

## Dealing with Children's Emotions After a Pet's Passing: Understanding Grief Therapy



Pets, whether cats, dogs, or hamsters, are an integral part of the family and serve as wonderful companions for children as they grow up. However, pets will eventually leave us. While adults may find it easier to cope, for children, this may be their first significant encounter with the loss of a loved one.

According to a study conducted by Massachusetts General Hospital, which tracked over 6,000 children who experienced the loss of a pet, there is a correlation between the death of a pet or sudden separation and the subsequent onset of depression in children. Some cases showed that children continued to mourn their pets even three years after their death, ultimately being diagnosed with depression. This highlights that "how to cope with the loss of a pet" is an issue that needs to be taken seriously.

Registered psychologist Ching Wai-keung states that having a pet is a great opportunity for children to develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of responsibility. Generally, parents can consider allowing children aged 2-3 to start caring for a pet. However, while enjoying the joyful moments with pets, parents should also prepare their children for the grief associated with loss.



Ching Wai-keung notes that when children face the loss of a pet, they may exhibit emotional outbursts. In addition to crying and being upset, they may also show regressive behavior or feel guilt and self-blame. Parents should encourage children to express their emotions to prevent them from internalizing negative feelings, which could lead to further invisible trauma. To help ease children's emotions, parents can try the following methods:

- 1. Be Honest**

Parents should honestly explain to their children why the pet has passed away, rather than trying to deceive them with lies. Phrases like "The puppy ran away" or "The cat will come back later" can create more confusion for the child. It is the parents' responsibility to teach their children to recognize their emotions rather than divert their attention.

- 2. Show Understanding**

Comments like "It's just a dog; why get so upset?" or "Just get another one" may lead children to undervalue their emotions, thinking they can simply replace their pet with money. Instead, parents should express understanding of the child's sadness, sharing that they feel the same way. This encourages children to articulate their feelings and release negative emotions. Additionally, providing more hugs can help give children a sense of security.

- 3. Accompany Them in Farewell**

Parents should participate with their children in a "pet farewell ceremony." This could involve creating a memorial, organizing pet photos, or sorting through daily items, giving children the opportunity to say "goodbye" to their pet rather than ignoring the loss.