



**PETCLOUD'S  
GRIEF  
SUPPORT  
GUIDE**

*Information and tools to support you  
after you've lost a beloved pet.*

# A NOTE FROM KEVIN



## TO MY FRIENDS AND FELLOW GRIEVERS,

I want to personally say that I'm sorry for your loss. The loss of a pet is a profound loss, and it's a loss unlike any other.

You have experienced a great loss, and you deserve to grieve that loss. We bond greatly with our pets—they are family. They are ALWAYS there for us, especially through the most difficult times. They have shown us true forms of unconditional love. It's no wonder we feel such profound grief when they leave us.

The sudden silence is deafening. The broken routines, unused toys and medicine, empty food dishes and beds are all painful reminders. For a while, our home can become just a house—a shell for our memories.

This new chapter in your life will be difficult. There is no such thing as “just getting over” a profound loss. It can feel like a giant hole has been ripped through us and it can take a long time to adjust to our new “normal”.

This booklet is meant to be used as a guide to help you in the hard days ahead. Inside, you will find activities and information about grief and how to find comfort and support if you need.

I want to personally tell you that you are not alone on this journey. There are many, many people who also share your feelings and your struggles, and I am one of them.

We need to surround ourselves with those who understand and can support us through this loss. Anytime that you feel alone, overcome with grief, or without anyone who will listen, we're just a phone call or click away. Come see what our community is like.

Sincerely,

**Kevin Ringstaff**

*Founder, Listener, Speaker*

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# NORMAL AND NATURAL



Grief is the normal and natural reaction to losing someone or something that we care about. There is nothing wrong with how sad we feel when we lose a pet.

We don't deal with death and loss well as a society. Many people find it hard to talk to their friends, family, and co-workers in response to someone else's grief and tragedy. We don't know what to say, and oftentimes we say nothing at all. Death makes us uncomfortable, and many people are afraid of talking about or even being around it.

As a result, people can say terrible things to us. Even well-meaning people can give "advice" on how to grieve, what we "should" do, or how we "should" feel. We've been programmed to believe that sadness and grief are problems, something wrong that needs to be corrected. That's just not true.

So many people just don't get the level of hurt and pain that accompanies the loss of a pet. As a result, they can make hurtful and insensitive comments. *This insensitivity always hurts.*

It's important to know that many well-meaning people find it hard to talk about grief and loss. They don't know what to do or say, so oftentimes they end up saying nothing at all. If this is the case, try not to let their "apparent" lack of response be indicative of a lack of caring.

There is nothing that needs to be fixed. We have lost. We're supposed to feel this way. It's okay to feel this way. Right now, one of the best things we can do is to find a person that we can really talk with about our feelings. Someone who will be supportive and just listen.

Even now, with everything that is going on in our worlds, we can find support. We have free groups that meet every Sunday at PetCloud where we create a space to hold this grief. If you don't have someone to talk with for support right now, come join us. Talking about and sharing our grief is the best way to feel validated and to start healing. Sometimes it just feels good to be in the presence of others who feel like we do...even if we don't have anything to say ourselves.

# HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND



Many people have told us that losing their pet hurts worse than losing a family member. To us, this statement makes perfect sense. We grow so close to our pets over the course of all the time we spent together. We learn how to communicate with them without words, they know our routines, they're always waiting for us when we come home. They are present with us without judgment or criticism during all states of our lives, good and bad. They love us unconditionally. This is an intimacy and love that we don't have with any other person. Even with our spouses and children. Our pets are like kids that never grow up. They are 100% dependent on us their entire lives.

One of the things we are grieving is this loss of our familiar pattern. Of having that dog or cat bundled up with energy, expectation, and longing waiting just on the other side of our front door. It's so empty without them in our lives. This is one of the hardest parts of pet loss.

It's so special that our pets are the ones who are ALWAYS there for us, through the most difficult times of our lives. And, although that bond has changed, it will never really leave us. They will always be a part of us, even if right now their absence is everywhere and the silence is deafening.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN GRIEF



Grief is hard work. It's hard on our bodies; it robs our ability to eat and sleep, it disrupts our normal routines, and it destroys our peace of mind. Losing a loved one is like being hit by a bus. It immobilizes us. The shock waves are immense, and roll over us again and again, relentless and debilitating.

When we are in deep grief, our emotional strength seems to give out. We have unusual physical fatigue, abnormal sleep patterns, and we can experience gloom, dejection, and despair where nothing seems to matter anymore.

It takes a lot of mental and physical energy to grieve. We have a limited supply of energy each day, and right now our grief is consuming a lot of it. That affects us physically, mentally, and socially in many negative ways. When combined, it saps our ability to heal and recover, which further compounds our grief and makes us more miserable because we start to physically and mentally feel worse.

## **PHYSICAL SIGNS OF GRIEF**

Chronic fatigue and exhaustion are common and natural experiences for those in heavy grief. We just don't have the energy to exercise and engage with life like we're used to doing anymore. We can become lethargic or restless, and some days it seems we can barely lift our head. We may find ourselves not wanting to eat or drink or over eating for comfort. We can also lose the ability to sleep. Night time is generally the hardest time of the day because our thoughts are completely preoccupied with our grief. We can lie awake for hours, yet be completely exhausted. Even when we do sleep it's not restful. If we have trouble sleeping, we can try taking a bath before bed, or getting into a new bedtime routine that we follow (whether we fall asleep or not). If our pet shared the bed with us and we're feeling that emptiness, try getting a stuffed animal or pillow to fill the empty space where they used to sleep.

## **MENTAL SIGNS OF GRIEF**

Practically everyone who has had a serious loss has reported "brain fog". Mentally, we lose our ability to concentrate on tasks and projects, we may forget small details, miss deadlines, have difficulty in decision making, and our short-term memory can even be affected. Mood swings are also common. We might find ourselves getting angry over little things, feeling increased anxiety, depression, panic, or having more symptoms of guilt and feeling generally helpless. And especially getting irritated at people.

Grief exacerbates any existing mental health conditions. If we have preexisting issues with anxiety or depression, let's make sure to let our closest friends, family, and healthcare providers know so they can check in on us from time to time.

## SOCIAL SIGNS OF GRIEF

Our social networks are the best way to take care of ourselves in grief. When we are supported by those that we love, when we have someone who will just listen and be present with us, it helps. However, grief affects that too. Socially, we can become more withdrawn, less productive, detached, overly sensitive, and our self-esteem can be lower. We want to isolate and to hide our grief from others, especially in the workplace. Right now, we can let it be okay to limit our interactions with those who don't understand; we don't owe anyone an explanation. We can save our energy for our grief.

Anger is a very common reaction to loss, *especially for men*. It's easy to feel anger. Anger makes us feel powerful and in control, which is something we've lost. We can be angry at ourselves and everyone around us. Our anger can be directed at a veterinarian for missing a diagnosis, at ourselves, or at our friends and family members for saying hurtful things, for not acknowledging our loss, or by avoiding us.

## ISOLATION AND DEPRESSION



There is a stage in most healing journeys where everything seems bleak and everyone seems to have abandoned us. It is common to feel and believe that life has no value and the future seems to be meaningless when we are grieving. However, if you feel emotionally stuck or unable to feel anything but sadness, helplessness, loneliness, or isolation for long periods of time, it may be time to ask for help.

One of the best things a person can do is to talk to other people who have also lost a dear pet. Reaching out to someone who understands and who you can talk to is the start of your healing process. But, we are in a socially unique time and not all of us have people in our lives we trust with our feelings. So what can we do if we need comfort and support when we are so isolated? Even if we are 100% alone in our lives there are people and groups that meet online to support each other. If you're interested in finding a group like this I would like to invite you to our Sunday support groups that we hold every week. Those who attend our groups often comment on how good it feels just to be around others

who are grieving. We can also find comfort in our faith traditions, in journaling, watching a distracting movie, taking a vacation, and by establishing healthy new routines and habits.

**Having a plan and support system in place is the best thing that we can do for ourselves.** Call a friend or family member, a hotline, join a support group, or seek out other help immediately if any of these things are true for you:

- ✓ These feelings are consistent and last for many days/weeks.
- ✓ Having a history of depression or mental illness that's affected by grief.
- ✓ Thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

**NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE**

**1-800-273-8255**

## GUILT



Virtually everyone feels some sort of guilt after a significant loss. Most of this guilt is undeserving. It's so easy to use guilt as a way of holding on to what we have lost, because if we feel guilty, then at least we still have a piece of them in our lives.

*Those with the most love are often  
those who feel the most guilt.*

Looking back at what happened and judging ourselves by reflecting on what we could have done better doesn't benefit us right now. Whatever our reasons or circumstances, we did the best we could with the information and resources we had at the time. We made the best choices we could have. If we are the ones at fault for what happened, like an accident or lost pet, our path forward is with time, self-reflection, and self-forgiveness. Let's realize that we are human, we are fallible, and we make mistakes. It's not possible to be 100% alert and present at all times.

Guilt, by definition, is something that we do with intent to cause harm. For instance, we feel guilty when we rob a bank. In dealing with our pets, we would *never* do anything to *intentionally* cause them harm. If we find ourselves constantly replaying those last few moments where we had to make those impossible choices, wondering “what if I had done X/Y” or saying “I wish X/Y would have happened”, try changing the word guilt to regret: “I regret not asking more questions before I put you to sleep”, or “I regret leaving the gate open”, or “I regret waiting as long as I did”. No matter our mistakes, we still deserve kindness ourselves. So, let’s change the word guilt to regret in our internal monologues.

## RESOLUTION AND CLOSURE



In the great presence of grief, time can seem both too long and too short. We all grieve at different paces and in different ways. Our personal journey through grief can’t be compared to anyone else’s journey. We have lost something that is irreplaceable and unique to us, and our corresponding grief is equally unique and deserves to be mourned for however long it takes.

*There is no finish line in grief.*

The bad news is that there is no magical point where our grief ends; in some ways, our sadness will be with us forever. With any profound loss, there is no such thing as “just getting over it”. The truth is that we never stop missing or loving them. There will always be a part of us that is sad, a part of us that will miss them. When we have a loss, only ½ of that relationship dies...the other ½ stays with us, forever present in our thoughts and hearts. Our bond changes, it doesn’t disappear.

Many people are worried that they will forget their loved one. Short of dementia, Alzheimer’s, and brain damage, that’s not going to happen. Although it may feel like we’re letting them go as we move through grief, all our memories, experiences, and feelings will still be with us. They have permanently imprinted themselves in our lives and hearts.

“Recovery”, “closure”, or “moving on” doesn’t mean we are never sad; it just means that we have found a way to say goodbye to the pain of parting and to re-engage with life again. Continuing on to love again is a great way to honor everything that they’ve given to us over the years.

## TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES



It’s so important to take care of ourselves when we’re grieving, yet it is often one of the first things that we neglect. We don’t feel like it, we don’t have the energy. It’s unfair. Life’s unfair. Why bother? When we’re in this stage, even the smallest victories can be monumental. Even the smallest things, like getting out of bed and taking a shower can take all of our energy.

First and foremost, we need to give ourselves permission to grieve. It’s okay not to be okay. Allow our grief to surface. Let our tears flow. Crying and grieving is how we express profound sorrow and loss. Our tears are healing and therapeutic. Breaking down at random times is a normal part of the grieving process. It seems to ambush us when we least expect it. Try not to fight it; let our tears come. If we’re in an inappropriate place for tears, make time for a private “grief-break” in the bathroom, in a car, or by taking a walk.

Our tears are also dehydrating. We need to eat healthy and drink enough water, even if we have to force ourselves; otherwise we won’t recover as fast and we end up feeling physically worse. Let’s try to find something small each day that gets our bodies moving. This doesn’t have to be strenuous exercise; for instance, we can take a short walk, do some yoga, or just sit in the sun.

### *Self Care Isn’t Selfish*

Let’s remember to be kind to ourselves right now. We won’t be functioning at 100% at work, at school, or in our daily lives. We need to allow extra time in our days to do our basic activities. Things will just take longer for a while. Once we acknowledge that we are affected by grief, it becomes easier to allow ourselves the time and space to heal without feeling rushed or pressured.

# TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT GRIEF



Just like adults, when children are not allowed to grieve or talk about their feelings, they hold all of that sadness, guilt, and anger inside. And, just like adults, it will eventually surface in other, more destructive ways.

Be open and honest with children about what has happened. Remember, children don't find it awkward to talk about death—that's an adult construct. However, it's important to talk to them at a level appropriate to their age and level of development. Use simple language, like "She was very very very sick and she died", and avoid using euphemisms like "She went to sleep" to avoid confusion about sleeping and death.

*Kids are kids first. They are grievers second.* Children love to play, create, and do things with their hands and bodies. Grief doesn't stop that.

Here are 3 activities you can do with your children:

- 1 Create a memorial box together: Decorate and fill it with things that remind you of happy memories and the adventures you had together.
- 2 Make a Grief First-Aid Kit: This is a box filled with things to turn to when they need to be cheered up. Include things like memories, chocolate, a movie, a journal, old toys, pictures, or other activities.
- 3 Go volunteer together at a local pet shelter. *This is not to adopt!* This is just to give back and be around other animals.

# JOURNALING ACTIVITY



One of the best things that we can do in our grief is to journal. Journaling is a great way of letting out the emotional pressure of grief; it's a way of saying the things that need to be said. Journaling and expressive writing have been found to:

- ✓ Boost our mood
- ✓ Enhance our sense of well-being
- ✓ Reduce or eliminate symptoms of depression and PTSD
- ✓ Improve our working memory in grief

These next pages of this booklet are designed to help us start the practice of journaling. Each page has a suggested prompt written to be thought provoking and tear inducing. Write on that topic or whatever is on your heart. There is no right or wrong way to journal because we are writing for ourselves and no one else.

Try to focus and write on one topic at a time, a different one every day. When we're just getting started it can be hard to find the motivation, so we recommend to journal for about 5 minutes (or less) before bed—every evening. Write a couple sentences using this format:

## 1 How am I feeling right now?

Write down how you are honestly feeling, even if it's "I'm devastated and I don't feel like writing".

## 2 What is something I can be grateful for?

This can be a memory or something as simple as "I'm grateful to have a roof over my head tonight" or "I'm so grateful to have this memory with you".

**Journaling really helps.  
Use it.**



# GRIEF JOURNAL



*My precious memories of*

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Date

---

By

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# RELATIONSHIP TIMELINE



Many times, when people remember lost loved ones, they are filled with overwhelming sadness—so much so that many people don't want to remember or talk about them because they fear being swallowed up by grief. In some ways this fear is true; we will never stop missing our loved ones. They will always be a part of our lives, and our hearts will never be the same.

However, if the only thing we ever think about and remember are those last few moments (or weeks), we are forgetting all of those years filled with happy memories. We are forgetting why they are so important and why we loved them. Solely focusing on the end and their absence from our lives is doing ourselves (and their memory) a disservice.

The purpose of this activity is to help us remember and record how we have changed over the years by having a constant and loving companion by our sides. It is meant to help us manage the grief caused by the physical ending of our relationship with our pets and to realize that, although they are gone, they will never be forgotten. Their influence and impact will always remain with us.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1 Plan to spend about an hour (or however long it takes) on this activity.
- 2 Recall all of the different memories and major life-events that we have had with our pets. These events can be non-related to them, such as losing a job or getting married. Remember, our pets were there for us during good and bad times.
- 3 For each life event we defined above:
  - ✓ Spend a moment with it.
  - ✓ Was it a good or bad memory? If it was good, draw the line above the midpoint of the paper. If it was a bad memory, draw the line below the midpoint.
  - ✓ How strong is the memory? The stronger the memory (positive or negative), the longer the line should be. Extreme events, such as a death, would be a long negative line below the midpoint.



# RELATIONSHIP TIMELINE

When I first met you.



Today



















# PETCLOUD



## WHO ARE WE?

We are a community of love, respect, and support who know what it is like to lose a pet. We “get it”. We understand pet loss, and we exist to support each other and go through this loss together.

Discover for yourself the relief and community of support that we provide. Becoming a part of our community of compassion, grief support, and remembrance means talking, sharing your stories, laughing, and crying with others who are here to support and listen.

## SUNDAY CHATROOMS



Every Sunday, we provide free video chatrooms to help support our pet loss community. Come share your story and listen to the stories of others.

### SUNDAY AFTERNOON CHATROOM

**3:00pm - 4:15pm PST**

(6:00pm - 7:15pm) EST

### SUNDAY EVENING CHATROOM

**6:00pm - 7:15pm PST**

(9:00pm - 10:15pm) EST

[www.PetCloud.pet/sunday-support-groups](http://www.PetCloud.pet/sunday-support-groups)

## REACH OUT TODAY IF YOU NEED SUPPORT.

If you need to talk, don't wait! Schedule a free and private Zoom or phone call with us today, or find out more about our grief support services on our website. We are always just a phone call or click away.



To discover more grief support, resources, activities, and join our community visit us at [www.PetCloud.pet](http://www.PetCloud.pet) or call

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**1-833-PET-1234**  
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If you liked this booklet, please let us know and tell your veterinarian and others about us!

