

## What is Grief and Mourning?

Grief can be described as being a rational and natural response to the loss of a loved one. It is the full range of emotions, thoughts and experiences one endures when someone they love dies. Anticipatory grief is grief which occurs prior to the loved one's death. It is important to recognize that this may entail a wide variety of emotions and experiences and may trigger responses that are physical, mental, behavioral, emotional or spiritual in nature. Some of these may be conflicted such as feelings of guilt surrounding a feeling of relief over an end to a loved one's physical suffering.

***What are some of the emotions, thoughts and experiences you have noticed in your grief?***

Mourning is the expression of the emotions and thoughts related to grief. To mourn is to release those emotions in order to allow for healing. This release can be through emoting (crying, etc.), talking, writing, physical activities (running, exercise) or any other healthy method of release.

***What are some of the ways you express and release all the emotions you noted above?***

***What do you think you would need in order to feel supported during this time? Who in your personal life do you think may be able to provide you with that support?***

## Where to Turn for Anticipatory Grief Resources and Support:

Our Bereavement Website is an online Bereavement Community Resource page which is readily available to you at any time. Psychoeducational information surrounding grief, bereavement and loss, information regarding our bereavement related events and programs and links to other relevant community-based resources are provided. In the event you are unable to access our online resources, please do not hesitate to reach out to our Bereavement Center. We will do all that we can to offer you guidance and direction.

Peer support groups can be a tremendous resource during challenging times. They provide an opportunity to share your story with others as well as hear from others who have experienced the loss of a loved one. While each individual loss and experience is unique, much can be gained from connecting with others who are also walking along this road of bereavement. Our Pet Loss group schedule can be found on our website as well as links to connect to other groups throughout the state of New Jersey. In the event you cannot access our online resources, please contact our Bereavement Center to speak with our staff. (973-948-2283).

If you find yourself continuing to struggle during your grieving process and feel you may benefit from some individual support, our Bereavement Center offers one-on-one counseling. Sometimes it helps to talk through experiences and emotions in order to gain more explicit awareness of them.

*The most important thing to remember during this time is to be compassionate toward yourself. Facing the loss of a beloved pet can change your entire world. It becomes important to honor and experience your needs and emotions as they are, not how you or anyone else wants them to be or thinks they should be. This is your time to do what is best for you and your beloved pet. Please know you do not have to walk this road alone.*

# Joseph T. Quinlan Bereavement Center



## Anticipatory Grief Guidance and Psychoeducational Sheet (GPS):

A Bereavement Awareness and Support Community (BAASC) Initiative Component

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## You are not alone.

You have received this information because you've found out that your beloved pet's health is declining, and that end of life care and/or euthanasia may be necessary. We cannot imagine what you are thinking or feeling in this moment. Regardless of the surrounding circumstances of the health challenges or the age of your pet, being faced with losing such a cherished relationship and loved one can be one of the most challenging and painful experiences of this

life, especially when being tasked with making decisions on that loved one's behalf. Based upon our hospice and bereavement experience, we have tried to imagine what would be most helpful to you and hope to offer you some support and guidance during this difficult time. Please read this in small doses or read this all at once – in whatever way you can best explore and reflect on this information. This is your time to try to do what's best for you and your beloved pet. Please know that you don't have to walk this road alone.

## What To Do When Faced with Hospicing or Euthanizing a Pet:

**Be Informed.** Ask questions of the veterinarian so you have all of the relevant information. It is important to advocate for yourself and for your pet by ensuring you understand your pet's health challenges and the possible courses they may take. This is also helpful when speaking to others in your life who may also love your pet such as children or grandchildren. Children should be informed and allowed to participate as is age appropriate and as they are able and interested. Having all the relevant information may help to guide you in your care and decision-making processes and in making the best decision for you and your pet's specific situation. The more thoroughly we understand our loved one's situation, the better we can care for them and keep them as comfortable and healthy for as long as possible and we will be better able to recognize signs of significant and/or on-going pain or discomfort. This understanding may also be helpful to your own self-care and support should you find that you need to make the hard decision of euthanizing your pet. It is common to experience guilt during one's anticipatory grieving process, especially when faced with making such life and death choices. By clearing up any uncertainties in terms of the health challenges and prognosis of your pet, you may be able to offer yourself some com-



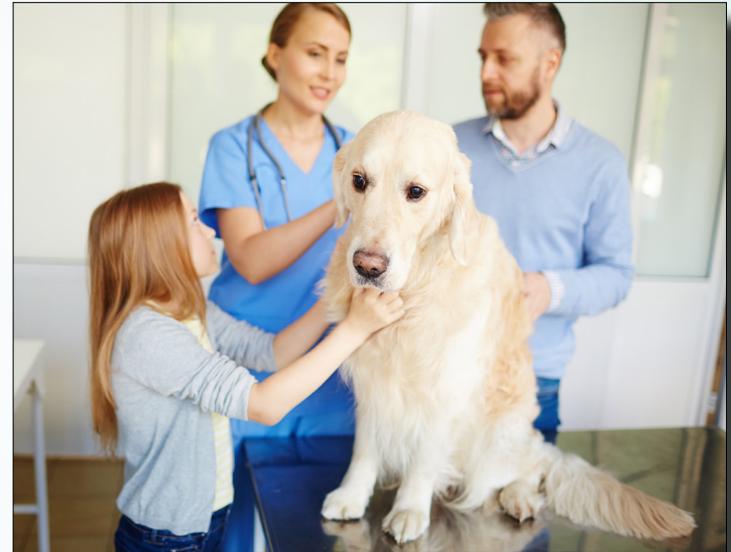
fort during times of doubt or regret in your compassionate decision to euthanize your pet. Be certain to ask your veterinarian what to expect during the end of life process and/or during euthanasia. Don't be afraid to ask these questions. By being informed you will be better able to prepare yourself and to be present with your pet for as long as possible.

**Be self-aware.** There are a wide variety of emotions you may experience when facing the death of your pet and they may change often and quickly. Try to allow yourself to experience, express and release these emotions

in healthy ways (talking, writing, crying, exercising etc.) rather than trying to be "strong" or to avoid them. These are part of a normal, natural process of grief which one experiences when facing a loss, typically through death. It is important to be honest in what you are feeling in order to promote self-care. Caring for yourself allows you to better care for your loved one. Have a plan for what you can do to support yourself during your pet's end of life process. If you are in a situation where you need to euthanize your pet, work on a plan to help get you through that difficult time.

**Be supported.** Allow people in your life to support you. Let the people who care for you and your pet know what is happening and how they can support you during this time. Allow others who care for your pet to spend time with him/her and say goodbye.

Their connection and time spent with your pet may be helpful to you as well. If you are euthanizing your pet, ask someone to come with you, if you think it may be helpful. Every individual experiences loss in their own way and has their own idea of what providing support looks like. Therefore, it becomes important to tell them how they can help to support you. These needs may change over time which makes it helpful for everyone involved to continue to speak openly. Accepting offered support can be difficult for many people and asking for it can be even



more difficult. Allow yourself to depend on others as needed throughout your anticipatory grieving process. Keep in mind that some people in your life may not understand the depth of your relationship with your pet. Let them know how much your pet means to you and tell them how they can support you during this time. Remember that no two situations are the same and it will ultimately be up to you to decide how to best advocate and care for them. Again, each and every individual relationship is unique.

**Be connected** with and memorialize your beloved pet. It can be helpful to memorialize the relationship and all that you have gained from your loved one while trying to find

a way through what will be lost upon their death. It is a reminder of everything they were and is another way to honor them and to provide yourself with meaningful sup-

port. Start early and give yourself and your pet as many meaningful memories as you are able during the time you have together. Spend extra time outside with them. Take pictures and videos. Think about how you might like to memorialize them after they have passed. Memorialization may look different to different people. Some people may want to make a clay imprint of the pet's paw or get a photograph of them and their pet at their favorite spot. Whatever it is that would be meaningful to you and can help allow you to remain connected with your beloved pet.