

The Pet Loss Support Hotline provides a telephone support service and nonjudgmental outlet for people to express their feelings and concerns. It also plays an important role in the education of future veterinarians.

Caring Support



Julian Lee, class of 2002, and his family dog, Chuck.

Pet Loss Support Hotline volunteer Julian Lee

Many pets are considered part of the family. When an animal plays such an important role in their life, an owner may have the same reaction to the loss of that animal that they would to the loss of a human loved one. Some people are surprised by their deep sense of loss.

The hotline helps us as veterinary students to be well prepared to offer care and compassion to our future clients when they are faced with the loss of a beloved companion animal. It also reinforces the reason I chose to become a veterinarian by allowing me to see the close bonds of owner and pet, and encouraging me to prolong the duration of that relationship.

Working on the hotline, which is very emotional, makes you want to go home and hug your own dog and cat.

Animals enhance our lives in many ways. It's no wonder we can become so emotionally attached to them. Every so often a very special animal finds a unique place in our heart. The end of the relationship with that special animal can be devastating.

The Pet Loss Support Hotline is a special resource for people who are dealing with difficult emotional issues concerning their companion animals.

When we must face the loss of an animal companion, we may be shocked to find ourselves experiencing intense grief. We may experience grief as we anticipate the loss of a sick or elderly pet, after the animal has died or has been lost in some other way, or even long after the animal is gone from our life. It might even be worrisome to have such an overwhelming response to losing what others think of as "just an animal."

The hotline is staffed by UC Davis veterinary students who are trained by a professional grief counselor. Student volunteers are familiar with the human-animal bond, the grief that can accompany companion animal loss, and the grieving process. They offer supportive communication skills and can also make appropriate referrals.

Pet Loss Support Hotline volunteers are available simply to listen, to help you sort through emotions or questions you may have, or to help you find other support in your geographical area. They can also send you supportive reading materials, free of charge, such as poems, stories, articles and a reading list of helpful books.

And it's not just the callers who benefit—The Pet Loss Support Hotline is also an important part of the education of future veterinarians. Veterinary students who serve as hotline volunteers develop skills in handling stressful situations that will arise both for themselves and their staff members, as well as the ability to help their clients deal with decisions and emotions concerning their companion animals.

Established at UC Davis in 1989 as the first of its kind, The Pet Loss Support Hotline has handled thousands of phone calls from the United States and Canada. Thirteen hotlines at veterinary schools across the country are modeled after the UC Davis Pet Loss Support Hotline, which is made possible through the generosity of IAMS and other donors. The new toll-free number is supported by the Animal Health Foundation headquartered in Southern California.



Lisa Leraas, class of 2001, and her cat, Jacob.

Pet Loss Support Hotline volunteer Lisa Leraas

Most people call the hotline because they want to talk to a friendly listener. Many callers are pleased when I tell them that I am a veterinary student, because they know that I understand what it feels like to care deeply about animals.

After talking to many people about their grief over the loss of a pet, I now have confidence in discussing difficult emotional issues. By staffing the hotline, I can also share my appreciation of the power of the special human-animal bond.

The Pet Loss Support Hotline

Services and referrals are free of charge. Call (800) 565-1526 or (530) 752-4200 6:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. (PST), Monday-Friday (Tu-Th during summer).

Call us. We understand the strong feelings people can have for animals. We have them, too.

Pet Loss Support Hotline volunteer Karen Sueda

For many callers, their pet is their child and their closest friend rolled into one. It doesn't matter what species—I've had calls about dogs, cats, horses, rabbits and even a wild goose.

Some of the most memorable calls are the ones in which I answer the phone and all I hear is crying. My heart just breaks because I can only imagine the kind of pain these owners are feeling. I usually tell them to take all the time they need—I'm there to listen.

The majority of the callers I speak with tell me they don't have anyone they feel comfortable talking to about how devastated they feel after losing their companion. I often hear, "My friends/family don't understand why I'm so upset over the death of an animal." Some have told me that they want to talk about their pet, but feel that everyone they know is fed up hearing about the pet. Just speaking to someone who understands why they feel such pain and loneliness helps a lot of callers.

Some people have a difficult time before their pet's passing. Parents call asking how to prepare their children for the death of the family's elderly pet. Some have difficulty dealing with a euthanasia decision. I try to provide a sounding board for their fears and worries, and to present options they may not have considered.

One of the best things I've learned from the hotline is how to listen. I encourage callers to tell me stories about their pets. The opportunity to share wonderful memories is a special way of memorializing their beloved animal.



Karen Sueda, class of 2001, with her pet mouse, Tipper.