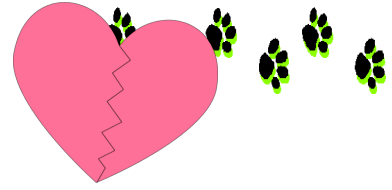


Help for the Loving Grieving Heart

Linda R. Harper, Ph.D.*



Why is it so hard?

We love our animal friends. Our relationships with them are unique and special bonds – they are like no other connections we have in our lives. They give us unconditional love, comfort, and pure joy!

- Our pets often see us through the many different transitions in our lives – they share special life events with us and may be the one constant and dependable relationship in difficult and changing times.
- We may spend more time with our animal companions than anyone else; we show them our true selves.
- They bring out the best in us, our ability to love grows larger.
- They touch us deeply – it's a connection of the soul. Animal lovers are blessed to have a natural ability to give and receive from the animals. Others may not understand the depth of the relationships that are formed.

Is my reaction normal?

Having strong and profound feelings of grief after pet loss is normal. You may feel devastated, anxious, and broken-hearted. Initial reactions may include anger, guilt, and a fear that you cannot go on without them.

What helps?

Honor Your Feelings. Accept all of what you feel. Hold your heart with compassion. You are grieving a lost treasure; a part of you. Take care of yourself. You know best what you need. Listen to you. Give comfort. Don't be surprised if just when you thought you were feeling better, a wave of sadness overcomes you. Stay open to the good feelings, too. Both sadness and joy can be in your heart at the same time.

Reframe the Story. Only when honoring your grief, can you begin to know your full experience of this unique and loving relationship -- including all the joy, growth, and gratitude you feel. You can choose to let go of the thoughts that block your peace of mind. You can then create the story that you want to tell yourself and others about your blessed bond. Remember, love is eternal.

Get Support. Give yourself what you need. Talk with a friend who understands. Consider attending a support group, workshop, or counseling; call a pet loss hotline. Explore online resources, poetry and books that comfort you and speak to *your* heart. Choose to honor your loved one in your own way and time.

Linda R. Harper, Ph.D., is a lifelong animal lover and clinical psychologist in the Chicago area for over 30 years. She is the facilitator of **WINGS, a pet loss support group sponsored by the Chicago Veterinary Medical Association; it meets at 7:30 pm on the first Wednesday of every month at 100 Tower Drive, #234 in Burr Ridge. Linda offers individual **Healing Heart** workshops at her Palos Park restorative workshop space. Please call her at **708.227.5330** or e-mail her at linda@drilindaharper.com for more information on scheduling your own private workshop.*



Consultants in Applied Psychology
11900 Southwest Highway, Suite 201
Palos Park, IL, 60464
www.drilindaharper.com
linda@drilindaharper.com