

Self-Care During the Grieving Process

Grief can affect every aspect of your being. Therefore, your emotional, physical, cognitive, social, and spiritual needs must be nurtured in order to work through grief and to heal.

The following are some suggestions on how you might begin the process of self-care. You may find that improving in one aspect makes you feel better in others, or that certain behaviors help in more than one area. This is because they cannot really be separated; each is somewhat dependent on the others and all are crucial in healing and maintaining your general good health.

Emotional

Emotional care involves expressing and acknowledging your pain.

- Talk with someone who understands the relationship you had with your pet and how much you are hurting
- Write down your feelings in a journal or in a letter to your loved-one
- Create a scrapbook or photograph album of your pet
- Use your artistic abilities such as drawing, painting, or sculpting to express your feelings

Physical

Physical care is done to keep your body healthy.

Grief can deplete your energy and make you extremely susceptible to illness and disease.

- Eat healthy foods
- Exercise
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs as a means of “feeling better”
- Try to get enough sleep

Cognitive

Cognitive functioning can be extremely impaired by grief.

Try stimulating yourself intellectually to improve your memory, concentration, and other cognitive abilities.

- Read books and other information that will help you to understand what you are going through
- Talk with others who have been through a similar experience and learn what was helpful for them
- Social contacts and establishing a support network are extremely important to help us not feel so alone.
- Find a healthy balance between the time you need alone and being with others
- Join a pet-loss support group
- Although not everyone will understand your grief, having a couple of close friends or family members who are supportive will help tremendously

Spiritual

Spiritual care involves doing things that you enjoy, that connect you with nature, and being kind to yourself. Some people refer to this as working in your “heart zone.”

Spiritual care can, but does not have to, include your religious beliefs or your philosophy on life.

- Take a long walk
- Take a long bath or shower
- Light a candle in memory of your pet
- Get a massage, facial, pedicure, or anything that makes you feel good about yourself
- Think about your philosophy of an afterlife for animals and talk with others who believe similarly to you
- Call a friend you haven't spoken with for a long time
- Do something kind for someone else
- Meditate
- Do something kind for other animals or for an animal cause