

# Supporting the Whole Family Through the Loss of an Animal Companion

## Supporting Your Animal



## Animals and Grief

It can be hard to watch your surviving animal notice and react to the absence of your deceased animal. Perhaps you feel helpless because you can't comfort them in the same way you would another human. However, there are things you can do to help your animal feel loved after the loss.

## Spotting Behavior Changes

After the loss, you may notice your animal acting differently. Some common signs are:

- Vocalizing (whining, barking, howling)
- Loss of appetite
- Changes in demeanor during routines that your animals formerly shared

Though not much is known about if or how animals grieve, these are some common signs. Be sure to talk with your veterinarian if you're concerned about drastic or prolonged changes in behavior.

## Reassuring Your Animal

It's important to give your animal reassurance and provide a consistent routine for them by doing the following:

- Sticking to usual feeding, playing, and bedtime
- Giving them some extra cuddling or play time

If your schedule doesn't allow for extra time with your pet, consider asking a friend, family member, or trusted pet professional to give your animal some extra love.

# Keeping or Getting Rid of Belongings

You may find yourself asking one of the following questions after your animal is gone:

- “Is it okay that I want to keep my animal’s belongings exactly as they were before they died?”
- “Is it okay that I got rid of everything right away?”

**The answer to both of these questions is yes.**

Do what feels right to you and your family – including your surviving animal. Some people feel that it honors their animal to see their surviving animal use the belongings of the deceased, while others feel like it’s right to get all new things.

If you aren’t sure whether it’s better to keep your animal’s belongings or to get rid of them, try the following:

- Experiment with moving things around
- Put belongings in the closet
- Purchase some new items
- Put the belongings in a box and then later, when you have adjusted more to the loss, choose meaningful items to keep

Some people have found that cherishing an animal’s leash, favorite toy, or dish – or making one of these items into a keepsake – is a way to stay connected to their beloved animal.

For more information and other resources for coping with loss, please visit [amcny.org/socialwork](http://amcny.org/socialwork) or contact AMC’s social worker, Jamie Cohen.

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If you have a question about pet health, we have the answer.

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