

Parent Talk

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Coping with the Loss of a Pet

It's very common for families to introduce a furry friend to the household. Children especially frequently form strong bonds with pets, and it can give them a sense of responsibility. However, eventually there does come a point where caregivers need to have the difficult conversation about what happens when pets grow old. In this guide, we provide some tips for navigating these tough discussions and how families can support each other during the loss of a beloved family pet.

Explain Honestly

While it can be tempting to soften the blow of losing a pet with something like the classic "they moved to a big farm" line, it's much more beneficial to be honest with your child as this will help them appropriately process their grief. While you don't need to get very detailed or graphic, you should try to be open about what has happened and how this is just another part of life. This may be the first instance where you need to have a conversation with your children about death, so you ultimately can take it as gradually as you'd like. Try to be attuned to your child's emotions and explain difficult concepts in more simplistic, but honest, ways.



Focus On Positive Memories

Once you've broken the sad news to your child, emotions will likely be running high. Try to keep the emphasis on honoring and remembering your pet. Find old photographs and videos to share. Creating a scrapbook for your child to honor your pet is a great activity you can do as a family. During the process, continue to relive positive memories. "Remember when..." is a good way to lead the conversation, but you can also directly ask your child something like "what was your favorite memory..." to allow them to express their feelings directly.



Validate Feelings

When children first hear about the loss of a pet, they can understandably be overwhelmed by sadness, grief, and confusion. Make sure not to minimize these feelings and let your child process the loss openly and without judgment. Particularly for children who already struggle with conditions like depression, anxiety, or trauma, an event like this has the potential to trigger their symptoms. Make sure you provide a nurturing space for them and don't be shy about keeping their therapist on speed dial if you need support working through these feelings. The loss of a pet is hard even for neurotypical children, so there's no shame in giving neurodivergent children the extra support they may need.



Don't Forget About Yourself

As a caregiver, you're likely dealing with grief over the loss of a pet as well. Many of us consider our pets another member of the family, so saying goodbye can be just as hard for you as it is for your kids. Give yourself space to process things and make sure you're not neglecting your own needs as you care for your child. Take advantage of things like grief counseling through your vet's office or just give yourself extra grace during this period so you can mourn.


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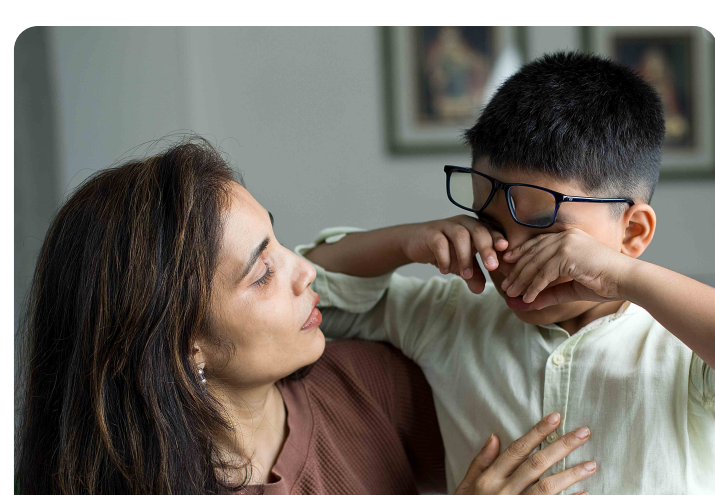
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Navigating Grief: Supporting Children Through Loss

In this seminar, we will discuss the nature and impact of grief on children and families, when to seek professional support, and what treatment can look like.

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