



Anticipatory grief

When you have learned that your beloved animal friend has a terminal illness and may soon be gone, it is very natural to experience grief while your pet is still with you, prior to his or her actual death. This is called anticipatory grief.

Many deaths occur with some forewarning. Thus, it is often during this period of anticipation that people begin to experience the various feelings and manifestations commonly associated with grief.

One of the most common feelings during this period is an increase in anxiety. For many people, anxiety increases and accelerates as the time of death draws closer. When there is some anticipation of death, it is common for people to mentally "rehearse" the event and its aftermath. Typically, people may ruminate on questions like, "How will I handle the death?" "Will I make mistakes?" and "What will it be like for the one who is dying?" This is called the "work of worry" and, when used in appropriate ways, it has been found to play an important role in peoples' overall ability to cope. During these times, it can be helpful to discuss your feelings with the people around you who understand your relationship with your pet. Making plans for the death of a pet can help to ease some anxiety and allow you to focus solely on loving your pet.

It is important to stay aware of spending too much time engaged in worrying. This can lead to emotionally withdrawing too soon from the one who is dying. This withdrawal can provide a false shield from the ongoing intensity of strong feelings, while in truth, it simply masks the emotions which remain disregarded, yet very intense.

(Adapted from Hospice of Larimer County, Fort Collins, CO)