

Relationship Advice: Losing a Pet During the Pandemic Like Hope Solo and Jerramy Stevens



 By Dr. Jane Greer

In this traumatic and unprecedented time of the global pandemic, we are surrounded by so much loss of life. In the United States alone many more than 90,000 people have died, and that number grows every day. With that in mind, it may seem that the loss of a pet pales in comparison to the death of a human loved one, and therefore people think they don't have a right to experience or express their heartbreak. But for many, pets are among their most loved ones, and saying goodbye can be devastating, even, or more so, during this time of isolation and widespread sadness. Sports couple Hope Solo and her husband Jerramy Stevens recently talked about the [loss of their dog](#), Conan, after he was tragically shot. Solo posted about it on social media, saying, "We're broken-hearted to share that Conan passed away from blood loss last night. He fought up until the very end. We're crushed. Just a dog running through the woods, trying to make his way home."

In the same way people wonder if it's alright to find things funny during these incredibly difficult times, many wonder if they can truly mourn the death of their

beloved pet without feeling guilty. In this relationship advice, is it okay to grieve for an animal when so many people are suffering?

The short answer is a loud yes, and there are a number of reasons why. For many people, especially those who live alone, a dog or cat can be a lifeline and can sometimes be the only interaction they have with another living thing, particularly in this time of social distancing. Your animal gives you companionship and unconditional love, which can be so important and fortifying that when they pass it can feel like a huge hole has opened up in your home and heart. The pain you experience can be overwhelming. With that in mind, in the same way it is important to continue to laugh, it is also important to make room for and acknowledge the sadness that comes with losing a treasured pet.

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Try not to compare your loss to those that other people are going through. While they may be different, they are nonetheless the same in terms of the emptiness they create. Keep in mind that nobody really knows how prominently your pet factored into your days – whether it was your feeding routine and the boost you got to your self-esteem through taking care of them, or the comfort you found when they jumped into your lap each afternoon or when they slept next to you every night. These many moments are now gone, and the magnitude of that is great. Furthermore, they have shared a substantial piece of your life history with you. Maybe as a kitten he was your first roommate in your new apartment. Or maybe you got her as a puppy the year you were married. Perhaps it was your faithful dog that saw you through your first breakup and

helped you survive. They were present and a touchstone for facets of your life that proved immeasurable.

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For some, the anguish can be so excruciating that they decide they never want to go through it again and choose not to get another animal. Others, though, feel that a way they can heal and honor the pet who came before is by replacing them and keeping their spirit alive.

Some get the same breed again, or even use the same name as a tribute of love. If you aren't ready to tackle the commitment of a new pet, during the pandemic it could be an opportune time to consider fostering an animal on a temporary basis. Sadly, dogs and cats are also losing their owners to the virus and are being abandoned, so it is a way to provide a home to animals in need while forging a new bond that can be healing for you as well.

The bottom line is that mourning the passing of a pet should not be minimized. Hope and Jerramy shared their loss publicly, and hopefully got much-needed support in doing so. It takes a long time to move beyond the sorrow after the death of a beloved animal. Appreciating what you are going through is the first step.

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