

A HARBOURSIDE RESOURCE

Grief Support Guide for Pet Owners

Quiet guidance for the days, weeks and months
after the loss of a beloved companion.

Prepared with care by Alby & Rachael Koster

A note before you begin

You are allowed to grieve.

If you are reading this, something irreplaceable has been lost. A small body that fitted into the curve of your arm. A presence that met you at the door every evening. A friend who knew your moods before you did.

This guide is not a solution. There is no solution to grief — only company through it. What follows is gentle, practical guidance from a family who has walked beside hundreds of others in the same quiet weeks. Take what helps. Set the rest aside.

— *Alby & Rachael*

The shape of pet grief

Grieving an animal is often more complex than people expect. The bond is daily, physical, and unconditional — and the loss disrupts the small routines that hold our days together. An empty bowl. A favourite spot on the rug. The sound that never comes.

What you may feel

- Waves of sadness arriving without warning, sometimes hours after you thought you'd settled.
- A heaviness in the chest, a tightness in the throat, tears that won't quite come.
- Guilt — over decisions made, decisions delayed, words not said.
- Anger — at vets, at yourself, at the unfairness of it.
- Numbness, or a strange calm that may worry you.
- Reaching to feed them, then remembering.

All of these are normal.

Grief is not a tidy line from sadness to acceptance. It loops back. It arrives at three in the morning or in the middle of a supermarket aisle. There is no calendar. There is no 'should'.

In the first days

Be gentle with the practicalities

Cancel what you can. Let work know. Allow easy meals — toast is a meal. Drink water. If a friend offers help, say yes. Specific yeses are easier: 'could you bring me bread' is easier than 'I'm fine'.

Hold a small ritual

Even something private. A walk on their favourite path. Lighting a candle at dinner. Reading their name aloud. Rituals don't have to be religious — they only have to be intentional. They give grief somewhere to go.

Allow the house to be quiet

Or noisy. Whichever helps. Some families find comfort in keeping a bed, a bowl, a blanket in place for a while. Others need to put things away quickly. Both are right. Trust what your body asks for.

In the weeks that follow

Watch for the second wave

Many people find the second or third week harder than the first. The shock fades, friends move on, and the absence becomes louder. This is not a setback — it is grief doing its work.

Talk about them

Say their name. Tell the funny story. Show the photo. Pet grief is often dismissed in casual conversation, which can make it feel invisible. Choose the people who will hold the story carefully.

Sleep, food, movement

Grief is exhausting in a way that is hard to predict. Short walks, simple food, water, and as much sleep as your body will allow. These are not small things — they are how you carry the weight.

“Grief is the price we pay for love. It is, in its own way, the last gift our companions give us.”

Helping children grieve a pet

Children often grieve a pet as their first experience of death. How adults handle it shapes how they understand loss.

Use clear, gentle language

Avoid 'went to sleep' or 'we lost them' — these can confuse young children and create new fears. 'Their body stopped working and they died' is honest and easier to hold.

Let them be part of the goodbye

A drawing tucked into the urn. A flower placed on the collar. A small ceremony in the garden. Children handle grief better when they are included than when they are protected from it.

Expect grief to revisit

Children grieve in bursts, not in steady streams. Months later, a question may arrive at bedtime. Welcome it. Each return is healing, not regression.

When grief feels too heavy

Most pet grief eases gradually. But if after several weeks you find yourself:

- Unable to sleep, eat, or function in daily life
- Having dark or hopeless thoughts
- Withdrawing entirely from people who love you
- Unable to talk or think about your companion without distress

please speak with someone. Pet grief is real grief and deserves real support.

Australian support lines

- **Lifeline** — 13 11 14 (24/7)
- **Beyond Blue** — 1300 22 4636
- **Pet Loss Australia** — pet bereavement counsellors and support groups
- Your GP can also refer you to a counsellor experienced in pet bereavement.

A small closing thought

“The wound is the place where the light enters you.” — Rumi

You loved them well. They knew it. The grief you feel now is the shape of that love, turned inside out for a season. It will not always feel like this.

If at any point you would like to talk — about a memorial, about choosing an urn, about the cremation itself, or just because the day is hard — Alby or Rachael will answer the phone personally. There is no clock on the call.

0493 814 474 · info@harboursidepetcremations.com.au

With our care,

Alby & Rachael Koster

Harbourside Pet & Equine Cremations