An animal is often a very special animal and 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.

A new toll-free number is supported by the Animal Health Foundation headquartered in Southern California.