

General Bereavement Support for Animal Guardians



Welcome to this animal bereavement course, the aim of which is to offer you gentle support during your grieving process. Each of us as individuals responds to grief in different ways and in my personal experience it is a journey, which is affected by our own unique experience of loss and the circumstances that surround it. Our friends and family may not always understand the bond of love and special connection we share with our animals and so we may feel unable to talk to them about our true most honest feelings. If this is the case for you, please know you are not alone and there are many people who find grieving for a beloved pet more difficult than grieving for a human family member. Our animals are family, they show us unconditional love and acceptance, bring laughter and fun to our lives and are there for us no matter what.

This course includes practical exercises for you to complete together with written notes for you to work through at your own pace. You may feel more drawn to some areas than others but all the resources will help you to gain the most benefit. If you have recently lost your animal you may wish to start at the end where there are resources including facebook groups and websites which may offer the most appropriate level of support in the early stages of grief.

The techniques and exercises can be repeated as many times as you wish or built upon over time. It is important to try and let go of any expectations and allow your healing process to unfold naturally whilst being as gentle with yourself as possible. I believe the bond of love we share with our animals continues after their passing.

I may at times use words that perhaps do not resonate with you, please try not to let this distract you, instead simply substitute a word or situation that you have positive associations with.

What is Included

An introduction, grounding technique, gratitude exercise, 3 part breathing exercise, a mindfulness walking exercise, photo collage creative experience, heart space technique, the next step and additional support.

Grounding Technique

Step One

Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your hands loosely in your lap. Close your eyes and take three slow deep breathes in and out. Next breathe in through your nose and imagine your breath travelling down your body, along your legs, travelling down to your feet and as you breathe out imagine the breath going into the ground below from the soles of your feet and anchoring you firmly and deeply into the earth beneath you connecting to nature energy. Now repeat this two more times. Next breathe in and bring the solid and grounding nature earth of the energy up through the soles of your feet, visualise this energy filling your whole body, as you breathe out imagine letting go of any energy from your body that is heavy or stagnant and being dissolved by the nature energy. Repeat this two more times.

This technique may be used alone or you may add in the next step and connect to your inner spark of divinity.



Inner Spark of Divinity Experience ~ Stage Two

Breathe in and intend to connect with your inner spark of divinity located in the centre of your chest, visualise or imagine filling your entire body with the beautiful energy of your own inner spark. Breathe out, feel the loving and compassionate energy filling the area around your body and your home. Repeat this for a number of times and notice if you feel more peaceful.

When you feel a deeper sense of relaxation however subtle simply relax in the beautiful space you have created through your own energy, be present in this space knowing you are in balance in this moment. Enjoy this peaceful space for a minimum of five minutes. When you are ready to finish take two slow deep breathes to centre yourself and open your eyes when you are ready.

Note: If the weather is fine, this is a lovely to practice this technique outside in nature.

Gratitude List

Here is a gentle process to assist you in connecting with your animal, that loving part of them that is always with us no matter what through our shared life experiences, our memories and our love for one another.

The first step on this journey is to choose a photo of your animal that has a happy association, with their eyes showing if possible.

You will need a piece of paper and a pen, deep emotions may rise and so you may want to have a cup of tea or a glass of water by you.

Light a candle if you would like to and sit comfortably with your feet flat on the ground.



Let's Begin:

Take a couple of slow deep breathes to centre yourself and intend to be guided by your inner spark of divinity. Place your hands over your heart if you wish, and set your intention to connect with your memories of your animal from a place of complete love, acceptance and compassion.

Let go of any expectations and if you feel deep emotions acknowledge them and allow them to pass. Try not to attach to them and gently move your attention to your breathing for a few moments.

Visualise yourself in a space of peace and compassion through your own inner spark of divinity. It is always important to only connect to your own loving energy.

Gaze at your animal's photo for a few minutes and allow gratitude for their presence in your life to build. When you feel ready start to write a list of the things you feel grateful for during their time with you. Simply write from your heart and take some further deep breathes if you need to do so.

It may take a few attempts to do this as emotions surface, please be very gentle with yourself and go at your own pace.

You can simply refer back to this list and the picture of your beloved animal at any time you feel drawn.

3 Part Breathing Exercise

We can centre and calm our mind and body through breathing properly. During the panic, pain and hurt of grief, breathing is overlooked. Here is the three part breathing method, which is a grounding and calming. It may take some practice!

~ PART 1 ~

First of all, lie down comfortably on your back, close your eyes, relax as much as you are able.

You can either have your legs outstretched or bent at the knee, whichever feels most comfortable for you.

Now bring your attention to your breathing and recognise your normal breathing pattern, letting any thoughts that enter your mind float away like clouds across the sky. Keep your attention on inhaling and exhaling.

Now breath in deeply through your nose and out deeply also through your nose.

With each inhalation feel your belly filling with air, feeling it expanding out.

With each exhalation, empty your belly of air through your nose moving your navel inwards to touch your spine to ensure you have completely emptied your stomach or air.

Continue with the belly breathing for five minutes.

~ PART 2 ~

Next inhale as above, filling your belly with air but this time when your belly fills up, breath in some more air and allow it to enter your rib cage, widening your ribs.

Breath out, release the air fully from your ribcage, release the air from your belly moving your navel inwards to touch your spine.

Carry on with the belly deep and ribcage breathing for a further five minutes.

~ PART 3 ~

Next inhale as before, first the belly, next the ribcage and then breathe into your upper chest area up to your collar bone. This will cause your heart centre (the area surrounding your heart) to rise and expand.

Exhale by releasing the breath from your upper chest first followed by your ribcage and finally your belly, using the method outlined above.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is all about focusing your attention. It brings with it many benefits as it is said to reduce depression, increase creativity, calm the mind and decrease physical pain amongst other things.

Making mindfulness part of your daily routine is the simplest way to feel positive effects. I recommend starting your practice when you wake up, be mindful as you get out of bed, notice as you place your feet on the floor and as you carry out each part of your morning routine. You can shower, brush your teeth and even eat your breakfast mindfully! This helps your mind to be calmer and clearer as you start your day. Just be aware of exactly what you are doing and any sensations. As thoughts enter your mind gently allow them to float away like clouds across the sky, notice them but do not give any energy to them.

Mindfulness can also I improve your daily exercise routine, be it walking in nature or a workout at the gym. Just remember to bring your mind gently back to the present moment if it wanders.



Mindfulness Walking Meditation

If possible when you first try this mindfulness exercise choose a quiet location for your walk.

Concentrate on the sensation of your feet touching the ground, you can continue this throughout your walk or move your attention to another part of your body or your breathing or change during the course of the walk.

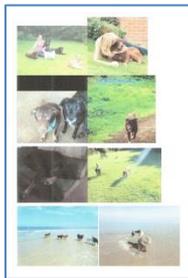
The main thing is to experience a state of relaxed attention during your walk. This will become easier the more regularly you practice.

Making a Photo Collage

Loosing someone we love is never an easy thing to deal with. There are so many emotions we experience with grief including: sadness, anxiety, loneliness and despair. This can be overwhelming and hard to bear. Making a photo collage to honour and remember your beloved pet can be a therapeutic experience.

Outline

- Use a piece of cardboard or a notice board and choose a colour that brings you comfort.
- Collect the photos you have of your pet and put them in an order that makes sense to you, these photos are a happy reminder of you animal friend.
- You may also wish to include photos from magazines that you associate with happy memories of your beloved animal. This could include a map of an area of special meaning or an aerial photograph of somewhere you used to go together.
- If you have won any rosettes, taken any exams you may wish to photograph certificates and awards to include. This is probably more for dogs and horses but also any show animals.
- You can be as creative as you wish and anything that brings a happy association will be a positive addition to your collage. The main goal of your collage is to express yourself and specifically your grief.



This could be a continuous project with you adding to it when you feel drawn or a one off, this is completely up to you and what you feel is right for you.

While making the collage you could experience very strong feelings and if this happens, take some time out and spend time outdoors, make a cup of tea or do something else for a while and go back to the collage a little later on.

When the collage is complete you could share it with others, frame it and display it. Show it to anyone going through the grieving process also and perhaps inspire and help them.

The grieving process is yours and we grieve so we can continue living in an attempt to have a fulfilled life once more, this can take time and this is your journey.



Other Ways of Remembering Our Animals

You may choose to have a dedicated area in your garden, with flowers and a memorial, solar lights, flowers and plants that remind you of your animal or simply bring you peace.

If your pet has been cremated, you could scatter the ashes in their favourite place, the woods or at the beach in a certain area that has meaning to you. Perhaps you may decide upon the place they chose to sunbathe in the garden.

A memorial can be as important as a funeral in the grieving process.

Memorials can be in some other form, something that is truly meaningful to you and your animal.

NB ~ I have found over the years that some individuals who kept the ashes of human and animal family members suffered from health and emotional issues. If you feel attached to your pet's ashes, you may wish to place a healthy and vibrant plant next to them and a happy photo of your animal, this will certainly help to balance the energy. Alternatively, you may feel able to place their ashes in a plant pot outside, if you have a garden, with a beautiful plant. Or you may wish to keep the ashes in a shed or garage until you feel ready to scatter them. Whatever you choose do it from love.

Heart Space Technique



Sit comfortably with your back straight and feet flat on the floor.

Set the intention that you wish to be fully present in a loving space of peace and compassion whilst remembering your animal and the love you will always share.

Remember you are simply creating a space with your intention from your inner spark of divinity, try to let go of any resistance as it comes up and allow the process to unfold.

Take three slow deep breaths in and out, breathing right down into your lower stomach area. Feel your feet firmly on the ground beneath you and notice your connection to the earth beneath your feet and nature energy.

Gently bring your attention to the middle of your chest and allow a deep connection to your inner spark of divinity and expand that feeling throughout your body or simply intend for it to be so. If you feel strong emotion just notice it and then bring your focus back to your breathing for a few moments and then return to love. If you do not feel the love just intend it and trust that you are expanding this loving energy outwards.

Continue to expand the love outwards, you may like to visualise it as a golden colour or a stream of golden light or just imagine the love is flowing.

Let go of any expectations, if your mind wanders bring your focus back to love or simply notice your breath. Relax in this space whilst being in the present moment for as long as you feel comfortable.

When you are ready to finish take several deep breaths in and out and feel your feet firmly on the floor, wiggle your toes and fingers and open your eyes. Have a glass of water and make a note of anything you felt or saw, however, small it may seem.

The Next Step

Some of us will feel like we want to share our lives with another animal, this will be different for each of us and we may already have other pets in our family.



Here are some general considerations as to whether the time may be right for a new animal companion. It is important that careful thought is put into this if you live alone or if you have other family members to discuss this step with.

- Is this too soon after losing you animal?
- Are you trying to replace your animal?
- What are your expectations of this new animal family member, do you want them to be similar to your last animal?
- Like us animals grieve, do you have any other family pets who may not be ready for a new animal to be introduced?

I truly believe that when the time is right we allow another animal to choose us!

Volunteering with Animals

You may feel ready to spend time with animals but are not at the stage to introduce a new family member quite yet. Volunteering is another option.

Becoming a Volunteer

Volunteering at a local rescue can be one way of having contact with animals and doing something that makes you feel good, you are making a difference and meeting and mixing with other animal lovers, which is always a positive experience or so I have found! Many rescues have different types of animals under one umbrella and there are also specific dog, cat and horse rescues and even breed specific rescues that have a network of volunteers countrywide where you can get involved in carrying out home checks, assessments or something that supports the animals indirectly such as fundraising or simply sharing facebook posts to spread the word about animals looking for homes.



You choose how involved you wish to be

You can choose how much involvement you would like. When Lucky passed away, as we adopted him at the age of 14, I felt drawn to volunteer for Oldies Club, which I did for a year or so as it felt right and in a way gave me comfort, he had truly opened my eyes to the beauty of adopting an elderly dog. Some rescues also have charity shops run by volunteers.

Fostering

Another alternative is to foster for an animal rescue or charity. Many charities require fosterers and The Cinnamon Trust is one such charity as they sometimes require short term fosterers while elderly or ill clients are in hospital and need care for their pets. You can also do dog walking or help with vet trips if you prefer. www.cinnamon.org.uk

Where to start

If this is of interest to you I suggest you search on Google or yell.com for local rescues or alternatively join rescue pages on facebook that resonate with you. Many rescue centres have open days or are open to the public on certain days so you have a look round first before applying to volunteer.

Resources and Support

Phoneline



The Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support ~ If you have lost a pet and need somebody to talk to please call our Pet Bereavement Support Service.

Tel: 0800 096 6606

Website: www.bluecross.org.uk

Book

I highly recommend the Grief Recovery Handbook for Pet Loss by John James, Cole James and Russell Friedman, available through Amazon.



Facebook Page - Rainbow Bridge ~ Celebration of our beloved pets



Mission ~ To keep our pets memories alive by posting photos, videos and stories of them and sharing our experiences and love for all animals worldwide. To support each other in our grief ♥

Website



The Ralph Site website: www.theralphsite.com

Pet loss support from the Ralph site

Caring and non-judgemental pet bereavement support online with information, resources, memorials and community. Pets are family, we get it.