



Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Pet

The death of a pet is often one of the first significant losses a child experience. For primary school-aged children (approximately ages 5–11), pets are close companions and part of daily life, so their death can feel confusing and deeply sad. This information sheet is designed to help parents support children at this age in a caring, practical way.

How Primary School-Aged Children Experience Grief

Children in this age group are beginning to understand that death is permanent, but they may not fully grasp why it happens. Grief may come in waves rather than all at once.

Common reactions include:

- Sadness, tearfulness, or quietness
- Anger, irritability, or frustration
- Guilt (believing they caused the pet's death or could have prevented it)
- Repeated questions about how and why the pet died
- Worries about other pets or family members dying
- Changes in behaviour, sleep, or concentration at school

All of these responses are normal.

Talking to Your Child About the Loss

- **Be honest and clear.** Use simple, truthful language that matches your child's age.
- **Use the word "died."** Avoid phrases like "went to sleep" or "went away," which can be confusing or frightening.
- **Answer questions patiently.** Children may ask the same questions many times as they try to make sense of what happened.
- **Acknowledge feelings.** Let your child know it's okay to feel sad, angry, or confused.
- **Reassure them.** Make it clear that they are not to blame and that most pets are well cared for when they die.

How Parents Can Support Grieving Children

- **Encourage expression.** Talking, drawing, writing stories, or playing can help children express feelings they can't yet put into words.
- **Keep routines.** School, bedtime, and normal activities help children feel safe and secure.
- **Spend extra time together.** Your presence and attention are very comforting.
- **Model healthy grief.** Let your child see that adults feel sad too, and that those feelings become easier over time.
- **Be patient.** Grief doesn't follow a schedule—some days will be harder than others.

Helping Children Remember Their Pet

Remembering a pet can help children process their loss and celebrate the relationship they had.

Ideas include:

- Making a memory box with photos, drawings, or the pet's collar

- Drawing pictures or writing a short story about the pet
- Planting a tree or flower in the pet's memory
- Holding a small family goodbye or remembrance ceremony
- Creating a scrapbook or poster of favourite memories

Supporting Children at School

You may wish to let your child's teacher know about the loss. Some children may:

- Be more emotional or tired
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Become upset by classroom topics related to animals or death

Understanding adults can make a big difference.

Helpful Books for Primary School–Aged Children

Reading together can help children understand their feelings and open up conversations.

Ages 5–7

- **I'll Always Love You** by Hans Wilhelm
- **Goodbye, Mousie** by Robie H. Harris
- **The Invisible Leash** by Patrice Karst

Ages 7–9

- **The Tenth Good Thing About Barney** by Judith Viorst
- **Saying Goodbye to Lulu** by Corinne Demas
- **When a Pet Dies** by Fred Rogers

Ages 9–11

- **The Forever Dog** by Bill Cochran
- **Because of Winn-Dixie** by Kate DiCamillo (themes of loss and healing)
- **Bridge to Terabithia** by Katherine Paterson (broader themes of grief)

Final Thoughts

Losing a pet is painful, but it can also be an important opportunity for children to learn about love, loss, and coping with difficult emotions. With honesty, reassurance, and support, primary school–aged children can grieve in healthy ways and carry positive memories of their pet forward.

This sheet can be shared with schools, counsellors, or other caregivers supporting your child.