

Human and Animal Grief and How Counselling Methods Can Help.

Grief is never ending. It may soften, but there will always be a hole in your heart.

~ Kirstey Lee LSBP



Pet loss can be many things it can be the ending of life as we know it. It can be a pet that has gone missing, a pet that has been stolen, given away or seized by authorities under certain legislation. We all grieve this loss in our unique way. Grief is an individual as a thumb print. Pets also grieve the loss of their animal buddies and human companions. This can be stressful for us as we feel so helpless.

Bereavement is the period of sadness that we feel when we lose a close companion. Grief is the process that we go through that enables us to find balance. Mourning expresses our sorrow.

Pet grief hits us hard and it is said that it can feel worse than losing a close human friend or relative. It can impair our emotional and physical health. When the love and friendship of a pet are gone, life may suddenly seem very empty and worthless. We can also experience what is known as “broken heart syndrome” which is sudden acute stress that can weaken the heart muscles and it feels as if we are having a heart attack (but it is not an actual heart attack).

Our pets can suffer with grief too and mourn the loss of their buddies. We may notice our living pets are more distant or absent, he or she may just sit in one spot, do nothing, are lethargic and sleep more. They may whimper or cry out. On the opposite end of the scale, they may be very clingy, insecure and follow us around everywhere not leaving our side. He or she may even search for their buddy. They may act out of character and may go off their food for a few days and may be destructive. Cats may over groom to the extent of pulling out their fur, leaving bald patches and urinate outside of their litter box. During this time it is best not to let your cat outside as they may go in search for their deceased buddy.

We must remember that animals are very resilient. Given time to mourn the loss of their buddy, they will return to their old routines. They may develop new rituals, and once again have the contentment that they previously enjoyed. My boy Bailey (a Staffordshire Bull Terrier) took on some traits of his past buddy Kai (which was such a comfort to me). Animals also grieve for the loss of their human companions, and some animals do not show grief (we should not take this the wrong way - that they didn't care for their deceased companion), even an animal's grief is individual. If we're concerned our pet is struggling with grief, it may be worth consulting with a vet (other health issues may go unnoticed at this time), or and speak with an animal wellness practitioner who can help with several natural remedies, to ease the intensity of the hurt. A pet bereavement practitioner can also help with this and point you in the right direction.

How can we learn to heal our hurt and where do pet bereavement counsellors fit in?

Some people actually filter out their memories and put them to one side (I have regrettably done this), they feel it is easier to cope with their personal grief this way, but as a result sadly you forget precious memories, and in later years you cannot recall them. This by admission of personal experience is not the answer. It is an important part of mourning and healing to connect with these memories and our emotions to help us recover from grief.

Recovery is not about moving on - away from our pet but honouring our pet and the realisation that they are no longer with us in body. We need to gradually reconnect with these feelings and work out in our own time how to resolve them and find meaning to our loss and grief. If years go by and we are continually disturbed with intrusive thoughts and dreams these can be a sign that we never truly recovered and that our memories and experience of our loss are buried somewhere in our subconscious. They need to be released and set free to find balance and to open our heart to truly love again.

Pet bereavement counsellors listen without judgment and work with you (in your own time) at a comfortable pace and help draw your emotions out in a positive manner. Counselling helps you work through your grief as well as learn coping mechanisms to help you when you are on your own. Pet bereavement

counselling is recommended for anyone, of any age, whose loss seems overwhelming or whose daily life, including employment, family and relationships are strongly affected by grief.

During the first meeting you will be asked about your pet and how your life is without him or her. You may cry, but this is only natural and your counsellor will comfort you. They may give you activities or challenges to do, to free your mind from the hurt and sorrow, to release guilt, and anger and to allow the happy memories to flood the front of your mind. They will help you understand your emotions; find meaning in your loss and the reason for feeling as you do. You will come to terms with your grief and have an understanding that grief truly is a friend, and that it exists because we have loved and cared deeply. If we do not grieve, we may reach a point of no return, which may lead to suicidal thoughts or worse. Pet bereavement counsellors prevent your grief from getting to this point. They can help children and families as a unit. They also help with grieving pets and can give you advice on the best way to comfort them.

The length of time for which bereavement counselling will continue is dependent on the individual, how they feel. Usually a counselling meeting lasts from 30 minutes to one hour and can continue for 3 to 6 plus sessions but it is very much individual. If you are suffering bereavement, please reach out to me or another professional bereavement counsellor, we are here to help.

How does it feel – the loss of a pet?

It's awful, its numb, there is no colour – everything is matt.

You feel weak, sick, lost, alone and lonely.

You also feel guilt and anger.

You cry many tears and ache deeply in your heart.

Your body feels heavy and your chest tight.

You are tired, so tired.

Your eyes see only sorrow and your ears hear emptiness.

There is nothing not even hope....

A dark hole leads you to nothing but a sinking feeling.

You can't get out, you can't escape, you are stuck.

You don't want to be here; you need your friend.

You are drowning.

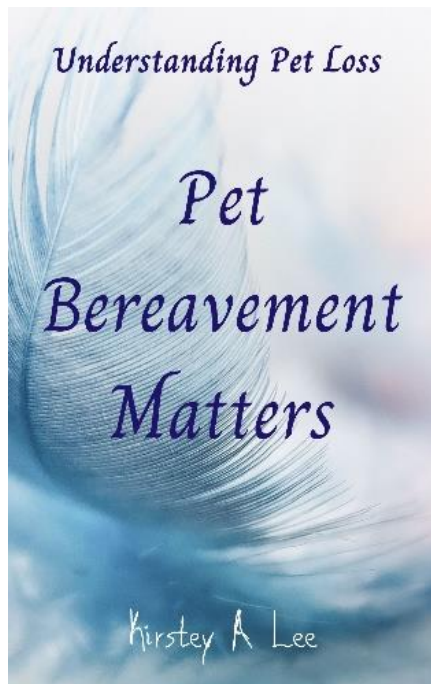
It hurts, it's truly hurts....

~ **Kirstey Lee**

The Author Kirstey Lee is a professional Pet Bereavement Support Counselor and a Licentiate of the Society of Bereavement Practitioners, which acknowledges existing expertise, training, and achievements. Kirstey lives in Cardiff, sunny Wales in the UK with her partner Carl and their two dogs a Staffordshire Bull Terrier and a Jack Russel Terrier - Shilo and Monty. It's the JRT (Monty) that wears the trousers; he is so cheeky and always makes her smile with all his antics. Shilo, on the other hand is quieter, more laid back and a sensitive soul, who likes his own space.



Kirstey's counselling sessions can be carried out via Zoom, email, phone calls or texts. You can get in touch with her below: -



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Or take a look at her new book -

[Pet Bereavement Matters – Understanding Pet Loss](#)

Which can be purchased via Amazon kindle or paperback.