



Anticipatory Grief

Grief is a normal emotion and feeling in response to a loss. Anticipatory Grief is the sadness you may feel when you grieve in anticipation or expectation of loss. In either case, grief comes with feelings and emotions that may be painful, confusing, or even a bit scary. Some normal feelings that can accompany grief are sadness, heartache, anger, guilt, or isolation. And when you are anticipating a loss, additional feelings of fear, dread, or hopelessness are common.

Anticipatory grief can affect you as your pet ages. It can happen if you receive a worrisome or confusing medical diagnoses. It can even pop up when you first notice a bit of grey on a muzzle.

What is important to know about anticipatory grief is:

- It is absolutely and perfectly normal.
- You are not alone. Help and support are available, if needed.
- It doesn't have to rob you of the loving time you have left to share.

While we can't wave a magic wand to make it all go away, we can offer some practical tips and thoughtful suggestions to help you navigate this difficult time.

- Know your pet's health status. As your pet ages, it is even more important that you have regular wellness checks and updates. Changes in health can occur very quickly - if you consider that one human year is equal to seven dog years, for example, you realize that a lot can happen in just a few months. Your doctor will help you develop the best possible wellness recommendations based on your pet's individual needs.
- If your pet is facing an illness, the last day doesn't have to be the worst day. If your pet is diagnosed with a disease or illness that will likely shorten their life, make sure to understand the prognosis and what to expect as things progress. This will help you to make the best decisions you can for your pet's quality of life. You can avoid an emergent situation and step in to prevent unnecessary suffering.
- Quality of Life. Know what a good day looks like for your pet. Take inventory of the things they like to do, their regular routine, their eating and drinking habits. Write it down, and review it periodically. This will help you to notice changes more quickly and to better evaluate health shifts as they begin to occur. In addition, take inventory of the things they don't like or tolerate well so that you can make the best decisions for medical care or intervention and avoid causing unnecessary stress or discomfort.
- Gather information about end-of-life choices and options in advance of need. Know what is available in your area. This will reduce the amount of pressure-induced decision making that you will be faced with. And it will allow you to spend the time you have together in love and relationship. You can't



know everything in advance nor plan for every contingency, but by gathering information before you need it, you can save yourself from undue stress and the anxiety of making decisions under pressure.

- Keep growing your relationship. The end-of-life can be a beautiful, loving time when your relationship grows exponentially. It's an opportunity to slow down and connect heart-to-heart. Though your grief is normal, it doesn't have to get in the way of your precious time together.
- You are their voice. It's your role to speak on behalf of your pet and to honor their individual process. As difficult as this may be, no one else can be a better advocate. Your pet loves and trusts you unconditionally, and they depend on you to make the best decisions you can for them. You can do this by speaking to them with an open heart, asking them for clarity, and trusting the messages and signs you receive.
- Presence. Being present at this most sacred time is essential. You may have heard that you will know when the time is right. Most of us will never be ready to say goodbye. But there is a certain knowing that surfaces within you when you are fully present and connected. And it's from this place of presence that you will gain your most important information and messages from your loved one.
- Letting Go With Love. We don't always get to choose the perfect transition for our beloved pets. If you do have the opportunity to influence the timing of transition at the end of life, it can be a very meaningful experience. Think about what a good end looks like for you and your pet - consider what you can and want to do to support your pet and create a beautiful, loving transition to honor their life. Consider giving them the gift of a perfect day - a chance to spoil them. Use this opportunity to tell them how much you love them and will miss them. You may want to give them permission to move on, and let them know you'll be ok.
- Create a support team. Know who you can count on to help you, especially if you or your pet have special needs or limitations. And know what local resources are available for Pet Loss Grief Support. Grief is harder when we feel alone or disenfranchised. And grief shared is grief diminished.

Each relationship is unique, and each individual within that relationship is unique. There are no rules or road maps to follow as you approach the golden years and the end-of-life. We offer things for you to consider, and we invite you to open yourself to the possibilities - even gifts - at this challenging time.

