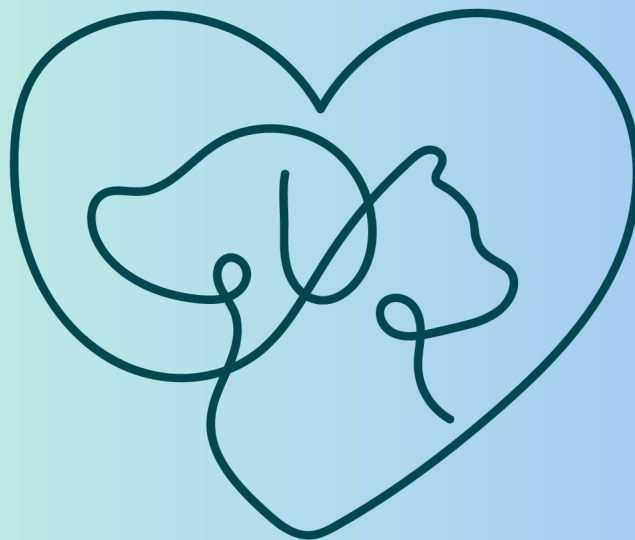


Coping with Pet Loss:

A Self-Care Guide



Your Loss Is Real, and So Is Your Grief

Losing a pet can feel like losing a part of your heart. The bond you shared was real, meaningful, and deeply personal—and your grief is just as valid as any other form of loss. There is no “right” way to feel or timeline to follow. You may experience waves of sadness, guilt, anger, or even moments of peace, all of which are natural responses to love and loss.



This guide is here to gently support you through that experience. Inside, you'll find compassionate reminders, simple self-care practices, and ways to honor your pet while tending to your own emotional needs. Take what feels helpful, move at your own pace, and know that you are not alone in what you're feeling.

Facts and Tips

Know these facts about grief as you navigate your journey

CRYING IS HEALTHY

Letting yourself cry can actually help you feel better. Your tears hold stress hormones. Releasing them reduces emotional pain while increasing well-being.

SCHEDULE “GRIEF TIME”

It may seem counterproductive, but dedicating time to be sad about your pet can help you feel less overwhelmed. Start by giving yourself 20-30 minutes of quiet time to think about your pet.

LOSING A PET IS JUST AS HARD AS LOSING A HUMAN

Pet grief is a form of disenfranchised grief - meaning your loss is not recognized by society as “significant.” This is INVALID! Talk to others that understand and validate your pain.

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO GRIEVE

Your grief timeline is unique to you, your past experiences, and your bond with your pet. Give yourself as much time as you need to grieve.

GRIEF IS UNEXPRESSED LOVE

Grief is incredibly painful. And grief is breathtakingly beautiful. Because grief is all of the unexpressed love you have for the one you lost.

The Basics

Self-care while grieving is about the small acts. You do not have to do it all. If you take one tiny step to care for your wellbeing today, that is enough. Remember to be as gentle with yourself as possible.

WATER AND NOURISHMENT

During the first few days of loss, you may be in shock, so try to take gentle care of your body—keep water with you and sip it throughout the day, and even if you have no appetite, do your best to eat small amounts of whatever appeals to you while limiting alcohol, especially if it's being used to cope with the pain.

Getting out of bed might feel impossible right after the loss. Don't put pressure on yourself in those first few days. Eventually, try to bring yourself to get out of bed. A shower or a short walk is more than enough.

MOVEMENT

NATURE

Spending time in nature can help clear your mind and feel connected to your pet. Nature reminds you of the circle of life, and that we are all a part of something greater than ourselves.

Sleep problems are very common when you're grieving. Limit caffeine in the afternoons. Try to keep a consistent sleep schedule. Talk to your doctor if sleep issues are affecting your functioning.

SLEEP

BREATHING

Diaphragmatic breathing can help calm your nervous system so you feel more at peace. Spend a few minutes each day breathing deeply and slowly, and try it before falling asleep.

Give Yourself Permission

If you'd like, print this out and draw a picture of your pet doing something they always loved to do (no artistic skills are required!). Hang this page up as a reminder that you have permission to take whatever you need while you're grieving. It's what your pet would want.



TAKE WHAT YOU NEED



A good cry

A glass of water

Comfort food

Mental health day

A hug

Binge watch a show

Scream into my
pillow

Night out with
friends

Go for a walk

Read a good book

Self-Compassion

Getting rid of your pain will not work; **tend** to it instead

Self-compassion, in a nutshell, is treating yourself with grace and loving kindness.

While you're grieving your pet, practicing self-compassion will take your self-care efforts deeper.

Self-compassion while grieving looks like:

- **Paying attention to and being extra kind when talking to yourself by saying things like:**
 - "It's okay that I'm hurting."
 - "I don't have to do it all right now."
 - "I can take as much time as I need to grieve."
 - "I'm allowed to feel sad."
- **Remembering your common humanity.** The pain, suffering, and vulnerability you feel is nothing to be ashamed of. Loss is part of the human experience. You aren't alone.
- **Being mindful** and nonjudgmental about how you feel by observing your experience instead of over identifying with it.

Self-compassion means treating yourself with as much love and care as you would your pet.



Mental Health Toolbox

Having a variety of self-care practices to turn to while grieving can help you cope. Sometimes, one option may work better than another. That's okay. Here are some ideas to get you started. Add the practices that work for you in the blank spaces.

Take a hot shower

Do a yoga class

Lay in the sun

Listen to your favorite music

Look at photos of your pet

Throw out your to-do list

Make some tea and get cozy

Watch a light-hearted movie

Make your bed

Call/text a supportive friend

Cook a nourishing meal

Take a short nap

Cry

Sign up for an art class



7 Days of Self-Care

Each day, do one small thing to care for yourself. Use this guide for ideas.

You’ve already started. Just by being here and taking a moment to think about self-care is a major step toward tending to your grief—and it matters.

Some examples:

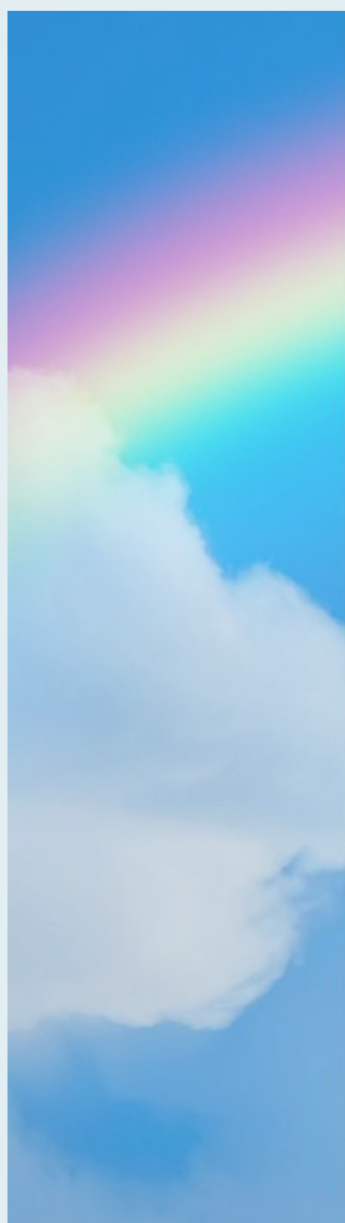
- “I drank water to hydrate.”
- “I gave myself permission to have a good cry.”
- “I took a shower.”
- “I spent time with friends.”

No pressure. No perfect way. And remember, if some days you’re just surviving, that’s more than enough

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Grief doesn't follow a timeline, and there is no "right" way to say goodbye. Be patient with yourself in the days ahead. The love you shared with your pet doesn't end here—it stays with you in quiet moments, in memories, and in the bond that will always be part of you.

If you need additional support, we invite you to visit our resource page using the QR code below, where you can find helpful tips, therapists, support groups, and more.



Rainbow Bridge

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge. When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, your pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water, and sunshine, and friends are warm and comfortable. All the animals who have been ill and old are restored to health and strength, those who were hurt are made better and strong again, like we remember them before they go to heaven. They are happy and content except for one small thing—they each miss someone very special to them who had to be left behind. They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are shining, his body shakes. Suddenly he begins to run from the herd, rushing over the grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cuddle in a happy hug never to be apart again. You and your pet are in tears. Your hands again cuddle his head and you look again into his trusting eyes, so long gone from life, but never absent from your heart, and then you cross the Rainbow Bridge together.