

# Grieving the Loss of a Pet

Published by your Employee Assistance Provider 888-682-2224, ext. 401 March/April 2003



## The Cost of Grief

*In their 2003 survey of hidden costs of grief in America's workplace, The Grief Recovery Institute reported an astounding \$2.4 billion cost to American businesses annually due to pet loss.*<sup>(1)</sup>

Reduced ability to concentrate and absences from work are often compounded by fear of talking openly about the loss. The Boston Globe <sup>(2)</sup> reported that "when people fear their feelings won't be validated, they don't open up and can become isolated", which can make coping even more difficult. This EAP newsletter focuses on grieving the loss of a pet. Please read on for some helpful information.

## Common Reactions to Loss

### Reduced ability to concentrate

Sometimes, it might even begin before the actual loss if a pet experiences a long-term illness. In the workplace, it is important to identify this as a problem and attend to it as soon as possible, because poor concentration is known to increase the likeliness of workplace injury. In addition, other work related skills and tasks might be compromised.

### Food, Alcohol, and Drugs

It is common in times of grief and sadness to turn to old habits; particularly those that seem to provide comfort or escape. Unfortunately, the use of food, alcohol, and drugs only makes things worse, often keeping the grieving person from processing their loss and learning to cope.

## The Stages of Grief <sup>(3)</sup>

Whether for a pet, a loved one, or following a significant change in your life, the stages of grief are a natural process that we all go through. Everyone's experience is unique, but some common stages include:

### **Denial:** "This can't be"

A sense of shock and disbelief, not being able to accept that a pet is gone

### **Anger:** "WHY DID YOU HAVE TO DIE!?"

It is not unusual to feel angry – at your pet, yourself, your veterinarian, etc.

### **Bargaining:** "If I'd only taken him to the vet"

Second guessing your actions and wondering "what if"

### **Guilt:** "It's my fault"

Guilt is a normal part of the grieving process, particularly in instances where a pet owner must make a decision regarding euthanasia

### **Relief:** "I'm just relieved she's not suffering"

In this stage, there can be a sense of relief, but also a realization of the finality of the loss

### **Resolution:** "He was a good dog"

Overwhelming emotions taper off, healing begins. In this stage, a pet owner is able to speak about their loss without becoming emotionally overwhelmed.

## What to do

If you or someone you know loses a pet, be prepared to grieve. While everyone may not be able to relate to the loss, find someone who you think will or call your local veterinarian for information about local support groups or books that might be helpful. If you have struggled with food, alcohol, or drugs in the past, be cautious and seek support. Becoming isolated is the worst thing you can do. Please call your EAP provider at the number above for assistance.



(1)Killeen, W. (02-16-03). When Pet's Death is Loss of a Pal. The Boston Sunday Globe.

(2)The Grief Recovery Institute. (2003). The Grief Index. [www.grief.net](http://www.grief.net)

(3)Shaw, J & Cavanagh, K. (2000). The Grief Process and Dealing with the Loss of your Pet. VetMedCenter.com