

## 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. 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 especially challenging or conflicted such as feelings of guilt surrounding making the difficult decision of euthanizing a beloved pet due to irreversible poor health or terminal prognosis.

*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 is Bereavement?

Bereavement is the state of grief and a time period of mourning after a loss, generally referring to the loss of a loved one. Bereavement work involves the truthful and honest experiencing of the full range of emotions which occur during one's grieving process. Throughout bereavement, grief can be cyclical, meaning that it can come and go. One moment may be different from the next and it sometimes feels as though you are moving backward along this road. You would not be the only person to feel that way.

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*You are not alone.*



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You have received this information because the pet you love has died. We want to extend our deepest and most sincere condolences. We have tried to imagine what would be most helpful to you in this moment and quite frankly, we can't. We can't imagine what you might be thinking or feeling, but based on our hospice and bereavement experience, we want to provide some information and guidelines which might offer you some support during this time. It is our hope that you find something here that you can use right away, or perhaps something will resonate with you a week from now. Please read this in small doses or read this all at once – this is your time to do what's best for you. Please know that you don't have to walk this road alone.

## **What is needed during Bereavement?**

**Be self-aware.** There are a wide variety of emotions you may experience, 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 after a loss. It is important to be honest in what you are feeling. Conflicts between expectations and other assumptions, whether self-imposed or otherwise, and your actual experience may arise. For example, one may feel uncomfortable asking for time off from work to mourn the loss of a beloved pet. It is important for you to experience grief as the natural process that it is and for you to be honest with yourself.

**Be supported.** Allow people in your life to support you. 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 grieving process. Keep in mind that some people in your life may not understand the depth of your relationship with your pet. Again, each and every individual relationship is unique. Let them know how much your pet means to you and tell them how they can support you during this time.

**Be patient with, and compassionate toward, yourself.** Being open and honest with yourself allows you to be open and honest with the people in your life. Part of this process is recognizing the validity of your natural grief experience. Engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities as you are able. Stay in and rest when needed. Nothing in grief is easy, so be easy on yourself.

**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 was lost. It is a reminder of everything they were and is another way to honor them and to provide yourself with meaningful support. Memorialization may look differently to different people. Perhaps creating a memorial in your home by arranging pictures and other meaningful items (i.e.- collar, favorite toys, etc.) in a specific place for you to visit and remember them may be helpful. Memorial gardens are another way to maintain your connection with your pet.

***What has helped you get through emotionally difficult times in the past?***

***What do you feel 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 When a Beloved Pet Dies:**

The people in your life who know you best and care for you can go a long way in providing support during such a difficult time. 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. Some examples of how support can be provided include regular “check-ins” and simply asking how you are, spending time with you and including you in activities or events or to be understanding if you do not feel up to participating in activities or events, reminiscing about favorite memories of your loved one, etc. Let them know specifically how they can be a support to you and what would be most meaningful to you at this time. These needs may change over time which makes it helpful for everyone involved to continue to speak openly.

Our Bereavement Website is an online Bereavement Community Resource page which is readily available to you at any time. Psychoeducational information surrounding 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 at 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. Losing someone you love 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. *Please know you do not have to walk this road alone.*