

**Contact:****Phil Boerner: 916-649-0599 (California Veterinary Medical Association)****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Help Available for Coping with Passing of Pet
*Veterinarians say grief process is an important step in healing***

Sacramento, CA – Just because the loved one walked on four paws does not mean humans don't grieve the death of a pet. After all, it usually kept us company and gave us joy for many years. Whether the death followed a long life or came unexpectedly as the result of an accident or sudden illness, most people feel as though they have lost "one of the family."

"Pets bring us happiness and companionship, so it stands to reason we are left with grief and sorrow when they pass away," says Jon Klingborg, DVM, president of the California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA). "Psychologists tell us the grieving process for pet loss is similar to that for human loss."

During the initial stages of grief, owners might feel anything from numbness to devastation. Dr. Klingborg suggests people be aware of common grief responses, so they can better understand and accept their feelings. The commonly accepted grief process comprises five steps, which people may experience in any order:

- Shock – Feeling stunned or like the reality of death is too much to accept.
- Anger – Lashing out at others, the world in general, or having feelings of guilt and fear.
- Bargaining – Asking or wishing that the lost one return to life.
- Depression – Intense sadness, helplessness in response to the void created.
- Acceptance – Coming to terms with the changes created by the loss.

"Veterinarians are great resources during this process, helping clients connect with the support they need," says Dr. Klingborg. Your veterinarian can recommend local grief counseling and support groups. The Pet Loss Support Hotline operated by University of California at Davis veterinary students is available to anyone and can be reached at 800.565.1526 Monday through Friday, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. or at www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/petloss/index.htm. You may also want to visit the CVMA website at www.cvma.net. There, you'll find links to local California support groups and recommended pet loss literature.

The CVMA recommends owners find a way to pay tribute to their departed pets. Anything from an owner's private writing of life and loss to a more public memorial will allow the bereaved to honor the pet as well as express feelings. Children may need some special attention during this time. Since it is often their first experience with death, some will need explanation as well as reassurance. Staying away from phrases like "put to sleep" and "taken from us" will help avoid instilling any fears in the child.

Not surprisingly, people may not be the only family members to feel a loss. Surviving pets go through their own adjustment period and may show signs of grief with restless, anxious, or needy behavior. "They require comfort too," says Dr. Klingborg. He advises that the daily routine be maintained but adds, "Initially, a bit extra time for petting and playing will make you both feel better."

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The California Veterinary Medical Association is the largest state veterinary medical association in the United States, with more than 5,300 members. Founded in 1888, its mission is to serve its membership and community through innovative leadership and to improve animal and human health in an ethically and socially responsible manner.

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