



*Dr. Henry Cloud & Dr. John Townsend. Reprinted with permission, MomSense, May/ June 2007*

# Dealing with the Death of a Pet

**Question:** *Your older dog is not expected to live much longer and your son wants to know if animals go to heaven when they die. How can you help a preschooler deal with the loss of a beloved pet?*

**Answer:** *The reality of death is difficult to deal with for grownups and kids alike. Yet at some point, we must all come to terms with it. Though it's a sad time, you can help your preschooler with his pet's death and also prepare him to deal later on with human losses, such as the death of a grandparent and others in his life. In fact, the questions he asks about his pet are often about him at a deeper level: "Will God take care of me when I die?" This is a vital opportunity for you.*

**P**reschoolers have an unformed and almost magical idea of death. They're not sure what dying is all about. They don't have a clear idea if it's like sleeping or if it's a trip to another dimension. They don't know if it's good, bad, permanent or temporary. Your basic task is to help your child see that the death of a pet is real. And yet it's a reality that's bearable because he has a mom who will help him understand and deal with it.

**Here are some steps to follow:**  
**Death is a normal reality.** Your preschooler needs to know that pets and people get old or sick and die; this is a normal part of life. Though we don't like death, it's not something

that scares or panics mom. It's "the way things go." Your child needs to know he's with a safe parent who can handle this sort of reality. Then he'll feel prepared to deal with it.

**God loves pets (and people).** Reassure your child of God's love and care for your pet. He knows what's best for him and for all of us. Read to him David's words from the Psalms: "You care for people and animals alike, O Lord." Psalm 36:6 (NLT) God is involved and protective. And He's stronger than death. Personally, we believe there's a case for the Bible to teach that animals are in heaven! Check out your local Christian bookstore for authors who write about this.

**It's OK to feel sad.** Sadness and grief are God's way of helping us honour those we've lost, let them go and move on. Tell your child you understand how much he misses his pet. Tell him you're sad, too, and that it's OK to cry. Comfort his sad feelings and talk with him empathetically.

**Create a positive memory.** Help your preschooler remember what he loved about his pet. Remembering helps a child create a positive emotional memory inside his heart about his relationship with his pet. It also helps with the grief process. Talk about the funny and cute things his pet did in the home and what a great pet he was.

**Get back into life's activities.** Grief was not intended to be permanent, but a season. Preschoolers will normally not be sad for too long and will be ready for you to help them get busy with their activities and friends. When your son has expressed his feelings and remembered what he loved about his pet, guide him toward his normal activities. And depending on your family circumstances think about getting a new pet.

**Use your pet's passing as a learning time about deaths reality and also God's protection.** Your preschooler is looking for a way to understand, accept and deal with death so he can continue growing and living.



## Practical Help for *Childcare in Church*

*Adapted for Cedar Springs by June Newbury, Toronto, Ontario*

**T**here are many ways to encourage parents and their children as they arrive for worship each week. Creating a comfortable environment for both parent and child will make the worship experience meaningful. After a busy week of responsibilities of home life and work, families arriving for worship will benefit from a Church that will value their children in providing them with a warm and comfortable setting.

Try these ideas for making childcare in your church and ministries a positive experience for both parents and children.

**Provide** enough workers so that one worker can greet each child with a friendly smile.

**Have** a sign-in sheet with a place for a cell phone number or the room the parent will be in, just in case a need arises.

**Be** sure all bottles, cups, etc. have labels with the child's name on them, masking tape is great for this.

**Provide** a numbering system for safety. One group uses two-part-clips, one clip is clipped to the child's diaper bag, and the other part of the clip goes with mom or dad. No matching numbers upon return, no child.

**Have** a spare set of second-hand baby clothes available, just in case there's an accident, or ask parents to include a spare set in the diaper bag.