

Guide Helps Dog Owners Say Goodbye to Pets

Colorado State University publication offers strategies for owners coping with grief.

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Pet owners searching for answers to their questions about coping with the illness or death of a companion animal can turn to a printed guide created to help them through difficult times.

“What Now? Support for You and Your Companion Animal” is a 31-page guide written by the Argus Institute, part of the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University. Three sections include information about the emotional process pet owners experience; approaches for talking to family members, especially children; help with decision-making; and self-care tips for dealing with grief and loss.

In the first section, which deals with pet illness, the guide explains that it’s normal to have certain responses to the realization that a pet is sick or hurt, including shock and disbelief. This part of the guide also covers ways to seek support and taking time for self-care.

The second section focuses on making end-of-life decisions, and knowing when it’s time to say goodbye to a pet. It offers suggestions for how to memorialize pets, such as planting a tree or saving a clipping of fur.

Finally, the third section goes into coping with the death of a companion animal. It outlines the various phases of grief and offers ways to help deal with the loss of a pet. Below is a sample of some suggestions: Give yourself permission to grieve: Write about it, cry it out, and work it out through exercise and projects. Expect the first year to be the hardest: Lots of “firsts” (holidays, birthdays, and vacations) without the family pet may be difficult. Allow for a relapse: “Grief is a rollercoaster,” according to the guide. Try not to get discouraged with the emotional ups and downs.

The guide is available for purchase online at the Argus Institute’s website or by calling 970-297-4143.