

## LOSING A PET IS LOSING A BEST FRIEND

Susan Rovello, a Lambertville resident, knows a lot about losing furry best friends. Having had and lost four dogs and eight cats adds up to a lot of grieving experience. “People need to process their loss. It is often trivialized by non-pet owners who don’t understand the connection. I want to offer a safe place for pet owners to express their deep loss and not feel ostracized. As a therapist for over thirty years and pet owner, my personal experience of working with grieving clients has shown me that sometimes losing a pet can be even more intense than losing a person. We all experience loss in our own ways, in our own time as we heal”.

Pets provide unusual, unconditional love. They give us feedback that lets us know they love us when they purr or wag tails. They are always happy to see us, are non-judgmental, forgiving and pure while meeting our need for affection. Providing loyalty, companionship, security and comfort comes easily to them. No complications. No drama. And playtime is always a joy, whether we are observing or interacting with them. We communicate with our furry friends.

Humans have an intimate physical connection with pets. We make sure they eat and go out. We groom them, look in their ears, check their teeth, have them vaccinated and sometimes travel with them. We pet, hug and kiss them as they lay beside us. We sleep in the same bed. Some people actually spend more time with their pets than they do with other people. The absence of a pet creates a disruption in our daily routine. Letting them go is a huge, difficult decision when we are called upon to take that final step as the humane solution to a painful situation.

According to Rovello, there are two types of grieving styles. Instrumental grievers get busy, take action, take on projects. While hurting on the inside, they choose not to show it on the outside. Expressive grievers cry, emote, express their loss verbally and can lose motivation. “They all hurt; it’s just expressed differently,” says Rovello. “We all go through a grieving process. It’s normal and to be expected. Be gentle with yourself”.

“Some people wait to get another pet. Others do it right away. We need somewhere to put our love”, Rovello added.

As a licensed clinical social worker, Rovello is offering free pet grief group sessions in conjunction with the Stockton Veterinary Hospital at 56 S. Main Street, Stockton. Anyone who has lost a pet or is in the process of caring for a terminally ill pet is welcome to participate. For more information regarding the next available meet up, call Rovello at 609- 397-4173.