



How To Care for Yourself When Grieving A Beloved Pet

Deep grief tends to affect every aspect of our being – emotional, physical, cognitive, social, and spiritual. Nurturing our whole self can soften the initial acute impact and help us move with our grief and heal over time. The process of self-care and self-compassion is multidimensional and integrated, so attending to one aspect usually benefits other ones. While specific in nature, the following suggestions are meant to support overall well-being and relieve stress. They are organized for easy reference. Feel free to experiment with them to find which suit you best.

Emotional Self-Care involves expressing your heartbreak and acknowledging the many feelings that ebb and flow

- Let your grief set the pace and don't allow anyone to rush you.
- Be gentle with yourself and trust your intuition.
- Not everyone will understand your grief, so seek out both the conversational and silent company of close, empathic friends and/or counselors who truly appreciate your special bond with your beloved pet and how much you are hurting.
- Write about your grief in a journal or in a letter to your loved one.
- Engage creative outlets and hobbies, such as drawing, coloring, painting, photography, sculpting, woodworking, ceramics, crafting, sewing, baking, and poetry to express yourself.
- Consider welcome distractions that are easy and familiar, and rely on your favorite leisure pastimes, such as watching movies (especially comedies) and listening to music.
- When comfortable, allow for purely fun activities and daydreaming – escapist jollies and small rewarding activities can help to restore your strength and perspective.
- Let yourself play and laugh out loud without guilt whenever possible.



Physical Self-Care focuses on keeping your body strong and healthy.

- Grief depletes your energy and makes you susceptible to illness and disease, so slow down and allow for these fluctuations.
- Tune in and listen carefully for signs of discomfort, tightness, pains, and aches.
- Positive touch is powerful, so give and receive all the affection and love that feels right for you.
- Eat healthy whole foods and drink plenty of water, allowing for treats that bring you comfort.
- Take soothing baths or showers.
- Avoid sitting for more than 30 minutes at a time – move around often.
- Prioritize favorite forms of exercise – yoga, tai chi, pilates, cycling, and dance are great options.
- Get a massage, haircut, facial, pedicure, or other body or energy work that strengthens your connection to your physical self.
- Limit use of tobacco, caffeine, alcohol and drugs; instead, consider soothing hot beverages, chewing gum, and herbal remedies.
- Try to get enough sleep and take naps as needed – consider progressive muscle relaxation, aromatherapy, a sound machine, calming apps, and bringing a belonging of your pet to bed for comfort.

Cognitive Self-Care is essential since mental functioning can be seriously impaired by grief.

- Maintain routines that help you feel oriented and grounded, and carefully adjust any daily habits that are difficult reminders of the loss.
- Read books and magazines, listen to podcasts, and explore resources that can help you to understand what you are going through.

- Try puzzles and games to sharpen your memory, focus, concentration, and problem-solving abilities.
- Limit exposure to the news and unplug from technology (computer, TV and phone) for frequent intervals in order to simplify your daily life and allow your psyche to rest.

Social Self-Care is vital to the mourning process and as an antidote to loneliness.

- In addition to the support and comfort of family and friends, consider sharing with others who have been through a similar experience and hear what they found helpful, creating a strong network if possible; it's even better if they knew your pet well so they can truly relate and share favorite anecdotes too.
- Join a pet loss support group, whether online, by phone, or in person.
- Find a balance between the time you need alone and in the company of others.
- Limit exposure to people who are difficult or seem negative.
- As you are able, be in the presence of other animals, both wild and domestic.

Spiritual Self-Care involves universal aspects of the broader human experience beyond the individual that can bring meaning, strength, and healing.

- Spirituality often has value-based, philosophical, and sacred features and can, but does not have to, include religious traditions.
- Spend time in nature and let all of your senses take in the experience, especially slowly walking in the woods.

- Spend time near, in, or on a body of water like a pond, river, or the ocean, enjoying the positive vibes, soothing sounds, and natural rhythms.
- Lie on your back outside, feel the earth beneath you, and watch the clouds drift by.
- All types of gardening are especially therapeutic – including houseplants and cut flowers.
- Look for and relish beauty wherever you can find it.
- Light candles or make a fire in an indoor or outdoor fireplace if you have one.
- Call a dear friend you haven't spoken with for a long time.
- Do something generous and kind for someone else – human or animal.
- Find insightful and inspirational affirmations that speak to you.
- Reflect on and explore your ideas about the afterlife.
- If you have a strong religious faith, continue to practice it.
- Utilize meditation, guided imagery, and breathing practices.
- Count your blessings, forgive slights, and express gratitude often.

Finally, if someone offers, "Let me know if there's anything I can do," here are some ideas:

- Feed, walk or provide care for your other pets.
- Cook dinner or bring over lunch.
- Fill up the car with gas or get it washed.
- Drop off or pick up your children from school.
- Play with your kids or help them with homework.
- Clean a room or closet in your home.
- Do the dishes or laundry.
- Mow the lawn, weed the garden, or stack firewood.
- Pick up groceries or prescriptions.
- Run a couple errands.

