

When You've Lost Your Best Friend

Grief is the normal, natural response to loss. It is not an emotional disorder or a dysfunctional state.

Grief is the normal, natural process that occurs when something or someone we value is taken from us. It can be a place, a set of circumstances, a human being, an animal, or an object. It doesn't matter. Loss is loss, and loss produces grief.

Grief is a process, not an event.

Grieving is a journey and there are no two grief journeys alike. The way we travel the road of grief is as unique as we are. We set out on this uncharted terrain without a map, armed only with our courage and the desire to somehow feel normal and happy again. Comparing one grief journey to another is futile and unproductive. Yes, there can be similarities in the feelings and experiences grief produces, but be clear: there is no prescribed set of stages or experiences that we all must have, to grieve and heal "properly". The way we grieve is unique, period.

Many people believe that losing an animal that we loved isn't as painful as losing a person we love. Anyone, who has ever lost the animal they loved, knows that this just isn't so. Because they walked on four legs and wore fur doesn't diminish the fact that they were important Beings who loved us, and were loved by us. Animals are the only absolute source of unconditional love that we ever know, and that experience is huge. When we lose that source of unconditional love, the pain we feel can also be huge.

Griever's Bill of Rights

I want to give you the following list of Grieving Person's Rights to assist you in understanding the journey you have undertaken. I also hope it will help you stand up to the judgments and opinions of others about how you should grieve the loss of your animal. I have adapted these rights from the work of Alan Wolfelt Ph.D.

- 1. You have the right to acknowledge your reality and experience your grief in your own unique way.**
- 2. You have the right to talk about your grief, and to be listened to, without advice or opinion.**
- 3. You have the right to feel and express a huge constellation of emotions**
- 4. You have the right to pace yourself physically and emotionally, and to honor your limits.**
- 5. You have the right to experience unexpected waves of grief, ranging from small and manageable, to "tsunamis".**
- 6. You have the right to embrace your Spirituality, and through it, seek to find comfort and meaning in your loss.**
- 7. You have the right to use Ritual to support and comfort you in your grief.**
- 8. You have the right to process the experiences of the relationship accurately, to assist you in grieving the reality of what was, rather than the euphoric recall of fantasy.**
- 9. You have the right to talk about and cherish your memories**
- 10. You have the right to utilize effective tools and procedures to help you move to a place of Acceptance and Healing**

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For more information or to schedule a consult, please contact Paula Shaw at (858) 480-9234
E-mail her at Pshawlight@gmail.com, or visit <http://tears2triumph.com> or <http://paulashaw.wordpress.com/>