



Loss of a loved one – how grief may affect you

For many people the loss of their cat is as traumatic and emotionally challenging as the loss of any other family member. This creature that brought so much joy and unconditional love into our homes and hearts – their absence leaves a massive hole and it hurts.

Whatever the circumstances of your loss, it is likely that you will be grieving. Grief is a unique and individual experience and while it is perfectly normal to grieve for the loss of a loved one, there is no normal way to grieve.

The relationship you had with your cat was probably a strong one. It's an attachment relationship, similar to the type of relationship that a parent has with their child. Little wonder then, that it hurts so much to say goodbye.

It may be that your beloved cat hasn't yet died and you are anticipating (perhaps dreading) their death; perhaps you have a very difficult decision to make and are struggling with how you will get through this. This type of situation often brings anticipatory grief – a type of grieving that starts even before your cat has died.

When a pet is very sick or dies, it can be difficult to manage your feelings and thoughts as the world carries on around you and you may feel very alone in your grief, as if nobody will understand.

All people respond differently to grief and you may experience some, all or none of the following:

- deep sadness, and the need to cry – or in contrast just feeling numb and empty
- guilt or blame – for yourself or others
- confusion about what has happened and a need to understand everything about your cat's illness and/or death – in contrast you may try anything to avoid thinking about it
- anger, which is a common part of the grieving process – you may feel angry towards yourself, others or even your pet for leaving you
- tiredness, lethargy, not wanting to do anything – or in contrast extreme anxiety and insomnia, can't sit still or feeling tense and fidgety
- sickness, an upset tummy, loss of or increased appetite
- inability to concentrate, thinking about your cat a lot and/or reliving events around their death – questioning yourself about decisions you may have made
- physical pain
- relief – when your cat has been in pain or had a chronic or lengthy illness it is not unusual to feel relieved that they have died – this is sometimes followed by feelings of guilt and shame for having felt relief
- feeling like nobody understands and that others will see you as being silly for being so upset about your cat's death

Whatever you are thinking and feeling right now, it is likely to be part of your own personal grief. There is no set time limit for grief. Equally, there is no set way to experience or process your grief.

Many people find it very helpful to talk through their experience of grieving for a cat with someone that understands how important your relationship with your cat is.

If your grief becomes complex or prolonged, you might benefit from seeking out a personal therapist to support you through this difficult time. You can ask your GP about finding a suitable therapist.