Grief is a real emotional state, and even the death of a pet can be a significant loss


Question: My 15-year-old dog recently died in his sleep. I thought I would be OK right after he died; I knew he was old and would not live forever. But now I find myself feeling really lonely, like nobody will ever really know or understand me. I was never all mushy about my dog. My dog was like a best buddy, but I never felt like he was my "baby" or like a human family member.

Why do I feel so weird and lonely after he died? I never even realized I felt all that close to him when he was alive.

Answer: Grief is a real emotional state that everyone goes through. Losing a pet of 15 years is a significant loss, and grief would be an expected response.

How to Deal with Grief is an excellent resource about grief published by the Center for Mental Health Services of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Symptoms of grief
After a loss, you may:

- Feel empty and numb
- Notice physical changes such as trembling, nausea, trouble breathing, muscle weakness, dry mouth or trouble sleeping and eating
- Become angry or feel guilty
- Have strange dreams or nightmares
- Be absent-minded
- Withdraw socially
- Lack the desire to return to work

While these feelings and behaviors are normal during grief, they will pass.

**Steps of grieving**

Those who experience a significant loss often go through stages as they recover. These stages include:

- Accepting the loss
- Working through and feel the physical and emotional pain of grief
- Adjusting to living in a world without the person or item lost (in your case, a pet)
- Moving on with life

Some of this will happen naturally, especially as you talk with family and friends, but occasionally even speaking with a counselor or therapist may be beneficial. For more information, check out **Grieving the Loss of a Pet** from Helpguide.org.

Good luck.

**Related topics:** grief counseling, grieving the loss of a pet, how to deal with grief, nancy elder, netwellness, university of cincinnati college of medicine

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Our relationships with pets (or as PETA calls them--our animal companions) is insufficiently studied even though it is a widespread practice. While some speak of pets in terms of "children" such words capture a better sense of the role they truly play for us than not. Our natural tendencies to project human feelings into our pets may misunderstand the limits of their mental states, they still accomplish a description of the bonds between us.

Losing a "mini-partner" in our life should, of course, precipitate true grief. Have we not invested in them a lifetime of devotion, play, sharing of tasks, training, feeding, and medical care, to say nothing of talking to them about our troubles, our loves, our worries?

Now that we have escaped from the Cartesian delusion that animals are machines without feeling we can unashamedly accord them a quasi-personhood, sentience, and sympathy. We would weep at the loss of any friend.
Pets are hard to loose because, unlike people, they love us unconditionally and make it seem effortless to do so. They don't ask for much just room and board and an occasional show of affection from us. It's very difficult to loose companionship such as that.