

Pet Bereavement Support



Welcome to this animal bereavement course, the aim of which is to offer some support to you during your grieving and healing process. Each of us as individuals responds to grief in different ways. This is also affected by our own personal 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 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 our family, they give us unconditional love and acceptance, they make us laugh 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. You may feel more drawn to some areas than others but it is important to use all the resources to gain the most benefit from the course. If you have recently lost your animal family member 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 meditations 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 and please be as gentle with yourself as possible. Your animal will be with you during this process even if you do not feel their presence, the love you share is eternal and the bonds of love can never be broken.

I may at times use words that perhaps do not resonate with you, please try not to let this distract you from the course, instead simply substitute a word or situation that you have positive associations with. For example I refer to heaven, for me this is the word that best describes the place of peace and joy I believe our animals go to when they cross the rainbow bridge. In this case you could imagine your animal's favourite place, maybe a wood, beach or park or perhaps even a comfortable sofa with a pile of toys waiting to be played with and lots of friends.



Course Outline

- Introduction
- Grounding Meditation
- Gratitude List exercise
- Three Part Breathing exercise
- Mindfulness Walking exercise
- Photo Collage creative exercise
- Heart Space Meditation
- Signs from Heaven
- The Next Step
- Additional support

Grounding Meditation ~ Stage 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 breath 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 Mother Earth. Now repeat this two more times. Next breathe in and bring the solid and grounding earth energy up through the soles of your feet, visualise the earth energy is filling your whole body, as you breathe out imagine this earth energy filling your aura, the area around your body, with the solid energy of mother earth. Repeat this two more times.

This meditation may be used alone or you may add in the next step and connect to the Universal Heart.



Universal Heart Meditation ~ Stage Two

Breathe in, visualise the breath coming in through the top of your head, your crown, and moving down through your body, filling your whole body with the beautiful energy of the universal heart. Breathe out, feel the loving and compassionate energy filling your aura, the area around your body. Repeat this two more times.

Now simply relax in the beautiful energetic space you have created through your breath and intention, relax into this space knowing you are in perfect balance with the world around you, grounded and connected to mother earth and connected to the universal heart. 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 meditation to do outside in nature.

Gratitude List

Here is a gentle process to assist you in connecting with your animal in heaven's soul energy, that loving part of them that is always with us no matter what.

The first step on this journey is to choose a happy photo of your animal, 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 higher self or heart self. Place your hands over your heart, left hand first, and set your intention to connect with 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 surrounded by loving angels, knowing that they are enfolding you and your animals in heaven in love, peace and compassion.

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.

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

Once you have a list spend a few minutes each day looking at the photo and at your list, which you may feel drawn to add to. By doing this you are building an energetic bridge connecting you with your loved one in heaven.

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 or Dirga Pranayama, which is a grounding and calming breathing exercise.

~ 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 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. Although these emotions are truly unpleasant they are necessary and lead us eventually to healing. 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 choice is completely yours and it is important that you do what feels good to you.

The grieving process is yours and we grieve so we can continue living in an attempt to have a fulfilled life.



Other Ways of Memorialising your Beloved Animal

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 in my Reiki Practice that some clients who keep the ashes of human and animal family members sometimes suffer 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 the ashes and a happy photo of your animal with some rose quartz to symbolise eternal love, 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 will be right for you and from a place of love.

Heart Space Meditation



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

Set the intention that you wish to share a loving space of peace and compassion with your animal in heaven.

Remember that you are simply creating a space to share with your animal and not doing anything, try to let go 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.

Gently bring your attention to the middle of your chest, your heart centre, allow a feeling of love to flow into your heart and expand that feeling. If you feel strong emotion just notice it and then bring your focus back to you breathing for a few moments and then return to that feeling of love in your heart centre. 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 colour or a stream of light or just imagine the love is flowing. Invite your animal to share this space with you. Trust that they are receiving this gift of love from you.

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

When you are ready to finish take three 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.

Signs from Heaven

Often when we start to let go, we start to receive signs from our loved ones in heaven, the signs are probably there for us before this point but perhaps they do not enter our awareness in the midst of our grief.

All that is needed is openness and a trust that our loved ones are able to connect with us through signs and we will start to receive them. If this is new to you, please do not discount anything as it could be the smallest thing that is a sign for you. There are many signs that are recognised as messages from heaven, these include but are not limited to: a white feather/s, robins appearing and other birds, butterflies and pennies, a song with poignant words or one that is special to you personally coming on the radio or playing in a shop you walk into.

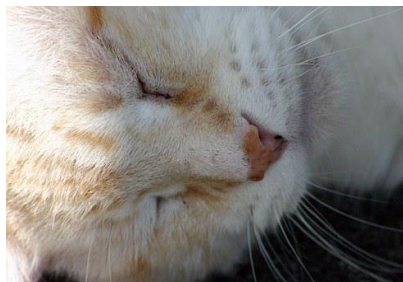


Here is a story I would like to share with you about Alfie, a very loving German Shepherd, who was a rescue dog and adopted by friends of ours. In March 2017, after a short illness and just before his 10th Birthday, Alfie journeyed over the rainbow bridge. Obviously heart breaking for his family, human and canine. Michelle would meditate with Alfie and his brother regularly and they all enjoyed this peaceful and bonding time together. A day or so after he had passed Michelle felt a big Alfie kiss on the side her face while she was sitting quietly with her other dog, this truly surprised her as it was the last thing she expected but she trusted it. This was later that day followed by a beautiful butterfly landing right in front of her in the garden. Just to make sure Alfie's signs were not missed, during a long journey in my car I noticed that the skyline was filled with beautiful white fluffy clouds and what looked like a doorway flooded with sunshine opened up. I immediately saw a picture in my mind's eye of Alfie and Bo, the family's beloved retriever who had passed away a year earlier, running around in the clouds looking so happy and free. Even after many experiences over the years with departed loved ones I still sometimes think – did I make that up? As soon as the thought entered my head on this occasion, a cloud in the shape of a GSD floated across the sky in front of me, I smiled I at the signs I was receiving from Alfie in heaven for his much loved family and was able to pass them on.

Please trust that even you do not notice a sign that your animal loves you and is always only a thought away.

The Next Step

Some of us will feel like we want to share our lives with another pet, 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 in heaven?
- 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

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.