



# Children's Ages and Reactions to Pet Loss

Age	Child's Reaction	How to Help
3-6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does not understand that death is permanent</li><li>• Fears dead pet is cold or hungry</li><li>• Repeats questions or fears that others may die</li><li>• Afraid to go to sleep, may have bad dreams</li><li>• May play-act events around the death</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain routine, providing lots of love and affection</li><li>• Repeat answers often</li><li>• Allow expressions of feeling</li><li>• Avoid vague terms like "put to sleep", "passed away" "God took him" "She ran away"</li><li>• Use concrete terms like: "Jupiter died. "When dogs die they do not run or bark anymore."</li></ul>
6-9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Views death as mysterious</li><li>• Some still think death is not permanent</li><li>• May be obsessed with cause of death, what happened to body, etc.</li><li>• May feel responsible</li><li>• May be distressed, sad, or show no signs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain routine</li><li>• Answer questions honestly</li><li>• Listen to child express thoughts and feelings</li><li>• Reassure that the death was not the child's fault</li><li>• Encourage expression through drawings, writing</li><li>• Contact child's teachers</li></ul>
9-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understands that death is permanent</li><li>• May seem unaffected by death</li><li>• May see the death as punishment for bad deeds</li><li>• May show anger, guilt, grief</li><li>• Physical symptoms are common</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide lots of time and affection</li><li>• Encourage child to express feelings, keep a journal</li><li>• Reassure that death was not child's fault</li><li>• Involve child in pet memorial</li><li>• Contact child's teachers</li></ul>
Teens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May feel confused, sad, guilt, angry, lonely or afraid</li><li>• May experience physical symptoms</li><li>• May try to hide feelings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk without criticizing or judging</li><li>• Be honest about your own feelings</li><li>• Allow teen time alone to grieve in their own way</li></ul>

