



When someone we know is grieving the loss of a pet, it's often difficult to find words that will be comforting to them. Expressing our sympathy by saying, "I'm sorry" or "You have my sympathy" is always appropriate, but what are some other things we can say or do to help? What are some things we shouldn't? This simple, yet useful guide will give you suggestions for comforting those in grief. At the end is a list of resources that may assist you further.

Helpful Approaches to Comforting

Offer Your Personal Support

It's always important to remember that when dealing with the loss of a pet everyone experiences grief differently. Some prefer to be alone, while others enjoy company. It's always best to be direct and ask what the person would like. Asking if your company is wanted or needed and letting the person know you are there either way will be a comfort to them. If you can't be with the person, offer to talk on the phone as well.

Be Yourself

The best rule of thumb when attempting to comfort and console a grieving pet owner is to be yourself - and then go the extra mile. Listening is the most important thing you can do.

Stay in Touch

Being there, by phone or even email, are great ways to stay in touch. Follow up in the days, weeks and months that pass, and especially during holidays and anniversaries. Many times people who have suffered the loss of a pet receive many calls and cards initially, but as time passes everyone else moves on. For the grieving pet owner, time moves much slower. Staying in touch will help the person to continue to feel supported.

Not So Helpful Approaches to Comforting

Don't Rush

Give someone who is grieving the loss of a pet time to grieve. Depending on the person this may take quite some time. Don't say things like "Are you still upset?" or "It's been a long time since they died." Be respectful that a person may need a long time to heal.

More Not So Helpful Approaches to Comforting

Don't Expect Too Much Too Soon

Don't expect someone who is grieving the loss of a pet to maintain his or her usual persona or daily routine. Often times people seem to be in a haze or disconnected from their surroundings. Don't make an issue out of things or take their behavior personally. And, don't go to them with your problems. This is their time, not yours.

Keep Quiet

Stay away from negative issues such as the amount of money the person spent on care or whether or not they did everything they could. If the pet was ill, never question or comment on the choices they made with regard to the care they gave. Remain supportive, offer to be with them and assure them you understand how much they loved their pet.

Avoid Comparing Yourself and Your Experiences

It's also a good idea not to share grief stories with someone who has just lost a pet. There will be no comparison. This is a time when the person will be unable to relate, or able to console others. It's unfair to attempt to comfort someone with an "I know just how you feel" or "It could have happened like me" story.

Don't Interrupt

Don't interrupt or distract a person when they're grieving the loss of a pet. Changing the subject will cause them to feel as though their loss isn't important. Be patient and let them talk as much and as often as needed. Listen.

Allow the Tears

Don't tell someone who is grieving the loss of a pet not to cry. Crying is a part of the grief process, and is completely normal. You can't "fix things" by telling them not to cry or how to feel. Respect that their feelings and their way of showing them is what's best for them. And, that they truly do know better than you.

**For More Information, Please Visit Our Web Site: www.chanceesspot.org
or try the following resources:**

**When Children Grieve: For Adults to Help Children Deal With Death, Divorce,
Pet Loss, Moving, and Other Losses (Paperback) by John W. James, Russell Friedman**

**Beyond Sympathy: What to Say and Do for Someone Suffering an
Injury, Illness or Loss (Paperback) by Janice Harris Lord**

**A Guide To Grief, available through the Hospice Net Web site at:
http://www.hospicenet.org/html/grief_guide.html
or by calling 1-800-646-6460**

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