel to get through it. I was absolutely horrible to everyone around me; I was just furious and miserable’.

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As soon as you move away from the negative – for example – ‘If I allowed myself to make progress through my grief what would it be like?’ – you are in a stronger position to move forward because you give your brain a different picture, i.e. one of a survivor making progress, rather than an angry, stuck, victim.

If you wake in the middle of the night with anxiety, start the deep breathing exercises described earlier in the book. Breathe in for four counts and breathe out for seven, building up to, in for seven and out for eleven. Keep your thoughts on the breathing and steer your thoughts away from deeply destructive thoughts and fantasies.

Chapter 14

More Tips and Hints to Help You

You can aid sleep and relieve anxiety by drinking chamomile tea or other nerve relieving teas like Passiflora. Calm the mind with Healing Herbs White Chestnut flower essence, for example, or place Lavender essence on the pillow for calming the mind. Valerian drops taken with water help induce sleep and feelings of peace.

Eat fish and omega oils. The Japanese rate of depression is less than 1% as seafood is thought to be beneficial to people who are suffering from sadness and bereavement.

Exercise regularly, warm up with some neck rolls, shoulder and arm rotations and gentle stretching. These postures and exercises are so gentle that you will be able to do them with ease, no matter what your age and condition.

Anger is part of the grief process and it is often directed at those closest to you. Learn to deal with it appropriately - either through appropriate physical expression kickboxing or other sport, or by recognising that it is being unfairly managed and forgive yourself!

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Physical relaxation is a voluntary act of the will and so much of what is happening to you is involuntary reaction to misery, fear and sorrow. Relaxation is therefore essential in order to maintain balance in mental activity and to avoid complete exhaustion. Most beneficial of all, is relaxing the Solar Plexus, the centre of life's energy and balance.

We can learn by watching children. They are often at their most relaxed when leaning with their forehead on the floor – sometimes they will even sleep like this to relieve the pressure on the frontal lobe of the brain. To do it yourself simply kneel and sit back on your heels. Then lean forward, arms by your sides, until your forehead touches the floor. Remain there for a few minutes breathing calmly. Most of us have forgotten how to breathe properly so it is worth practising!

You need your strength to get through pet loss particularly if we have had negative, vengeful or difficult thoughts. As you work through the grief process you can exorcise these negative ideas.

COMFORT CARD 17

I will try not to envy others who have not suffered loss.

The person who suffers most from negativity in any situation is you - and it can badly affect your future

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happiness. Being caught up in jealousy, envy, resentment or hatred is in the long run counter productive and will impede the healing process. It is important to ensure that you are not ‘stuck’ in the angry stage of grief and loss.

So, be positive and in a quiet moment try something like this.....think of a special place away from recent troubles Imagine a sunrise, mountains, a distant beach, make it an imaginary paradise.

Now, lie down and breathe slowly and naturally. You remember our old exercise? Relax the legs, buttocks, torso – now feel your heart pumping a little more slowly. Let the tension go from your upper body and your arms and hands, then your throat (swallow once or twice) relax your face, chin and scalp. You may feel as if you are floating and you may start to drift away for a few minutes.

Allow yourself to do this – push away negative thoughts as you might a cloud. (if the bad thoughts persist, use the ‘shrinking the image’ technique mentioned earlier in the book. When you decide to wake up – start to move bits of your body, take deep breaths, stretch your arms above your head, stretch and tense your whole body and gently roll onto your sides, first one and then the other and finally, slowly sit up.

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Now you can add a powerful affirmation by saying to yourself :

my loss is growing daily. I can look after my body and my mind and what I set out to do, **I will complete.**

My journey is continuing and I feel close to

my darling(name your pet)

I knowis in a peaceful place and **I seek that peace** in myself. I will persevere and **find my inner courage** through all difficulties. My body is **strong** and my mind is **firm.**

I feel **less overwhelmed** and I know my petwould want it this way.

Make sure the statements you are making contain the words.....I have.....I do.....I can.....

Positive statements are accepted by the subconscious and they have a healing effect on the mind and body.

Grief unbalances us and some people say it feels like a form of madness. Remember that you determine the object of your concentration, so you need to focus away from your profound grief for a few minutes in order to bring healing to your body and mind.

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The efforts and events of mankind upset the balance of our lives so it is good, if not essential, to concentrate regularly on the wonders of nature – the majesty of the oak tree, the purity of fallen snow, the magnificence of a sunset.

Know that everything returns to the universe and to nature. Your pet is at peace and you will now want to find peace within yourself and be your own guide to finding a happier heart.

Tip – Remember that a smile will heal you and boost your immune system, which is undoubtedly under stress when you are grieving. Imagine the parts of you that feel heavy with sorrow. Smile into them (even if you are crying and feeling your grief) – smile for a few seconds about a happy time with your pet. Return to the smile technique anytime, any place you want.

Lastly, try to keep in mind that life throws up difficult and hurtful situations and we can smile not *at* those horrible things, but at the fact that before losing our pet we were happy, we were blessed, we were lucky and we loved them. Now, we have to find our way past the negative and look to our courage in order to survive.

Your pet would want this and be so proud that you have survived pet loss and are prepared for any other sorrows that might befall you.

LINKS PAGES

(if links do not click immediately, copy and paste them into your browser).

forgive me if I have not mentioned your type of pet specifically.

Denise's blog: www.copingwithpetloss.co.uk

Sponsor a Dog (in memory of your own)

<http://www.dogstrust.org.uk>

Horse support Page – e mail on

[Hoofbeats in Heaven-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:Hoofbeats_in_Heaven-subscribe@yahoo.com)

Good site for information on loss, lost or stolen horses

<http://dmetcalfe.homestead.com/horsearticles.html>

Top Cat Forum

www.catforum.com

Information of Hamsters and illnesses

<http://nbpfaus.net/~pfau/melissa/hamstercare.html>

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Information on Fish Care

http://va.essortment.com/fishpetstaking_rmtw.htm

Taking Care of Birds

<http://nature.gardenweb.com/forums/bird/bird911.html>

Taking care of Snakes

<http://exoticpets.about.com/od/snakes/>

Pet Loss

<http://www.pet-loss.net>

This charming site will offer all kind of poems, books, personalised songs and more when you have lost a beloved pet.

<http://www.selfhealingexpressions.com/courses.shtml>

Grief Support Help Line USA

Telephone Helpline, 602-995-5885 Forum and Support

<http://www.chancepot.org/>

Missing Pets

<http://www.griefhealing.com/missingpets.htm>

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USA site with useful information

Forum: <http://www.hovforum.ipbhost.com>

No time, or reluctant to Exercise?

Try 8 Minutes in the Morning by Jorge Cruise

www.jorgecruise.com

Try Yoga in Bed (from www.Amazon.com)

Search for Yoga lessons on Google and Try Pilates outside in the fresh air in your area.

Learn to swim - google swimming lessons.

Take up Nordic walking - google for your area.

Honour Your Pet - Experts in Pet Memorials

<http://www.poffins.co.uk/>

Charming garden stones with paw prints and pet names <http://www.glassfootsteps.com/>

Dog Lost – informative search site for lost dogs

www.doglost.co.uk/

For a Counsellor

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www.bacp.co.uk

the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists

for similar organizations, search the internet by country or by State.

Self motivating <http://www.thinkrightnow.com>

Learn More about Your Pet

Bruce Fogle is a Canadian vet based in the UK and I am grateful to him for his great compassion, skill and wholeheartedly recommend his books on dogs and cats which you can find at www.Amazon.com.

Charities to benefit from the proceeds of this book include PAT dogs – Pet As Therapy; Dogs Trust and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Please send this site to a friend and add to your favourites www.copingwithpetloss.co.uk

Visit Forums, support groups and other websites where you will receive additional help for your specific breed of pet.

Please, do not hesitate to contact a local professional if you are feeling extremely depressed or inconsolable.

Bonus 1

Learn CPR for Pets - you could save a life.

Do not proceed with CPR, even if the animal goes into cardiac arrest. You must clear the airway first. From a Licensed Veterinarian and a member of the Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Society. This document is primarily aimed at EMS and Emergency Medical personnel who may encounter animals in arrest.

Pet owners should consult their veterinarian for specific details on procedures outlined here.

A. Airway

The first step in animal CPR, after determining non-responsiveness, is to obtain a patent airway. You should not continue on, until this step has been achieved.

1. Carefully pull the tongue out of the animal's mouth
2. *WARNING: even an unresponsive dog may bite by instinct!!*

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3. Make sure that the neck is reasonably straight; try to bring the head in-line with the neck.
4. *WARNING: Do not hyperextend in cases where neck trauma exists*
5. Attempt 2 rescue breaths, by closing the mouth, and performing **mouth-to-nose** ventilations.
6. Reposition the neck and try step 3 again.
7. Visibly inspect the airway by looking into the mouth, and down
8. the throat for foreign objects occluding the airway. Unlike human-CPR, rescuers may reach into the airway and remove foreign objects that are visible
9. Proceed to the Heimlich.

B. Breathing

1. After achieving a patent airway, one must determine whether the animal is breathing, and whether this breathing is effective:
2. Carefully pull the tongue out of the animal's mouth

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3. *WARNING: even an unresponsive dog may bite by instinct!!*
1. Make sure that the neck is reasonably straight; try to bring the head in-line with the neck.
2. *WARNING: Do not hyper-extend in cases where neck trauma exists*
3. Ventilate the animal by closing the mouth, and performing mouth-to-nose ventilations.
4. Ventilate at 20 breaths per minute. If supplemental Oxygen is available, and the animal is breathing on its own, use a high-flow blowby.
5. *WARNING: Do not attempt to in-tubate the animal, without prior training, and properly sized ET tubes.*

Proceed to C-Circulation, while continuing respiratory support as necessary

C. Circulation

This is the final step of CPR and should only be initiated after the airway and breathing steps have been completed:

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1. Make sure that there are no major (pooling/spurting blood) points of bleeding. Control as necessary
2. Lay the animal on its right side
3. Locate your hands where its left elbow touches the chest.
4. Approximately the middle of the rib-cage
5. Compress the chest 15 times followed by 2 rescue breaths (3compressions every 2 seconds)
Compress
 - 1/2" - small dogs
 - 1" - medium dogs < o 1.5" - large dogs
6. Repeat as necessary

Important:

Animals do not have palpable carotid pulses. You can only obtain a femoral pulse in the inguinal crease. Check where this is with your vet so you are prepared. (Palpate carefully on a conscious dog for example.)

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A. Heimlich

1. After attempting to ventilate:
2. Turn the animal upside down, with its back against your chest
3. With both arms, give 5 sharp thrusts (bear hugs) to the
4. abdomen. Perform each thrust as if it is the one that will expel the object
5. Stop, check to see if the object is visible in the airway, if so, remove it and give 2 mouth-nose rescue breaths. If the breaths do not go in, go back to step 1
6. *Use gravity to help you expel the object*

Bonus 3

How to behave in an Emergency

During an emergency it is very important that you remain calm. Animals can sense your unease, but cannot understand what is happening and you cannot verbally tell them. Your body language is very important. Be calm, yet deliberate in your actions.

When you determine that you either have corrected the life-threatening problem, or are unable to stabilize the animal, you should transport to the nearest emergency veterinary hospital.

Notify your emergency clinic that you are coming in with a dog in respiratory arrest with a foreign body airway obstruction and/or cardiac arrest.

Give them the following information via phone if possible:

- Your name
- Your ETA
- Steps taken (CPR, O2...)

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- Breed/size
- If a foreign body, what the suspected object is
- If a poison or medication has been ingested
- Mechanism of injury (hit by car...)

Write down the phone number of the 24 hour animal hospital nearest to you and keep it handy.

Bonus 4

Guidelines on How to Handle a Pet in an Emergency

The first aid provider must not only identify and treat injury or illness, but must also safely transport the patient to the veterinary facility for treatment. Improper technique when transporting a patient can result in further injury or complications. Although a book of this type cannot fully prepare the reader for all specific examples, it can provide the following general recommendations.

Lie the Pet on its Side if it is comfortable.

Try to make the pet comfortable by encouraging him to lie down and stay. Smaller dogs and cats can most effectively be transported in commercially available carriers or in a cardboard box with a lid.

Handle the Pet Gently

Rough handling may cause further internal damage if the pet has an injury to the chest or lungs. In this case, it is better to leave the pet in a comfortable position.

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Minimize Movement

It is best in many cases to actually tie or tape the pet to a flat surface. This is imperative when handling the unconscious patient or the patient with a suspected back injury.

Do Not Put Pressure on the Stomach

This is most important for the pet who is having difficulty breathing, has been vomiting, or has pain in the abdomen.

Use a Backboard

If the pet seems paralyzed or unable to get up, a spinal injury is suspect and the pet must be firmly immobilized to prevent further damage to the nerves. Get a firm, flat support (an ironing board, a piece of plywood, a collapsed cardboard box, a table leaf -- think of one in your house before you need it). Grasp the skin over the back of the neck and over the small of the back and gently slide the pet on to the support. Try to keep the back and neck straight. Tie or tape the pet to the support.

Position the Head

If the pet is unconscious, position the head in normal alignment with the body. It should not flex abnormally

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downward nor extend excessively upward. Improper flexing or extending can cause decreased blood drainage from the brain and cause serious damage. If the pet has vomited or appears likely to vomit, put the head down below the level of the heart. This will allow the vomitus to run out of the mouth and not down into the windpipe and the lungs. Be aware that pets with severe head injuries are likely to vomit, even while they are unconscious.

Cover the Patient with a Blanket

Covering an injured pet has a calming effect. More importantly, it prevents heat loss. A blanket can also be used as a transport device if there is no sign of back injury. In this case, the animal can be gently lifted with the blanket. Gently slide the pet into the center of the blanket. Roll the edges of the blanket to provide a better grip. Gently lift the blanket and the pet into the transport vehicle. This is usually a two-person procedure.

Know the Route to the Vet Facility

Get precise directions and drive directly to the facility. This will result in the fastest delivery of the pet for professional care.

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Drive Carefully!

Driving out of control or in a panic may result in delays (while the officer writes a ticket) or injuries if you are involved in an accident.

Emergency situations require prompt and safe transport of the sick or injured pet. If done properly, this will give your pet a better chance for recovery. If delayed or done carelessly, the outcome may be less favorable. As with most first aid principles, prior planning and awareness of proper techniques will prevent many problems.

First Aid: A Final Note

Most veterinary hospitals are not open around the clock. Some may provide emergency service (meaning someone will meet you there if you call first). If you do not call first, you may arrive to find that a doctor is not available. To avoid wasting time in a crisis, ask your veterinarian ahead of time about emergency services available, and learn the shortest route to your veterinarian and to the 24-hour emergency facility, if one is available in your area.

Your Notes : On the next page you will find YOUR NOTES. Here you can begin a Journal; make an Action Plan; Schedule an Exercise Regime; add interesting web links that appeal to you.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PET DIES

Make notes on how you are going to look after yourself...In fact anything that is important to you.

MY NOTES

My Name

My Pet's Name

My Notes

MY COMFORT CARDS - create your own!