



Helping Older Adults through Pet Loss

You would think that loss affects us—children, adults, and the elderly—in exactly the same ways, wouldn't you? But grieving in older adults can be more difficult simply because of all the loss they have endured in the past.

Grief can be compounded by successive “layers” of loss—making its effects stronger and more debilitating. According to experts, the top 5 ways you can help a grieving older adult include:

- 1. Giving the person time.** Sometimes older adults need more time to become aware of their feelings and express them. Sometimes they need more time to complete other activities as well. Giving an older person extra time shows that you are concerned and respectful of the person's needs.
- 2. Pointing out signs of sadness or changes in behavior.** This may help the person become aware of his or her feelings and may help the person feel more comfortable talking with you about how he or she feels.
- 3. Spending time with the person.** An older adult who often seems to be alone can benefit from your company. Invite him or her to go for a walk or have a cup of coffee. Feelings of loneliness may last for a long time when an older adult has lost something or someone special, especially a spouse.

4. Talking about the loss. Ask the person to talk about his or her loss. Older people, especially those who have experienced several losses over a short period of time, are often helped by sharing memories of the one they lost.

5. Watching for signs of prolonged grieving or depression. If you have concerns that an older adult is having difficulty working through his or her grieving, talk with a health professional.

Remember, older adults often have more than one loss to deal with at a time, so deciding to talk about each separately may also help the person feel less overwhelmed and more able to cope with their emotions.

Our website is rich with valuable resources to help you and your family deal with the loss of a cherished pet. We invite you to stop by the site, where you'll have immediate access to a collection of articles and downloadable guides to support you during the days and weeks after the death of your pet.