



## *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.

