



The Rainbows Bridge Poem

*Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.
When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone
here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge.*

*There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so
they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water
and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.*

*All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health
and vigor. Those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and
strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days
and times gone by. The animals are happy and content, except
for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to
them, who had to be left behind.*

*They all run and play together, but the day comes when one
suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are
intent. His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run
from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying
him faster and faster.*



You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....

Author Unknown

COPING WITH THE HURT

Understanding Your Feelings of Loss

After your animal has died or been lost, it is natural and normal to feel grief and sorrow. While grieving is an internal and private response, there are certain shared processes that most people experience. By understanding the grieving process, you will be better prepared to manage your grief and to help others in the family who are also sharing the loss.

The Stages of Grief

There are many signs of grief, but not everyone experiences them all or in the same order. You may experience **denial, anger, guilt, depression, acceptance, and resolution.**

Your first reaction may be **denial**—denial that the animal has died. This reaction may occur even before death, when you first learn the extent of your animal's illness or injuries. Often, the more sudden the death, the more difficult the loss is to accept.

Anger and guilt often follow denial. This anger can be directed toward people you normally love and respect, including your family and your veterinarian.

People will perhaps hurting those whom they do not mean to hurt. You may feel guilty or blame others for: not recognizing the illness earlier; not doing something sooner; not being able to afford other types of treatment; or for being careless and allowing the animal to be injured.

Depression is also part of the range of emotions experienced after the death of a loved animal. This is the period when you usually feel the greatest sense of loss. The tears flow, there are knots in your stomach, and you feel drained of all your energy. Day-to-day tasks can seem impossible. Sometimes you may even ask yourself if you can go on without the animal. The answer is yes, but there are times when special assistance may be helpful.

Eventually, you will come to terms with your feelings. You can begin to resolve and accept your animal's death. When you have reached **resolution and acceptance**, the feelings of anger, denial, guilt, and depression may reappear. If this does occur, the intensity of these feelings will be much less, and with



time, these feelings will be replaced with fond memories.

Although the signs of grief apply whether the loss is of an animal or a human loved one, grieving is a personal process. Some people take longer than others to come to terms with denial, anger, guilt, or depression, and each loss is different. If you understand that these are normal reactions, you will be better prepared to cope with your own feelings and to help others face theirs. Family and friends should be reassured that sorrow and grief are normal, natural responses to death.

They may not understand

Well meaning family and friends may not realize how important your animal was to you or the intensity of your grief. Comments they make may seem cruel and uncaring. Be honest with yourself and others about how you feel. If despair mounts, talk to someone who will listen about your animal and the illness and death. Talk about your sorrow, but also about the fun times you and the animal spent together, the activities you enjoyed, and the memories that are meaningful.

The hurt is so deep

If you or a family member has great difficulty in accepting your animal's death and cannot resolve feelings of grief and sorrow, you may want to discuss those feelings with a person who is trained to understand the grieving process. Your veterinarian certainly understands the loving relationship you have lost and may be able to suggest animal loss support groups and hot lines, grief counselors, clergymen, social workers, physicians, or psychologists who can be helpful. Talking about your loss will often help.

THE NEXT STEP

Should I get another animal?

The death of an animal can upset you emotionally, especially when euthanasia is involved. Some people may feel they would never want another animal. For others, a new animal may help them get over the loss more quickly.

Just as grief is a personal experience, the decision of when, if ever, to bring a new animal into your home is also a personal one. If a family member is having difficulty accepting the animal's death, bringing a new

animal into the home before that person has resolved his or her grief may imply that the life of the deceased animal was unworthy of the grief that is still being felt. Family members should come to an agreement on the appropriate time to acquire a new animal. Although you can never replace the animal you lost, you can obtain another to share your life.

Remembering your pet

The period from birth to old age is much shorter in pets than in people. Death is part of the life cycle for all creatures. It cannot be avoided, but its impact can be met with understanding and compassion. Try to recall the good times you spent with your pet. By remembering the pleasure of those times, you can realize your pet was worthy of your grief. You may also wish to establish a memorial of some type in honor of your pet.

HELPFUL BOOKS

1. Nieburg H A, Fischer A. *Pet Loss: A Thoughtful Guide For Adults And Children*. New York, Harper & Row, 1982.
2. Kubler-Ross E. *Death, The Final Stage Of Growth*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Simon and Schuster, 1986.
3. Church J A. *Joy In A Wooly Coat; Living With, Loving & Letting Go Of Treasured Animal Friends*. Tiburon, Calif, H J Kramer Inc, 1987.
4. Grollman E A. *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent And Child*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1990.
5. Quackenbusch J, Graveline D. *When Your Pet Dies: How To Cope With Your Feelings*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1985.
6. Anderson M. *Coping With Sorrow On The Loss Of Your Pet*. Kingston, Wash, Peregrine Press, 1987.
7. Lee L, Lee M. *Absent Friend*. Bucks, England, Henston Ltd., 1992.
8. Montgomery M, Montgomery H. *Goodbye My Friend*. Minneapolis, Montgomery Press, 1991.
9. Sife W. *The Loss Of A Pet*. New York, Howell Book House, 1993.
10. Lemieux C M. *Coping With The Loss Of A Pet*. Reading, Penn, Wallace R. Clark, 1988. References



Desert Hills
ANIMAL CLINIC
Family Healthcare for your Pet

Bryan Neidigh, DVM
Cheryl Rahal, DVM ACVIM
Jason Gold, DVM

1, 3, 5, and 10 are out of print; you may be able to obtain copies of these books from your local library.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

1. White E B. *Charlotte's Web*. New York, Dell Publishing Co., 1952.
2. Viorst J. *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*. New York, Aladdin Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1971.
3. Rogers F. *Mr. Rogers' First Experience: When A Pet Dies*. New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1988.
4. Wilhelm H. *I'll Always Love You*. New York, Crown Publishers Inc, 1985.
5. Sibbitt S. *Oh, Where Has My Pet Gone? A Pet Loss Memory Book, AGES 3-103*. Wayzata, Minn, B. Libby Press, 1991.