

FINDING HOPE

After The Death Of Your Dog



Jason Troyer, PhD

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Jason Troyer, PhD

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Finding Hope *After the Death of Your Dog*



By Jason Troyer, PhD

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Jason Troyer

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Jason Troyer
Mt Hope Grief Services
Maryville, TN
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This book is not designed to replace information from a mental health professional or a physician. The reader should consult an appropriate professional in matters relating to his or her physical and emotional health.

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To the reader,

I am deeply sorry about the death of your dog. Anyone who has shared his or her life with dogs knows that their loyalty and love are unmatched. Therefore, the death of a dog always leaves a hole in our heart. I hope this booklet will provide you with comfort, hope, and information following the death of your companion. Feel free to use the table of contents to skip around and find answers and support for your specific concerns. For example, there are sections on: dealing with feelings of sadness and guilt, ways to honor and remember your dog, and how to talk to children about death.

I hope this booklet will be helpful to you as you mourn the death of your companion.

Sincerely,

JASON TROYER, PHD

www.GriefPlan.com

Guiding Principles

There are many different perspectives on death and grief associated with companion animals. This list summarizes my guiding principles and provides you with a snapshot of the contents of this booklet and my views on assisting dog owners who are grieving.

- Most people consider their dogs to be a member of their families — therefore, the death of a dog is a significant loss.
- The length and severity of grief following the death of a dog is often surprising.
- Those who aren't "dog people" rarely understand the significance of this loss.
- The death of a dog is an important opportunity to teach children about death and create a healthy understanding of grief and loss.
- There are many healthy ways to express grief and all forms should be respected.
- It is normal to adapt human rituals and funerals to grieve a dog.
- Children of different ages require different types of support and assistance following the death of a companion animal.
- Guilt, in addition to grief, is a common reaction after euthanizing a dog (but we shouldn't be so hard on ourselves).
- In addition to expressing our emotions, being active in our grief rituals can be very helpful for bereaved dog owners.
- Most people will slowly feel less pain and grief over time, but some may benefit from professional assistance.

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Mikey's Story

I was sobbing with tears streaming down my face as I sat on the examining room floor at my veterinarian's office. I was cradling Mikey's head in my lap. My wife and I had rescued Mikey, a yellow Labrador retriever, eight years ago. After learning that cancer had completely overtaken him, we had to make the difficult decision to euthanize Mikey. Having not grown up with dogs, this was my first experience with the death of an animal companion.

Thankfully, I had a wonderful veterinarian. She was supportive, gentle, compassionate, wise, and gave me plenty of time throughout the process. Yet, as I sat on the floor with Mikey I still had many questions and concerns. What would I tell my one-year-old and three-year-old daughters when I got home? Why was my reaction so strong? Would Eddie (our chocolate Lab) be all right without his companion? What would my grief look like over the next weeks, months, and years, and what was normal?

Although I was an expert on grief (as related to deceased humans), I realized that I knew little about dealing with the death of an animal companion. Now I realize that my questions are common among those whose dogs have died. After extensive study I have written this booklet to help provide some guidance, comfort, and hope for those who are suffering the loss of an animal companion.

Of course, no book can take away your grief. But this booklet will give you a starting point for dealing with your grief. I hope that you'll find some answers to your questions and strategies for helping yourself and your loved ones as you mourn your dog.

Grief Reactions

Why is My Reaction So Strong?

I'll be honest — the grief I experienced after Mikey's death surprised me. After all, I am considered to be a grief expert. I have written a book on how to counsel grieving people. I have counseled bereaved people. I have a doctorate in counseling psychology and am a college professor. Yet, while I was on the floor of the veterinarian's office, I was overwhelmed by my response to Mikey's death.

As I wrestled with my reaction, a conversation with Joseph popped into my head. Joseph* was a widower I had interviewed for a study. When I had asked him about different deaths he had experienced (other than the death of his wife), his first response was to talk about the death of his dog, Bilbo. Joseph and his wife had spent 15 years with their poodle. After Bilbo's death, Joseph was surprised that his grief for his dog was much greater than the grief he felt after his estranged brother died. Joseph finally came to the realization that "Loving is touching." Joseph recognized that despite trying to be connected to his brother, they were never able to connect. Yet Joseph and Bilbo had a deep connection. They were constantly together and their connection was deep and multifaceted; they had a physical, emotional, and psychological bond.

After the interview, I began to appreciate how deeply Mikey and I had been connected. My relationship with Mikey was built on daily physical contact and a deep emotional and psychological relationship. That type of connection with most people — even family members — can be rare. This realization was crucial in helping me understand why the loss of an animal companion can be so overwhelming. For those who have never had this type of bond with an animal, the loss we experience may seem excessive. Yet those of us with animal companions can point to thousands of daily interactions — a quick pat on the head, a nuzzle in the morning, a jump up onto our lap — that reinforce the deep bond we have with our dogs.

Furthermore, our animal companions play the same roles for us that people do. They are our friends, family, and confidantes. After I gave a presentation about grief, a woman approached me. Sarah* thanked me for acknowledging that the grief we feel after the death of a companion animal is as significant as the grief we feel after the loss of a human friend or family member. Sarah was still grieving the death of her dog (Ginger), and she wanted to share the realization she had made. While trying to figure out why her grief was so strong, Sarah realized that Ginger entered her life just after she and her husband found out they would be unable to have children. Ginger helped Sarah heal from the loss of her dream of having children. Therefore, when Ginger died, Sarah grieved not only for her dog, but also everything that Ginger symbolized. Quite naturally, Sarah re-experienced her grief over her inability to have children. Once Sarah fully recognized all the pieces, the extent of her grief made sense. This was more than grieving a dog (although that in itself is enough) — this was even deeper.

I believe Sarah's story is a common one. For many people, dogs not



only serve as loving companions, but also as a symbol or reminder for significant events in our life. Perhaps your dog was a key part of your life as you dealt with a loss: a divorce or break-up, your children leaving the home, or a loss of a spouse, child, friend, parent, or sibling. For many people, their dogs also serve as reminders for important changes they have gone through including job

changes, retirement, having children, new relationships, or starting over in life in some way. For children and adolescents, dogs have often been with them for most of their lives — they literally may not have experienced a time without their dog in their lives. For young adults, their dog may have been the one consistent thing in life as they attended school, moved out on their own, and began new relationships, etc.

Through all of this your dog was by your side and continually showered you with unconditional love and acceptance. Your dog was always ready to listen, never judged you, and reassured you that things will get better. The truth is that many of us are closer to our dogs than we are to many family members. After all, dogs never criticize us for having a bad day, make comments about our weight, make fun of our latest haircut, or expect us to be something we're not. They just love us, accept us, and want to be with us. So when people tell me that we should not grieve the death of our animal companions I feel sorry for them, because I know they have never been blessed with a close relationship with a dog. As difficult as it is to lose an animal companion, it is worse to never have had the relationship at all.

*Names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.



Common Grief Reactions

People have a wide variety of reactions to the death of their animal companion. Furthermore, your reaction may change throughout the day and over the weeks and months following the death. Here are several common grief reactions following the death of a dog.

- Sadness & Crying
- Guilt & Self Blame
- Helplessness & Shock
- Loneliness & Yearning
- Anger & Irritability
- Fatigue & Lack of Energy
- Insomnia & Restlessness
- Forgetful & Absentminded
- Lack of appetite
- Dreams about the deceased
- Regret

Most Grief Reactions are Normal

A wide variety of reactions to the death of your dog are normal. For example, it is completely normal to find yourself looking for your dog or even calling out to him before remembering that your dog has died. It makes perfect sense to feel pangs of grief when you see her dog bed is empty and her leash is unused. You may cry when you walk or drive by places where your dog loved to walk and play. Seeing other people with their dogs may be a painful reminder of what has been lost. You may be unable to stop crying. These are normal reactions to the death of your dog — don't let anyone tell you differently. Of course, just because they are normal reactions doesn't mean they won't be painful.

Furthermore, people express their grief in different ways. Some people express their grief through thinking about their loss. For example, I found myself thinking about Mikey while I drove to and from work. I felt most comfortable grieving for him by myself and in a private way. Others will want to put their grief into action. They may choose to donate money, time, or supplies to a local animal shelter or rescue organization as a way to honor their dog. Others will express their grief through their tears and sharing their memories with others. All of these expressions of grief are normal and healthy.

What about the Stages of Grief?

The most widely known theory of grief is Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's Stages of Grief. Her stages — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance — have been frequently depicted in television shows and movies. A common assumption is that Kubler-Ross's stages are the "right" way to respond to death but this is a false assumption. Many people experience some of these reactions, but there is no evidence that everyone must go through all of the reactions in a specific order. Grief reactions are very individualized — they do not follow only one pattern. So don't be worried if you don't feel angry or if you don't experience denial — each person's reactions are normal, and you shouldn't try to match any specific stage of grief. (If you're worried that your grief reactions aren't normal — see the section on "Should I Get Professional Help?").

Grief Reactions After Euthanasia and Accidents

AFTER EUTHANASIA

Your grief may be influenced by how your dog died. Like many others, you may experience tremendous guilt after deciding to euthanize (i.e., “put to sleep”) your dog. Most people have never had the responsibility to make such an important decision for another living creature. You may feel this guilt even if your dog was in terrible pain or was incurably ill. You may also dwell on all of the times when you weren’t the “perfect” dog owner — you may beat yourself up for not taking enough walks or playing with your dog more, etc. Thoughts such as “Why didn’t I take my animal to the vet sooner?” and “Should I have waited?” are common following the choice to euthanize a dog. I know that I often think back and imagine times when I could have taken Mikey to the lake more, when I could have been more patient with him, when I could have thrown his retrieving toy a few more times. But when I’m really honest with myself, I realize that the perfect dog owner doesn’t exist (just as the perfect parent, spouse, or child doesn’t exist). These thoughts and reactions are a normal, but difficult part of grieving for a dog.

You may also feel relief after the death of your dog. Sometimes the decision to euthanize comes after months or years of helping your dog fight an illness. These long-term battles can involve frequent medical appointments, a special diet, injections, countless types of medications, accidents in the house (e.g., vomit, diarrhea, etc.), and large vet bills. It is normal to feel relief that (1) most importantly, your dog is no longer in pain, and (2) you no longer have to expend the energy and money to continue the fight. But you may also feel guilt regarding your sense of relief. You may question your motives and wonder if you chose euthanasia just because your dog’s needs were extensive. I know I’ve had these feelings.

Obviously each of us would love to have another day with our dog — as long as that day was spent when our dog was feeling his or her best. But the truth is that if you had to euthanize your dog, he or she was not in good health and was not his or her normal self. If you think about the qualities that made your dog unique and lovable — perhaps his or her personality, energy, playfulness, friendliness, etc. — it was likely that many of these characteristics were being obstructed/repressed by illness or pain. Because your dog can't tell you when the pain is too much, you have to rely on these clues (like when your dog just doesn't seem like him/herself anymore) to know when it is the right time.

There is no magic pill or words that will remove your feelings of guilt after choosing euthanasia. But I'll bet your decision was made in partnership with your veterinarian and that it was a decision you didn't take lightly. If you decided to euthanize because your dog was in pain or ill, then you put your dog's needs before your own — and that is what is important. Putting our dogs' comfort and needs before our own is the ultimate demonstration of care, concern, and love. I believe that all dogs want their human companions to feel at peace over the decision to euthanize. Imagine your dog could respond to you right now — I'm sure your dog would say, "It's ok. It was the right decision."



AFTER AN ACCIDENT

If your dog died as a result of an accident, your grief reaction will be affected. It is common to feel guilt if you believe your actions led to your dog's death, and it is natural to be angry at others if we believe they are at fault. The most important step is to recognize if the death really was an accident (Thankfully it is rare that a dog's death is the result of an intentional act).

It is also common to second-guess ourselves and think about all the "what ifs" and "I should haves" — what if I had double-checked the gate, what if I had kept her on a leash, I should have never left her alone, I should never have gone there, etc. As best you can, break down the situation to see what role you (or someone else) really played. I expect you'll find your intention was never to allow your dog to be harmed and that is important. After all, would your dog want you to be consumed with guilt and regret? Every dog I've ever known has wanted his or her human companions to be happy — and this situation is no exception.

How Long Should My Grief Last?

In many cultures funeral ceremonies for deceased family members can last for several weeks or more, and grief is viewed as a natural reaction — not a disorder. Unfortunately in the United States, many people expect grief to be something that we "get over" in a matter of days or weeks. This expectation to rush through grief is even more pronounced when an animal companion dies because many people cannot appreciate the special bond between humans and animals. Your grief may last a year or more and animal lovers will occasionally feel grief even longer than that. Most people find that their grief will slowly lessen over the first several months.

Should I Get Help?

You should always seek professional psychological assistance if you think it would be helpful to you. If you believe you need individual counseling, begin by talking with potential psychotherapists (i.e., professional counselors, clinical social workers, psychologists) about their views on animal loss and how they work with grieving people before you begin working with them. Most mental health professionals recognize the importance of the death of a companion animal, but you always want to ensure you are working with a professional who is taking your concerns seriously and with whom you feel comfortable. It is also important to realize that a significant loss, such as the death of your dog, may trigger previous problems. For example, if you have struggled with anxiety, depression, substance abuse, or other mental health concerns in the past, a significant loss may cause a relapse.



Signs You May Need Professional Help

- Your grief has not lessened (or has gotten worse) after several months.
- You are experiencing symptoms of grief, depression, or anxiety that impair your ability to take care of yourself, be effective in your work, or maintain your relationships with others.
- You experience any thoughts of self-harm or suicide (always seek help in these situations).
- Your use of alcohol, medications, or illegal substances impairs your ability to be a fully-functioning person.

Helping Children After the Death of a Dog

A child's first experience with death is often through the death of an animal companion. I firmly believe that children learn "rules" about grief through these experiences and these lessons are often repeated after later deaths (animal and human). For example, if a family never talks about a family dog after his death, then the child may learn the 'rule': we never talk about the deceased. Later, the child may incorrectly believe that we shouldn't talk about grandma after she dies. Therefore, the way we help children grieve the death of their dog may have important implications for understanding later losses.



Helping Children – General Concepts and Advice

- Encourage your child to talk about your dog, the process of the dog's death, and related topics.
- Children will infer a great deal from your actions and demeanor. Be honest about your reactions and demonstrate to children that it is appropriate to express sadness and talk about your dog. They will learn that it's normal to miss their dog and feel loss.
- Children may respond to grief by acting out, being frustrated and angry, feeling sad, wanting time alone, and other responses. Try to be especially patient with them.
- Avoid rushing the transition — it is ok to leave out bowls, leashes, dog toys, etc. for a few days or weeks while the entire family adjusts to the loss. There are no prizes for “getting over” one's grief as quickly as possible.
- Encourage your children to share their memories associated with their dog.
- Be as clear as possible about the cause of death. Don't simply say, “the dog went to sleep forever.” Children often confuse the concepts of sleep and death, and statements like this make it worse.
- If your dog was euthanized, reinforce that death was not painful and the dog no longer experiences any discomfort.
- Children and adults can benefit from rituals after the death of a dog. See the sections on “Expressing Grief and Remembering — For Children” and “Honoring Your Dog” for examples.
- Don't be worried if your child doesn't express grief or sadness right away. Children may not fully grasp the implications of death and may not know how to show their reaction.

- Children may feel guilty for some previous action (that is usually completely unrelated to the death of the dog). Be sure children understand that the dog's death was not their fault, nor was it punishment for any action they might have done or any thought they had.
- Avoid lying to a child of any age. Stories about dogs "going to live on a farm" may seem like a convenient way to avoid upsetting your children, but they will likely feel betrayed when they are old enough to discover the truth.

Expressing Grief and Remembering - For Children

All children can benefit from various ways to express their grief and memories. The easiest method is simply to talk about your dog and relate special memories. You might discuss events and topics such as these:

- The first time you met your dog.
- The adjustments you had to make as the dog joined the family.
- Your dog's favorite toys, foods, and activities.
- A time when your dog did something mischievous.

Other activities that may be helpful include:

- Looking at pictures and videos of you dog.
- Drawing, coloring, or painting pictures that relate to or include your dog.
- Writing about your memories of your dog (for example, poems, songs, letters, etc.).

Be sure to have your children be a part of any ritual or activity (see "Honoring & Remembering Your Dog.") It can be immensely helpful for children.

Suggestions for Specific Age Groups

PRESCHOOLERS (AGES 2-5)

Some parents believe that preschool children are incapable of grief — this is a faulty assumption. If a child is old enough to understand that a dog is part of the family, they are old enough to experience grief and loss. This is why it is important that they be told what has happened. Preschool children do not understand the permanence of death; they often equate death with sleep and pretending. You will probably have to remind them repeatedly that your deceased dog isn't just sleeping and can't come back tomorrow. This is normal for children of this age. Further confusing the matter is that we often use “put to sleep” in place of “euthanize.” Be as clear as possible when explaining the cause of the death. Specifically, explain the differences between death and sleep in as simple terms as possible.

CHILDREN (AGES 6-12)

Younger children in this age group may also need to be reminded of the permanence of death, but most children will have an accurate understanding of the physical aspects of death. Children of this age will have many questions about the process of death and related spiritual and religious questions. Furthermore, they will be quick to relate this loss to other deaths (e.g., deceased grandparents or other family members). Some parents try to explain too much and may launch into a long, intricate theological and philosophical speech. It is best to keep it simple and honest, especially for children under 10. Most importantly, be responsive to children's questions and never make them feel ashamed for asking them.

ADOLESCENTS (AGES 13-ADULT)

Adolescents will often grieve more like adults, and they typically understand the permanence and irreversibility of loss. However, adolescents may express their grief in rebellious or defiant ways. The death of a beloved dog may cause an adolescent to consider and ask about more complicated questions about life, death, what happens after death, and the meaning of life. It is common for families to get dogs when their children are relatively young — therefore adolescents may not remember a time before their dog was a part of the family. Recognize that their bond with their dog may have developed over 10, 15 years, or more.



Children and Loss: Patience and Perspective

It is important for parents to understand how significant their dog may be in their child's life and how tricky the concept of death is. Most adults have had previous experiences with grief and know that it stings terribly at first but usually gets better over time. However, for most children the death of their dog may be their first significant loss, and they may believe that their current level of pain and sadness will continue indefinitely. Remember that your child is learning a new and complex concept: that living creatures die and don't return or come back to life. Just as a preschooler has to learn that she can't simply wish that Christmas will be tomorrow and make it happen, children aren't born with an understanding of death. Be patient with your child as he or she deals with the death of their dog and begins to comprehend what death means.



Including Children in Funerals and Rituals

It may be especially helpful for children to participate in a family funeral or other ritual. This may include burying your dog, spreading the ashes, or simply telling stories about your dog. Funerals or other rituals can be helpful for several reasons. First, they provide some structure during an uncertain time. Children want to know “what should I do?” (adults often want to know the same thing). Secondly, funerals and rituals provide an occasion to express loss and show emotions. Children often appreciate being given an explicit opportunity to talk about their feelings, what they miss about their dog, and what they will always remember. While no child should be forced to participate in a funeral, they should be given a chance to make an age-appropriate contribution. Finally, funerals and other rituals can help reinforce that their dog was an important part of the family and that it is normal to feel grief and loss.

If a Child's Actions Led to the Death

If a child's actions led to the death of your dog, it is important to choose your words carefully. In most cases, a child will assume his or her actions caused the dog's death — whether they really did or not. First, it is important to determine the child's involvement in the accident. In most cases, the death is a result of a mistake and bad luck — for example, letting a dog go outside and then being hit by a car. If the child's actions are related to the death, it is probably due to a misconception or misunderstanding. Most children are unable to predict the potential consequences of their actions or may not understand the impact of their actions. For example, many children don't understand that some things people eat can be poisonous to dogs.

Most children will feel extreme guilt over their dog's death, so it is unlikely that you'll need to lecture them or punish them. It is common for children who feel guilt to express it as extreme sadness and/or anger. As mentioned in the section on Grief Reactions after an Accident it is important to talk about the child's intent and how mistakes and accidents can happen even when no one does anything wrong. Emphasize forgiveness and that you want to help them as they deal with their emotions and reactions.

Service Options: Cremation or Burial?

After your dog dies, you have several service options; the most common options are cremation or burial.

Cremation

About 2 million animals are cremated each year in the United States. Animal crematories typically offer several options. In a private cremation you will receive all the ashes of your dog (and only your dog's ashes). Furthermore, this also means that your animal does not go through the cremation process with any other animals — only one animal at a time. If it is important to you that there be no co-mingling of ashes, then a private cremation is the only process you should consider. Another option is separate or individual cremation (also called “partitioned cremation”) — which typically means that multiple animals are cremated at the same time, but are kept divided by partitions while going through the process.

Many crematories also offer a communal or group cremation option. For a smaller fee they will cremate your dog as part of a larger group — in these situations, it is impossible to keep the ashes separate. With group cremation, you may receive mixed ashes or no ashes. These terms (private, separate/individual, communal, group) are not standardized across all providers, so be sure to ask specific questions about the process if this is an important concern for you. Many animal cremation facilities will allow you to observe the cremation and to stay during the process, if you choose.

The most significant benefit of cremation is that you have the greatest number of options for memorializing your dog. You can keep the ashes in an urn, spread them at a place of significance (for example, a flower garden), bury them at a meaningful location, have the ashes incorporated into memorial jewelry, etc. Furthermore, ashes can be divided among family members or for different purposes — for example, some ashes can be spread, some kept in an urn, some incorporated into a piece of jewelry, etc. Although some people feel uncomfortable with the process of cremation, the trends in the United States are shifting (for example, over 40% of Americans are now cremated and it is expected to be more than 50% by 2020).

Burial

Another popular option is burial. A burial can be a simple affair or can include all the meaningful details of a human burial. Many service providers will conduct animal burial services. With burial, the location is one of your most important decisions. Many people want to bury their animal companion in a place they can return to later. This may not always be possible if you bury your dog on your personal property. Many people have been distraught at having to sell a house and leave behind the burial spot of a beloved dog. Thankfully, most communities have a dedicated cemetery for animals (it may be a portion of a human cemetery). This provides family members with a permanent place to return to remember their dog.



Honoring and Remembering your Dog

Grief experts used to think it was important to eventually “let go” of the deceased. Therefore the assumed goal of grief was to forget the deceased. We now know that this is not a healthy and adaptive way to grieve. Instead, it is healthy to maintain some connections with the deceased (humans and animals). It can be healthy and normal to have “continuing bonds” with our animal companions after they die. These bonds may include thinking and dreaming about them, talking to them and about them, visiting a gravesite or special place, and other ways of feeling connected to them. I believe these different ways of honoring and remembering our dogs can be an important part of the grief process, even if others don’t understand why it is so important.

A note of caution: It is possible to be too heavily invested in your continuing bonds with your dog — to the point where it interferes with grief and maintaining your relationships with the living. But this is not a common reaction. Most people are able to balance remembering and honoring their dog while continuing to love the important people and animals in their lives who are still living.



WAYS TO HONOR AND REMEMBER YOUR DOG

1) *Do something meaningful with your dog’s ashes.*

One benefit of cremation is that your dog’s ashes can be kept or spread at a variety of meaningful locations (or even divided to be used in multiple ways). You may find some of the following options meaningful for you:

- Spread your dog’s ashes at a meaningful location such as a local animal cemetery, a favorite walking or playing area (hiking trail, park, lake), etc.

- Keep your dog’s ashes in a meaningful urn or other container.
- Incorporate a small amount of ashes into jewelry or other containers (see www.petgriefbooks.com for examples).

2) *Create a photo album, scrapbook, memory book, video montage, or other visual way to remember your dog*

Having visual reminders can be an important way to honor your companion. All of these variations can help you remember your dog and reinforce how important his or her role was in your life.

3) *Volunteer for and/or contribute to an animal organization whose mission you support.*

Many grieving people find it necessary to do something active as part of their grief response. They feel the need to “do something.” Volunteering for a local organization or providing financial support can be a wonderful way to honor your dog.

4) *Keep a special reminder with you.*

Most people feel an extreme sense of loss after their dog dies. We’re accustomed to having our dog around us. Therefore, it may help to have something with you that reminds you of your dog. For example, you might carry a picture of your dog, a significant piece of jewelry that reminds you of your dog, a figurine that looks like your dog, your dog’s tags, or something else of significance — as a way to continue to feel close to your dog

There are many different ways to honor and remember your dog. It doesn’t matter if other people don’t understand why a specific item, action, or ritual is significant for you. As long as your way of honoring your dog doesn’t hurt you or others and doesn’t cut you off from other important relationships, then you should choose ways to remember your dog that are meaningful to *you*.



Should I get Another Dog?

The death of an animal companion, especially if the dog was the only animal in the family, can leave a huge hole. As you consider adding a new dog to your life, you should think carefully about these questions:

- Would getting a new dog be fair to me and the dog?
- How long should I wait?
- Am I trying to replace my deceased dog?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Some people find that having a new dog in their life is the best form of grief therapy. Others feel that they need time to grieve their previous dog and that it wouldn't be fair to a new dog. Clearly, you should not get a new dog with the expectation that the dog will “replace” the deceased dog. For example, you will likely be frustrated if you expect your new dog to act like the previous one. Getting a new dog that is a different breed than the deceased dog can reduce the expectation that the new dog is a “replacement” — although many people are particularly attached to a specific breed. The best advice I can give is to be honest with yourself about your reasons for getting a new dog. It isn't fair for your new dog if you expect that she will have the exact same personality as your previous dog — so if you're looking for a “replacement” in this sense, then you should probably wait. If the goal is to share your home, love, and attention with a new companion and you realize that this will be a new relationship, then getting another dog can be a great idea.

A Final Word of Hope

While no words can take away your grief, I hope this booklet has provided you with information and comfort. I want to remind you that experiencing grief over the death of a dog is normal. For example, your sadness may resurface at seemingly random times. In addition to these moments of pain, you will also experience unexpected pleasant memories. For example, you may smile whenever you see a puppy because it reminds you of first meeting your dog. For most people the ache of grief will lessen over time. However, dealing with the death of a dog is never easy because dogs are an integral part of our lives.

My hope is that you are surrounded by supportive loved ones as you grieve the death of your dog and that eventually your happy memories endure longer than the sad ones.

With sincerest condolences,

JASON TROYER, PHD

www.GriefPlan.com



About the Author



Dr. Jason Troyer is the creator of [GriefPlan.com](https://www.griefplan.com). In his professional experience as a therapist, grief researcher, and professor, he discovered that grieving people wanted a plan to help them on their grief journey. His GriefPlan Programs include videos, information, activities, writing prompts, and other tools to guide people to heal, remember, and rebuild after loss. Dr. Troyer also offers 1-on-1 GriefPlan Coaching for those who want additional help. He provides engaging presentations and workshops on a variety of grief-related topics. Dr. Troyer earned his doctorate in Counseling Psychology and masters in Counseling. You can contact Dr. Troyer at [GriefPlan.com](https://www.griefplan.com).

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With Dr. Jason Troyer



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