

Avatar

A winter landscape featuring a snow-covered foreground, several bare trees with intricate branch structures, and a clear blue sky. The scene is captured in a cool, blue-toned light, suggesting a clear day in winter.

TeenHelp.org's eZine
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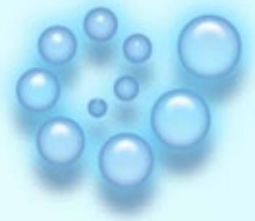


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Letter from the Editors

Welcome to the third of four "Winter Edition" installments of Avatar, TeenHelp's monthly eZine!

In this edition you will find "January in Review," a brief timeline of major news events from January, as well as articles on OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) and pet loss. As always we invite you to read the creative writing in the self expression section! Horoscopes will return in the March 2009 issue (Volume 2, Issue 9) which will be released on time.

All the best,
The Avatar Editors.

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Your valuable contributions are what make Avatar what it is. Please submit us your content, whether it be an article, poem, joke, game, photo, drawing or anything else you have to share!

Email us at
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The TeenHelp Times

January 2009



By Jes (Jessie)

January 1

An Israeli airstrike on the Gaza Strip kills senior Hamas military commander Nizar Rayan.
Russia halts deliveries of natural gas to Ukraine.
Slovakia adopts the euro and becomes the 16th member of the Eurozone.

January 2

A Swedish aircraft carrying 150 passengers lands at Baghdad International Airport. It is the first European commercial flight to land there since 1990.
Israel's Defense Forces launch a ground attack on the Gaza Strip.

January 3

A series of earthquakes strike Indonesia killing at least four people and wounding at least 37.

January 7

Israel and Hamas resume hostilities after allowing humanitarian aid to reach Gaza.

January 8

Rockets fired from Lebanon strike the Israeli city of Nahariya. The UN suspends humanitarian aid operations after receiving fire.
The Bank of England cuts interest rates to 1.5 percent, its lowest level in its 315-year history.
Russia and Ukraine agree to resend natural gas through pipelines to Europe.

January 9

Microsoft Corporation releases the beta version of its new operating system, Windows 7.
Governor Rod Blagojevich is impeached.
A 6.1-magnitude earthquake in northern Costa Rica kills 15 people and injures 32.

January 12

Urban warfare begins between Israeli Defense Forces and Hamas militants.

January 13

German Chancellor Angela Merkel announces a €50-billion economic stimulus package.

January 15

President George W. Bush bids farewell to the US.
US Airways Flight 1549 lands in New York City's Hudson River, with 155 people on board.

January 18

The Republic of China distributes shopping vouchers to all its citizens as part of plan to stimulate the economy.
Hamas agrees to a one-week ceasefire, but fires at least two rockets afterward. Israel begins withdrawing from the southern Gaza Strip.

January 18

Russia devalues the ruble for the sixth time in 2009.
Her Majesty's Government confirms a £300-billion bailout package for the UK's banks.

January 20

Israel completes withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.
Barack Obama is inaugurated as the 44th and first black President of the US.
Russia resumes transmitting natural gas to Europe.

January 21

US President Barack Obama halts the trials of detainees at Guantánamo Bay.
The UK reports that 1.92 million Britons were unemployed in December 2008.

January 22

US President Barack Obama will close Guantánamo Bay Naval Base's detention camp within one year and bans torture.

January 23

The number of unique Internet users reached one billion in December 2008.
The UK enters a recession.

January 26

A set of human octuplets are born alive in the US.

January 29

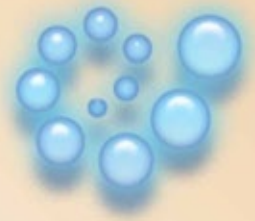
German unemployment rises to 3.27 million (7.8 percent).

January 30

A heat wave affects southeastern Australia.
More than one thousand workers strike at four UK oil refineries.

January 31

Iraq's provincial elections begin.



What is OCD?

By Casey (Casey)

You pick up your keys and set them back down. You do it again and again, until it feels right. Then you place the keys in your pocket and take them out. You keep doing it, counting silently, breathing deeply. Thirty minutes later you finally make it out the door. These little 'quirks' rule your life. You plan your day around them. People around you throw out a term repetitively: OCD. But what does that mean? What is OCD? What can you do about it?

What is OCD?

OCD is an Anxiety Disorder. OCD, or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, is also an uncontrollable repetitive thought or action. It is something that you feel compelled to complete, or else you may begin to panic. Everyone has little quirks, but sometimes those quirks get to the point where they control your life, causing you to panic if you don't act them out. You can't function normally anymore, your life is interrupted by these pesky little quirks. That, in a nutshell, is OCD.

If you have OCD, you could have obsessions, compulsions, or both.

Obsessions: Obsessions are thoughts, images, or impulses that occur over and over again and feel out of your control. You do not want to have these ideas. You may find them disturbing and intrusive, and recognize that they don't make sense. Those with OCD might worry excessively about dirt and germs and become obsessed with the idea that they are contaminated or are contaminating others. They may have obsessive fears of having inadvertently harmed someone else even though they usually know this is not realistic. Obsessions are accompanied by uncomfortable feelings, such as fear, disgust, doubt, or a sensation that things have to be done in a way that is "just so".

Compulsions: People with OCD try to make their obsessions go away by performing compulsions. Compulsions are acts the person performs over and over again, often according to certain "rules." People with an obsession about contamination may wash constantly to the point that their hands become raw and inflamed. You may repeatedly check that you have turned off the stove or iron because of an obsessive fear of burning the house down. You may have to count certain objects over and over because of an obsession about losing them. Unlike compulsive drinking or gambling, OCD compulsions do not give the same pleasure. Rather, the rituals are performed to obtain relief from the discomfort caused by the obsessions.

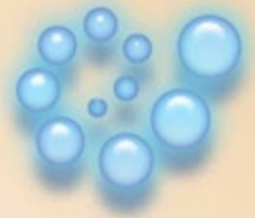
OCD symptoms cause distress, take up time (sometimes more than an hour a day), or significantly interfere with the person's work, social life, or relationships. Most individuals with OCD recognize that their obsessions are coming from their own minds and are not just excessive worries about real problems. They realize that the compulsions they perform are excessive or unreasonable. When someone with OCD does not recognize that their beliefs and actions are unreasonable, this is called OCD with poor insight. OCD symptoms tend to wax and wane over time. Some may be little more than background noise; others may produce extremely severe distress.

What causes OCD?

There are many beliefs as to what might cause OCD. Most people with OCD have someone in their family who has OCD or another Anxiety Disorder, so OCD is considered, in part, genetic.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder may also be caused by levels of serotonin in the brain. When the serotonin is blocked, the brain reacts thinking that it is in danger. Instead of the brain getting rid of the unwanted thoughts, the brain dwells on them. Thus, the person develops unrealistic fears and doubts.

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What is OCD? (continued...)

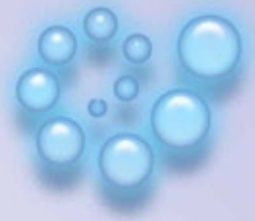
By Casey (Casey)

How can OCD be treated?

There are two main treatments for OCD: behavioral therapy and medication.

Behavioral therapy is when you are taught to do or not do a behavior. Behavioral therapy with OCD might be facing the obsession. An example might be touching an object that has touched another object but not being allowed to wash your hands. Behavioral therapy is considered the most effective because it teaches you how to deal with and conquer the present anxiety.

The second treatment is medication, which might be an anti-depressant or serotonin supplement. Medication is effective, but not as effective as behavioral therapy, as medication only helps you manage the anxiety, not overcome it. Behavioral therapy helps you to conquer the thoughts, actions, and anxiety caused by OCD.



Grieving the Loss of a Pet

By Shaz (Shaz)

When a person you love dies it is natural to feel sorrow, express grief, and expect friends and family to provide understanding and comfort.

Given the rich and intense relationships most pet owners share with their animal companions, the loss of a pet can be very painful. The loss of a beloved pet can trigger overwhelming feelings of grief and sadness. Many consider grieving inappropriate for someone who has lost "just a pet." In reality, though, nothing could be further from the truth.

Our pets live relatively short lives. For many of us who love our pets, their death can affect us in powerful ways. The death of a pet leaves few people entirely untouched.

A pet may come to symbolize many things to each of us. It may represent a child, or perhaps the innocent child in us all. It may reflect the ideal mate or parent, ever faithful, patient and welcoming, loving us unconditionally. It is a reflection of ourselves, embodying negative and positive qualities we recognize or lack in ourselves. The same pet may be all of these, alternating between roles on any given day or for each member of the family.

When a pet dies, we expect that our pain will be acknowledged, even if it is not shared, by our relatives, friends and colleagues. Though the bond between you and your pet is as valuable as any of your human relationships, the importance of its loss may not be appreciated by other people. The process of grieving for a pet is no different than mourning the death of a human being. The difference lies in the value that is placed on your pet by your family and by society as a whole.

How is the loss of a pet similar to and different from the loss of a human friend or family member?

One important difference between pet loss and human loss is that pet loss is often not appreciated. Friends and family may ask "What's the big deal? It's just an animal, you can always get a new one!" There is also the assumption by many that pet loss shouldn't hurt as much as human loss, because humans are supposedly more important than pets.

For someone who has truly loved a pet, however, the loss of that animal can feel just as devastating as a

human loss, if not more. The very things that make animals different than humans often make them more endearing. An animal who doesn't talk can't pass judgement or give you the silent treatment or withhold companionship and love. For many, pets provide a source of love, affection and companionship. Some of the qualities of a beloved pet are hard to match in human form for some owners. The loss of that companion can be heartbreaking.

The truth is that all losses, animal or human, can plunge you into despair and may signal the beginning of a profound spiritual-emotional journey. Like grief for humans, grief for animal companions can only be dealt with over time and in stages.

The stages of grief

The stages of grief are not orderly and precise, and sometimes the stages overlap. Even after you feel 'healed,' it's quite possible to feel the old pain afresh. When other life events prove challenging, you might feel the loss all over again because you are faced again with the absence of the comfort your pet provided. Knowing the stages of the grief process will not make them easier to go through, but knowing that your feelings are similar to those of others who have experienced loss might make you feel less alone in your sadness. Some people will quickly progress through all the phases, while others appear to get "stuck" in a particular phase. It's different for everyone. Briefly, the stages of grief are as follows:

1. Shock and Denial:

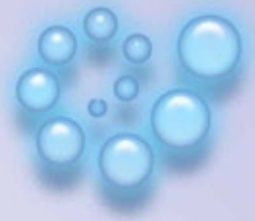
The reality of death has not yet been accepted by the bereaved. He or she feels stunned and bewildered--as if everything is "unreal."

2. Anger:

The grief stricken person often lashes out at family, friends, themselves, God, the Veterinarian or the world in general. Bereaved people will also experience feelings of guilt or fear during this stage.

3. Bargaining:

The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control. If only we had sought medical attention sooner. If we got a



Grieving the Loss of a Pet (continued...)

By Shaz (Shaz)

second opinion from another doctor. If we changed our pet's diet, maybe it will get well. Secretly, we may make a deal with God or our higher power in an attempt to postpone the inevitable. This is a weaker line of defence to protect us from the painful reality.

4. Depression:

Depression occurs as a reaction to the changed way of life created by the loss. The bereaved person feels intensely sad, hopeless, drained and helpless. The pet is missed and thought about constantly.

5. Acceptance:

Acceptance comes when the changes brought upon the person by the loss are stabilized into a new lifestyle. The depth and intensity of the mourning process depends on many factors. The age of the owner, circumstances surrounding the death, relationship of the animal to the owner and to other family members, are all significant. Recently experiencing the death of a significant person in the owner's life can also affect how the pet's death is handled. Usually, children recover more quickly, while the elderly take the longest. Sometimes, the death of a pet will finally enable the bereaved to mourn the loss of a person, whose death had not yet been accepted.

How Can I Cope with My Grief?

While grief is a personal experience, you need not face loss alone. Many forms of support are available, including pet bereavement counselling services, pet-loss support hotlines, local or online Internet bereavement groups, books, videos, and magazine articles.

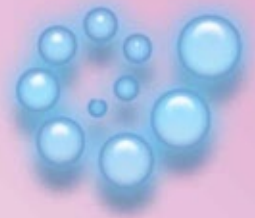
Here are a few suggestions to help you cope:

- Acknowledge your grief and give yourself permission to express it.
- Don't hesitate to reach out to others who can lend a sympathetic ear. Being around caring, supportive people can help you move forward.
- Write about your feelings, either in a journal or a poem.
- Call your local humane society to see whether it offers a pet loss support group or can refer you to one.
- You may also want to ask your veterinarian or local animal shelter about available pet loss hotlines.

- Explore the Internet for pet loss support groups and coping information.
- Prepare a memorial for your pet.

Getting a new pet?

Though it's tempting to fill the void of one pet's passing with another pet, most vets and grief counsellors say it's best to mourn the old pet so that the new one can be appreciated fully for its own sake, not as a replacement. That may mean choosing another type of pet or a different breed. Follow your instincts, you will know when it is right to bring a new animal companion into your life.



Self expression

from **When You Were Young**
By *star_crossd*

When you were young, sitting on the bus made you feel ten feet tall, peering down at the other cars dwarfed by the yellow goliath that was your transport to the place you would soon spend more time at than home.

Such exhilaration, escaping the tiny world of home where you have been for six straight years of your life save for brief reprieves of shopping or playground adventures at the nearby park, yet always watched by moms careful eye.

But now...now you are farther than you have ever been, surrounded by hundreds of people that seem like giants. They seem to hold all the wisdom and experience the world has to offer and you huddle with the few friends you've managed to make (in that delightful innocent way that was all you knew) during the short ride that seems like years as you glance nervously/excitedly up and down the aisles.

The "cool" kids (the upper classmen, whatever that meant) always sit in the back, a privilege it seems you are not old enough to come by yet. Yet sometimes you managed to sneak back, hidden from the watchful driver by seats a bit too tall for you. There, you entered a new world, if only for the brief ride to school.

from **When You Were Young**
By *star_crossd*

This was your domain, upon which you built amazing (to you at least) sandcastles, complete with enormous motes that were more like the Grand Canyon surrounding the blobs of sand with sticks and leaves poking through the top to serve as flags. You conquered the bars, being the first to climb all the way to the top and let your legs dangle down over your cheering classmates.

You wore the first battle scar on your knee from falling off and scraping a rock hidden beneath the sand. You wanted to wear that Scooby-Doo BandAid til the day you died...or at least until all the sticky stuff came off.

You picked handfuls of the flowers that grew on the edge of the playground to take home to your parents but most were dropped and trampled on the bus. But they still put the surviving few in a little glass of water on the counter and there they stayed til the petals dropped, brown and brittle.

It wouldn't be until a few years later that you learned those pretty yellow flowers were weeds

And you didn't think they were pretty anymore.

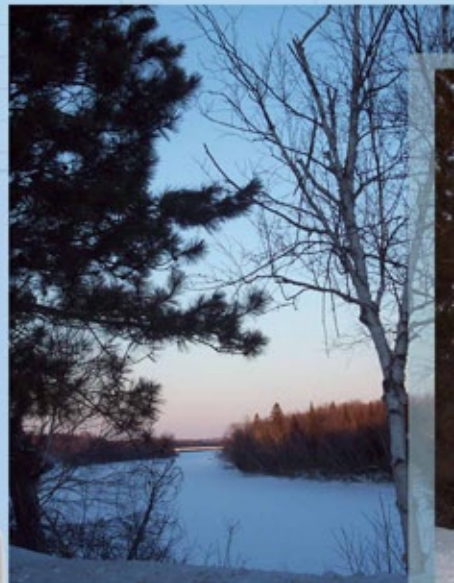


Photo by Mel

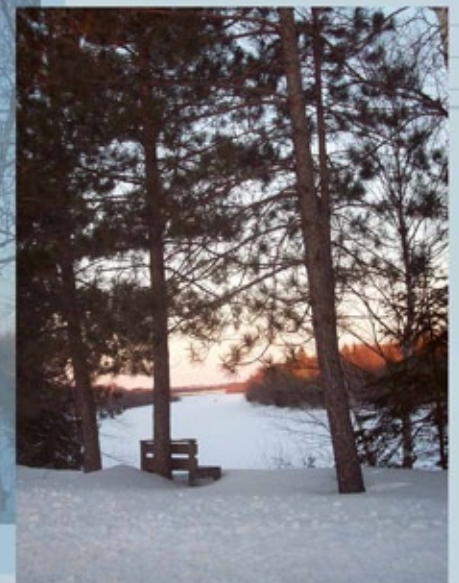
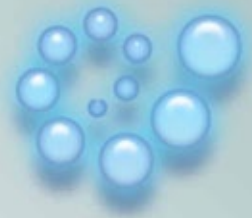


Photo by Mel



As always, to contribute to the Self expression section of Avatar, or Avatar in general, email us at avatar@teenhelp.org



The wind down...

Acknowledgements

Image sources

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Press hat: www.usagold.com

Thanks for reading!

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of Avatar! Any comments, questions, suggestions or criticisms can be directed towards the editorial team. You can also send us any submissions you have for Avatar, which are a really important part of keeping Avatar alive. We appreciate any submissions that are made to us. We look forward to hearing from you, and hope you enjoy the next edition of Avatar!

The Avatar Editors.

Please visit us at the Avatar page, www.teenhelp.org/avatar, or email us at avatar@teenhelp.org.