



Veterinary Wisdom[®]

for practice teams

What NOT to Say to Grieving Clients

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The job of the veterinary team is to help clients deal with the thoughts, feelings, behaviors and issues associated with losing a beloved pet. In your efforts to help, please note the following things that are **NOT** found to be helpful to grieving clients:

- DO NOT use clichés such as “Time will heal.” Clichés are simplistic solutions to complex problems. Using them tends to make people suppress, rather than express, their grief.
- DO NOT compare one griever’s loss to another’s. Comparisons are attempts to minimize the impact of loss and imply that loss wasn’t as bad as it could have been. Comparing tends to make people suppress, rather than express, their grief.

Note: Self-disclosure about your own losses displays empathy and are not considered a comparison in this situation. It is important however, to keep conversations about your own loss to a minimum and to concentrate on your client’s loss.

- DO NOT encourage grievers to stay busy to keep their minds off their grief. Grievers need slow, empty, alone time to fully experience their grief and move through it.
- DO NOT give advice, lectures, or pep talks to grievers who are feeling down. Grief is a process that can take weeks, months or even years to complete. Grievers need time, patience, and understanding.
- DO NOT suggest grievers replace the pet they’ve lost. People who have experienced a major loss are often urged to get on with life. Most grievers view this advice as insensitive and are deeply offended by the implication that another pet could take the place of the unique beloved pet who died.



(Photo from istockphoto.com)

*Adapted from Morehead D., Lagoni L., et al. *Guidelines for Bond-Centered Practice*, 2001. (Out of print.)