

PET LOSS AND GRIEF RESOURCES FOR KIDS

Being a parent is already difficult enough, and navigating your own grief while supporting your child can feel incredibly overwhelming. Start by considering your own family's views on spirituality – for some, it may be appropriate to discuss ideas of heaven, reincarnation, or a beloved pet being with other deceased family members until you are reunited. The concept of the Rainbow Bridge may also provide solace. For other families, discussions can focus more on how it is a natural part of life to die – pets can become sick and even though veterinarians can try to help, sometimes their bodies and hearts and minds are too tired. I also find that children are remarkably sensitive and receptive to the truth – in older groups, looking into the physiology of your pet's illness may be helpful. Finally, I recommend emphasizing to your child that euthanasia is an act of love and kindness. Families enter into the process of euthanizing a pet knowing that they will be hurting, but their pets will not. It is something we do for those animals that we love deeply.

I encourage you to avoid euphemisms and phrases such as “going to sleep” or “won't wake up”, as this can lead to sleep anxiety and nightmares in some age groups. Do your best to answer your child's questions with compassion and understanding. It is normal for your child to act out or require more support in the days to weeks following the euthanasia of a pet. With all people, young or old, there is no exact timeline for grief. Allow yourself and your children the space and time to process emotions as needed. If your child wants to talk about your deceased pet, encourage them. Sharing happy stories can also help. If you are burying your pet at home, consider allowing your child to decorate the coffin or shroud you choose.

ONLINE RESOURCES

1. <http://csu-cvmb.colostate.edu/vth/diagnostic-and-support/argus/Pages/involving-children.aspx>
 - a. Helpful information regarding normal grief behavior for developmental stage
 - b. Advice about speaking to your child about pet death
2. <https://www.aplb.org/support/children-and-pet-loss/>
 - a. Developmental information, as well as ideas to help involve children in the grieving and memorial process
3. https://www.lapoflove.com/community/Pet-Loss-Support/Children-and-Pets-Grief-Resources?fbclid=IwAR1q3NIDWGwQ_W2nltP-bKKVZY9vEW_ISRoxYNfWkxHaLkwZHenssuRobog
 - a. List of additional online resources, as well as a book list

TANGIBLE ITEMS TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH GRIEF

1. Extra paw prints – provided by your veterinarian. Giving your child their own paw print that they can decorate, carry around, and touch whenever they want may help process some grief.
2. Printed blanket or pillow with a photo of pet. Shutterfly, Vistaprint, and other photo printing websites have excellent options.
3. Stuffed animal from Etsy. Or, if you're crafty, consider having your pet's photo printed onto fabric to DIY your own stuffie.
4. A framed photo of their pet for their room.
5. A memorial tree, garden, or stone that your children can visit in your yard.

BOOKS FOR KIDS

2-5+ years

1. Dog Heaven (Cynthia Rylant)
2. Cat Heaven (Cynthia Rylant)
3. Being Brave for Bailey (Dr. Corey Gut)
4. Staying Strong for Smokey (Dr. Corey Gut)

5. Goodbye Mog (Judith Kerr)
6. The Goodbye Book (Todd Parr)
7. I'll Always Love You (Hans Wilhelm)
8. I Miss My Pet (Pat Thomas)
9. My Yellow Balloon (Tiffany Papageorge) (general grief, not just pets)

5-9 years

1. The 10th Good Thing About Barney (Judith Viorst)
2. The Rainbow Bridge (Adrian Raeside)
3. When a Pet Dies (Mr. Rogers)
4. The Invisible String (Patrice Karst)
5. The Invisible Leash (Patrice Karst)
6. The Heaven of Animals (Nancy Tillman)
7. Saying Goodbye to Lulu (Corinne Demas)
8. I Miss My Best Friend (Penelope Lagos)
9. The Day Tiger Rose Said Goodbye (Jane Yolen)
10. Jasper's Day (Marjorie Blain Parker)
11. Sassie's New Home (Erin Albright)