

This Is What Loving Pet Parents Do When Their Pet Feels Rotten and Is Near Death

It's not the time for pity parties or descending into despair. Your beloved pet still needs your love and companionship. Here are five ways to stay emotionally up when your pet's health is down, so you can be the hospice caregiver your pet deserves.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Caring for a beloved pet with a terminal illness can take a heavy emotional toll
- To make your dog's final days with you the best they can be, it's important to take care of yourself emotionally
- Ways to do this: stay present in the moment, avoid finding fault with yourself and reach out to others for support

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If you're a dog parent, you've either already faced the death of a beloved pet, or at some point you will.

If you've lost a canine family member, you know it can be an extremely painful experience. In fact, many people are surprised by the overwhelming grief they feel when a dog dies.

Because the loss is felt so sharply, many dog parents brave enough to open their hearts to a new pet live in fear of "the next time." We know the day will come when it's time to say good-bye to another precious companion.

That's why we often have a tough time coping with the news that a current pet is now also at the end of his or her life.

Like many people, when the time comes, you may choose palliative care (comfort care) rather than aggressive treatment for an older dog with a terminal illness, and so you enter into a period of caring for a furry family member in his final days. You know what's coming, and it can take a heavy emotional toll.

It's important at such times to understand that while your grief and sadness may feel suffocating, there is hope. Licensed professional counselor **Chris Corrigan Mendez**, M.Ed., LPC, NCC, offers this reassurance in an article for Dogster:

"You can, while accepting and understanding the presence of your negative feelings, also invite in those that are more positive, supportive and comforting."¹

To make your remaining time with your pet the best it can be, Mendez offers five suggestions to help you maintain your emotional health and strengthen the bond you share with your pet during this crucial period.

Five Ways to Stay Emotionally Healthy When Your Dog Is Terminally Ill

1. **Stay present in the moment** — It's easy to occupy your mind with regrets about the past or fear of what's to come, but when you let yourself go there, you're missing the here and now with your dog. Your canine companion, by example, can help you stay present and live for today. Dogs experience each moment of life as it arrives, and so can we if we follow their lead.

As Mendez points out, "... [Y]our ailing pooch may still be experiencing fun walks with you, enthusiastic mealtimes and exciting adventures to the park, but you may not be really 'there,' enjoying them with him or her."

When you're with your pet and your mind is elsewhere, take some slow, deep breaths and refocus on your dog. Use your senses of sight, smell, hearing and touch to bring yourself back to the present, appreciate what's happening right now and reconnect on an emotional level with your dog.

2. **Remind yourself that you've always done the best for your pet** — It's very easy for the caregiver of a terminal pet to engage in a lot of "woulda coulda shoulda" and self-blame about their dog's health. Our dogs are 100% dependent on us from their first day in our lives till their last. That's why it's easy to feel your dog's illness is your "fault."

"It can be difficult to accept the terrible illness as a 'no fault' occurrence or mystery," says Mendez. "However, you can divert yourself from this path of self-blame."

You can think honestly and positively about how you prioritized your beloved pet through caring actions: the medical care, quality food, exercise, socialization [and] affection."

She recommends using affirmations to strengthen positive thinking:

"Five to 10 times each morning, midday and evening, speak words such as, 'I am continuing to do the best I can for my beloved pet,' or 'I am a loving pet parent. I am making our remaining time together the best it can be.'

As a result of these affirmations, you may find your self-judgment softening and the belief in yourself as a supportive pet parent strengthening."

It's important to always remember that no one has, or ever will, love and care for your pet in the same way you do.

3. **Take time each day for meditation and deep breathing** — It can be quite hard when you're feeling sad and also slightly overwhelmed by all that you need to do, to take time to "do nothing." But believe it or not, it can be extremely beneficial to set aside a few minutes to do nothing each day.

"As you progress through your pet's palliative care," says Mendez, "you may find your mind buzzing and your body scrambling to keep up with ongoing hospice duties. This can result in losing touch with yourself, your physical sensations and the appreciation of just 'being.'"

She recommends taking a few minutes each day to do deep breathing exercises and guided meditations. There are even guided meditation apps you can download to your cell phone that allow you to select how long you want to meditate, the music you want to listen to and more.

Setting some time aside each day to relax your body and quiet your mind can help bring you back to the present moment. It's also a great way to bring your stress level down as well. Taking homeopathic Ignatia and the Bach Flower remedy Honeysuckle can also be very beneficial.

4. **Reach out for kinship and support** — Thankfully, more and more people in society are becoming aware of the importance of pets in our lives, and there's also increased understanding of the tremendous grief and sense of loss many people feel when they lose an animal companion.

There are resources available if you need them, including veterinary hospice, articles, books and websites dealing with the loss of a pet and pet loss grief counselors and support groups. Reach out for information and support if you're feeling isolated or confused.

These resources are available, as Mendez points out, "... to help you feel more informed and supported as you move through the illness period with your beloved friend, arrive at the final journey decision and then grieve, mourn and heal."

5. **Express your thoughts and feelings** — "For many pet parents, keeping everything 'inside' significantly contributes to emotional distress," says Mendez. That's why it's important to keep in mind there are people out there who can empathize with your experience and help you cope. One way to dial back negative emotions is to write down your painful thoughts and feelings in a personal journal, or share them with a trusted family member, friend or support group. You can also consider talking with a professional counselor.

The benefit of this type of processing, says Mendez, is that it can help you "... gain understanding, acceptance and space in your mind for the positive beliefs and emotions that also deserve to be included. And with strengthened emotional health, you will be better able to fill the time you have left with your beloved friend with true connection, love and joy — making it the best it can be."

Sources and References

¹ [Dogster \(Archived\)](#).
