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Pet Grief Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

1 · Identify Symptoms

2 · Write About Your Loss

3 · Challenging Misconceptions

4 · Pet Loss History

5 · Write a Goodbye Letter

6 · Honoring Your Pet's Memory

7 · Managing Difficult Emotions

8 · Grounding Toolbox

9 · Managing Inappropriate Comments

10 · Self-Forgiveness

11 · Exploring Readiness for Another Pet

12 · Resources for Pet Grief

How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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Identify Symptoms

The following are some common pet grief symptoms. Check off the ones you're experiencing or add more to the list:

Emotional Symptoms:

- ☐ Intense sadness and tearfulness
- ☐ Feelings of emptiness and loneliness
- ☐ Anger or frustration
- ☐ Guilt over decisions made regarding the pet's care or end-of-life choices
- ☐ Anxiety and worry about the future
- ☐ Emotional numbness or detachment
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Physical Symptoms:

- ☐ Fatigue or low energy levels
- ☐ Disturbed sleep patterns such as insomnia or oversleeping
- ☐ Changes in appetite, either decreased or increased food intake
- ☐ Physical ailments or exacerbation of existing health issues
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Cognitive Symptoms:

- ☐ Preoccupation with thoughts of the pet
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating or making decisions

- ☐ Forgetfulness and absentmindedness
- ☐ Intrusive thoughts about the pet's death or final moments
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Behavioral Symptoms:

- ☐ Withdrawal from social interactions or activities previously enjoyed
- ☐ Irritability or outbursts of emotion
- ☐ Seeking out places or objects that remind one of the pet
- ☐ Engaging in rituals associated with the pet, such as setting places for them at mealtimes
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Spiritual Symptoms:

- ☐ Questioning the meaning of life or struggling with existential thoughts
- ☐ Feeling a sense of connection to the pet beyond physical death
- ☐ Struggling with feelings of hopelessness or despair
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Write About Your Loss

1. Describe your pet:

Reflect on your pet's unique traits, personality, and the special bond you shared.

2. Share your memories:

Write down some of your favorite memories and experiences with your pet.

3. Express your feelings:

Allow yourself to openly express the emotions you are experiencing following your pet's loss. (e.g., sadness, guilt, anger, loneliness)

4. Changes in routine:

Note any adjustments or disruptions to your daily life as a result of your pet's absence.

Challenging Misconceptions

Write down any beliefs or thoughts about pet grief that feel distressing or unhelpful. The following are some common examples. Highlight the ones you're dealing with right now or add more to the list:

1. Misconception: "Grieving for a pet is not as significant as grieving for a human loved one."

Perspective: The bond between a pet and their owner can be incredibly deep, and the grief experienced after losing a pet is valid and significant.

2. Misconception: "I should be able to 'get over' the loss of my pet quickly."

Perspective: Grief is a personal and individual process. It's normal for the grieving process to take time, and there's no set timeline for healing from pet loss.

3. Misconception: "I shouldn't feel as devastated about the loss of my pet as I do."

Perspective: Your emotional response to the loss of your pet is natural and valid. Pets often become integral parts of our lives, and it's normal to feel profound grief.

4. Misconception: "It's inappropriate to hold a memorial for a pet."

Perspective: Holding a ceremony or creating a tribute for a beloved pet can be a meaningful way to honor their memory and find closure.

5. Misconception: "I must replace my pet immediately to fill the void."

Perspective: It's essential to give yourself time and space to grieve before considering bringing a new pet into your life. Each person's journey toward welcoming a new pet is unique.

6. Misconception: "I must keep busy and distract myself to avoid feeling the pain of pet loss."

Perspective: Allowing yourself to feel and process the pain of pet loss is a crucial part of the healing process. Finding a balance between distraction and acknowledgment is key.

7. Misconception: "My grief for my pet is irrational or excessive."

Perspective: Grief is personal, and there isn't a "right" or "wrong" way to experience it. Your emotions are valid, and it's okay to honor them.

8. Misconception: "My grief for my pet will never lessen, and I'll always feel this level of pain."

Perspective: Grief evolves over time, and while the loss of a pet may always hold significance, it is possible to find moments of peace, acceptance, and joy in the memories of your beloved companion.

My Misconception: _____

Perspective: What would you tell a friend in the same situation having the same misconception?

Pet Loss History

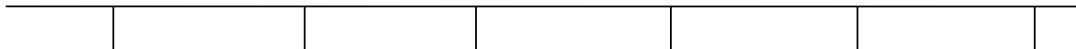
If this is not the first pet you lost, think about previous losses. If this is your first pet, think about other losses you experienced that have affected you (e.g., death of people, divorce, breakup, health issues, etc.). Reflecting on other losses can help you see what you learned, in general, about dealing with your grief.

Example:

Loss History Graph:



Your Loss History Graph:



Reflecting on Losses

Thinking about your previous losses, take some time to reflect on the following questions:

- How did you cope with the loss at that time?

- What emotions did you experience, and how did you navigate through them?

- What support systems or coping strategies were helpful for you during that period?

- Did you learn anything about yourself and your resilience while dealing with grief?

Write a Goodbye Letter

1. Address your pet: Begin your letter by addressing your pet directly, using their name or a special nickname.

2. Express your love and gratitude: Share your deep affection for your pet and express gratitude for the joy, companionship, and love they brought into your life.

3. Recall special moments: Highlight specific memories, experiences, and qualities of your pet that hold special significance to you.

4. Express your emotions: Openly express the emotions you are feeling as you prepare to say farewell to your beloved pet.

5. Expressing forgiveness (if needed): If applicable, convey any forgiveness, understanding, or closure you may seek related to your pet's passing or any challenges you faced together.

6. Words of farewell: Say your final goodbyes to your pet and express your wishes for their peace and comfort.

[illegible]

Honoring Your Pet's Memory

1. Memorializing your pet:

Brainstorm ideas for creating a lasting tribute to honor your pet's life and legacy. The following are some common examples. Check off the ones you want to act on or add more to the list:

As a psychologist, I understand that creating a lasting tribute to honor a beloved pet's life can be a meaningful and healing process for many individuals. Here are 20 ideas for creating a lasting tribute to honor your pet's life:

- ☐ **Planting a Memorial Tree:** Choose a special spot in your garden or a meaningful location and plant a tree in memory of your pet.
- ☐ **Customized Memorial Stone:** Engrave a stone with your pet's name, a meaningful quote, or a special message and place it in your garden or a favorite outdoor space.
- ☐ **Memory Garden:** Create a dedicated garden space featuring flowers, plants, and decorative elements that remind you of your pet.
- ☐ **Personalized Photo Album:** Compile a photo album or digital photo collage showcasing special moments and memories shared with your pet.
- ☐ **Donation in Their Honor:** Make a donation to an animal charity, shelter, or rescue organization in your pet's name.
- ☐ **Commemorative Artwork:** Commission a portrait, painting, or custom artwork capturing your pet's likeness and personality.

- ☐ **Writing a Tribute:** Compose a heartfelt letter, poem, or story celebrating your pet's life and the impact they had on you.
- ☐ **Memorial Jewelry:** Create or purchase a piece of jewelry, such as a necklace or bracelet, containing a small memento or engraving in honor of your pet.
- ☐ **Candle Lighting Ceremony:** Hold a meaningful candle lighting ceremony in remembrance of your pet, inviting loved ones to participate.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Cherished mementos:

List any possessions or keepsakes that hold special meaning and connection to your pet.

Managing Difficult Emotions

Identifying Your Emotions

Take a moment to write down the emotions you have been experiencing since the loss of your pet. These may include sadness, loneliness, guilt, anger, confusion, or any other feelings that come to mind.

Rate each emotions from 1 to 10 (10 being very intense). This can help you recognize the emotions that are most challenging for you right now.

Emotion: _____

Intensity:



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Emotion: _____

Intensity:



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Emotion: _____

Intensity:



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Understanding Your Emotions

1. Identify the triggers. Reflect on the specific situations, memories, or thoughts that tend to trigger your most intense emotions related to your pet's loss.

2. Validate your emotions. Understand that it is normal to experience a mix of conflicting emotions, such as longing for your pet's presence while also feeling overwhelmed by the pain of their absence.

Remind yourself that all emotions, even the most difficult ones, are valid and part of the natural grieving process.

Coping Strategies for Difficult Emotions

1. Find healthy ways to express your emotions. The following are some common examples. Check off the ones you want to try or add more to the list:

- ☐ **Journaling:** Writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you process and understand them better.
- ☐ **Talking to a friend or loved one:** Sharing your emotions with someone you trust can provide support and validation.
- ☐ **Engaging in physical activity:** Exercise can help release endorphins, which can improve mood and reduce stress.
- ☐ **Practicing mindfulness and meditation:** These techniques can help you stay present and manage difficult emotions.
- ☐ **Pursuing hobbies:** Engaging in activities you enjoy can provide a positive outlet for your emotions.
- ☐ **Exploring creative outlets:** Art, music, and other forms of creativity can help you express and process your emotions.
- ☐ **Engaging in relaxation techniques:** Deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and other calming methods can help reduce emotional distress.
- ☐ **Engaging in volunteer work:** Helping others can provide a sense of purpose and fulfillment, which can positively impact your emotional well-being.
- ☐ **Establishing a routine:** Having a consistent daily schedule can promote stability and reduce emotional fluctuations.
- ☐ **Limiting exposure to negative influences:** Setting boundaries with individuals or environments that contribute to negative emotions can be beneficial.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Grounding Toolbox

Grounding techniques are designed to help individuals stay connected to the present moment, manage overwhelming emotions, and reduce the impact of traumatic memories or intrusive thoughts. Try the following techniques. Highlight the ones you found helpful.

Physical Grounding	Mental Grounding
Progressive Relaxation Systematically tense and then relax different muscle groups in your body, noticing the contrast between tension and relaxation.	5-4-3-2-1 Technique Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
Breathing Exercises Take slow, deep breaths, filling your abdomen with air, holding for a few seconds, and then exhaling slowly.	Visualization Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful or safe place. Envision the details of this place.
Grounding Objects Carry a small textured object, such as a smooth stone or a piece of fabric, and use it as a tactile anchor when feeling distressed.	Guided Imagery Listen to recorded or guided visualization exercises that guide you through calming scenarios.
Mindful Eating Focus on the sensory experience of eating. Pay attention to the flavors, textures, and smells of the food.	Positive Affirmations Repeat positive statements about yourself or your situation, focusing on self-compassion.
Everyday Activities Mindfulness Engage in an everyday activity with great detail, such as making a cup of tea mindfully or folding laundry in intricate detail.	Category Game Practice a categories game, such as naming different types of animals or countries.

Managing Inappropriate Comments

1. Identify Inappropriate Comments:

List any comments or statements from others that have made you feel uncomfortable, invalidated, or misunderstood in regard to your pet grief. The following are some common examples. Check off the ones you encountered or add more to the list:

- ☐ "It's just a pet, you can always get another one."
- ☐ "You shouldn't be so upset over an animal."
- ☐ "Pets aren't as important as people, so your grief shouldn't be as intense."
- ☐ "Why are you still sad? It's been weeks since your pet passed away."
- ☐ "You're overreacting. It's not like it was a family member."
- ☐ "You should focus on the positive memories and move on."
- ☐ "Just get another pet and you'll feel better."
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Emotional Impact:

Reflect on how these comments have affected you emotionally. Consider the specific emotions they may have triggered, such as anger, sadness, or frustration.

3. Healthy Responses:

Brainstorm and list alternative or assertive responses you could offer when faced with similar comments in the future. These may include calmly expressing your feelings, setting boundaries, or educating others about the significance of your pet's role in your life.

4. Seeking Support:

Identify individuals or resources that can provide understanding and validation during this challenging time. This could involve seeking out supportive friends, family members, pet loss support groups, or mental health professionals who can empathize with your experience.

5. Self-Validation:

Remind yourself of the importance of honoring your own grief and the value of the bond you shared with your pet. Affirm the validity of your emotions and experiences, regardless of others' comments.

6. Setting Boundaries:

Consider how you can establish boundaries with individuals who consistently make inappropriate comments about your pet grief. This may involve limiting your interactions with them or openly communicating your needs and expectations regarding supportive conversations.

Self-Forgiveness

1. Identify the Feelings:

Reflect on the feelings of guilt or self-blame that have emerged since your pet's passing. Write down specific instances where you feel you may need to forgive yourself related to your pet's loss.

2. Understanding the Circumstances:

Consider the circumstances surrounding your pet's passing. Were there factors within or beyond your control that contributed to the outcome? How did you make decisions regarding your pet's care and end-of-life needs?

3. Recognizing Imperfections:

Acknowledge that as a pet owner, you did your best with the knowledge and resources available to you at the time. Understand that imperfections are a natural part of the human experience, and it's okay to be compassionate toward yourself.

4. Letter of Forgiveness:

Write a letter of forgiveness to yourself, acknowledging any perceived mistakes or shortcomings in caring for your pet. Express self-compassion, understanding, and willingness to let go of self-blame. Be kind and supportive to yourself as you write this letter.

5. Letting Go Ritual:

Consider a symbolic action to represent your willingness to let go of self-blame. This could involve lighting a candle, releasing a written message, or engaging in a mindfulness practice to symbolize your intention to move forward with self-forgiveness.

Exploring Readiness for Another Pet

1. Assessing Your Emotional State:

List the emotional aspects of pet ownership that you cherished and found fulfilling. Then, consider the emotional responsibilities and commitments associated with caring for a new pet. Reflect on whether you feel prepared to open your heart to another animal at this time.

2. Evaluating Practical Considerations:

Identify the practical aspects of pet ownership, such as time, financial resources, and living arrangements. Assess whether your current circumstances align with the practical demands of caring for a new pet.

3. Exploring Expectations:

Write down your hopes and expectations for a new pet. Consider how these expectations may differ from your past experiences and how they may influence your readiness to welcome another animal into your life.

4. Revisiting Your Bond with Animals:

Reflect on the role of animals in your life beyond companionship, such as emotional support, stress relief, or purpose. Consider whether the presence of a new pet aligns with your personal values and well-being.

5. Decision-Making Process:

Take time to weigh the emotional and practical considerations you've outlined. Assess whether the potential benefits of welcoming a new pet align with your current emotional capacity and lifestyle.

Resources for Pet Grief

The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement is a nonprofit organization staffed by volunteers trained in pet bereavement counseling.

<https://www.aplb.org/>

Everlife Memorials support groups in US

<https://www.everlifememorials.com/Pet-Loss-Support-Groups-s/443.htm>

Grief Healing lists several pet loss helplines, as well as virtual support groups.

<https://www.griefhealing.com/help-lines-message-boards-chats.htm>

Veterinary Medical Center at Michigan State University runs an online pet loss support group the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month from 6:30-7:30 p.m. (There is no charge for this service.)

<https://cvm.msu.edu/hospital/services/social-work/pet-loss-support-group>

Lap of Love: veterinary hospice & in-home euthanasia

<https://www.lapoflove.com/>

Letters to Pushkin allows you to express yourself through letter writing. You can write a letter directly to your pet, upload a photo, and if you wish make your letter public so that others can read it.

<https://www.letterstopushkin.com/>

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: Prolonged grief disorder · Bereavement is not itself a disorder; PGD applies only when full requirements are met after a human death.
- ICD-11 CDDR: 6B42 Prolonged grief disorder · Formal diagnosis with system-specific requirements.
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 30. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Assess elapsed time, persistent severe grief response, impairment, cultural/religious norms, depression, PTSD, separation anxiety, and suicide risk; do not infer PGD from relationship to the deceased alone.

Document-specific corrections

- Pages [2] · Frame ·Pet Grief· using the DSM/ICD status below; add duration, impairment, exclusions, and differentials without reproducing criteria. The title alone must never be treated as a diagnosis.
- Pages [1, 2, 4, 15, 16] · Treat the Pet Grief ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly.
- Pages [5, 19] · Avoid pathologizing expected grief or imposing forgiveness, closure, exposure, or relationship contact. Escalate for suicide risk, severe functional decline, trauma symptoms, coercion, or persistent disabling grief requiring diagnostic assessment. Apply this specifically to the workbook's Identify Symptoms, Write About Your Loss, Challenging Misconceptions, Pet Loss History sections.
- Pages [1, 4, 9, 14, 17, 18, 19] · Review all medical assertions in Pet Grief with a qualified medical professional; distinguish psychoeducation from individualized advice and add referral thresholds, contraindications, and medication/procedure cautions appropriate to this population.
- Pages [30] · Live-check every phone number and URL in Pet Grief, state its country/jurisdiction and purpose, add a last-verified date, and avoid implying that a directory or peer resource provides emergency response.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Treat the Pet Grief ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly. custom/unvalidated unless evidence is supplied confirm no third-party item wording was adapted

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Avoid pathologizing expected grief or imposing forgiveness, closure, exposure, or relationship contact. Escalate for suicide risk, severe functional decline, trauma symptoms, coercion, or persistent disabling grief requiring diagnostic assessment.
- Bereavement is not inherently a disorder. Consider prolonged grief disorder only when system-specific requirements, impairment, time course, and cultural, social, and religious context are met.

Crisis and current resources

- U.S.: call or text 988; chat at <https://988lifeline.org/>. Immediate danger: local emergency services. International resources must be separately verified for the intended country and dated.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/prolonged-grief-disorder>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>