Helpful Tips for the Grieving Pet Parent

There are many different ways to cope with grief. We hope you’ll find some ideas in the list below that will help you on your journey.

**Give yourself permission to grieve.** It is normal to grieve deeply for your pet. Acknowledge your feelings. Allow yourself the time and space to express your feelings about the loss. Think about your relationship with your pet, what it means to you, how it happened, and how it affects your life.

Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It’s okay to be angry, to cry or not to cry. It’s also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you’re ready.

**Educate yourself about the grief process.** Understanding that grief is a normal process, and knowing more about the different emotions experienced during grief, will help you accept what you are going through and seek the support you need.

**Be especially good to yourself.** Each day allow yourself at least one thing that brings you joy. Engage in some relaxing activity: take a long bath, meditate, listen to a favorite song, or immerse yourself in the beauty of the natural world. Be patient with yourself. Identify what has helped you through a loss or a difficult time in the past. Make sure you get enough rest. If you can, take a day or more away from work. Let yourself cry, and talk to supportive people in your life about your feelings.

**Let others assist and support you.** Surround yourself with people who can be supportive of you at this time. Reach out to friends, family members, therapists, or clergy who are sympathetic to your loss. Check out online message boards, pet loss hotlines, and pet loss support groups. Or find someone who has lost a pet and will be supportive.

Not everyone understands the deep connection you had with your pet, and while you grieve it’s important to stay away from those who don’t understand your experience.

**Find at least one person you can talk to openly about your loss.** **Seek professional assistance if necessary.** Grief is a very personal and unique experience, but you need not face it alone. There are many forms of support available – take advantage of the ones that best suit your needs. It is most helpful to share your feelings without censorship with someone who is supportive. A pet loss support hot line, support group, or a local pet bereavement counselor may help you through your grief process.

**Find a special way to say good-bye to your pet.** Write a letter to your pet. Look at a photo and tell your pet all you want and need to tell him. Plan a service or a life celebration to provide a time and a place for mourners to support each other, acknowledge feelings of loss, pay honor to the life of your animal companion, and offer a proper farewell for your furry friend.

**Strive to maintain a normal routine. Maintaining a normal routine is an important goal when struggling with grief**. Start with the basics – make sure you eat, sleep and maintain personal hygiene. It may not be easy! Reward yourself for successfully taking any small step to reestablishing normalcy.

**Avoid Others Who Devalue Your Loss.** One aspect that can make grieving for the loss of a pet more difficult is that pet loss is not understood by everyone. Friends and family may ask “What’s the big deal? It’s just a pet!” Some people assume that pet loss shouldn’t hurt as much as human loss, or that it is somehow inappropriate to grieve for an animal.

**Don’t let anyone tell you how to feel.**

* Don’t argue with others about whether your grief is appropriate or not.
* Don’t tell yourself what you “should feel” either
* Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it’s time to “move on” or “get over it.”
* Accept the fact that the best support for your grief may come from outside your usual circle of friends and family members. Seek out only those who can appreciate the magnitude of your loss.