



Handling a broken heart:

The loss of your beloved animal companion and getting through the holidays

- 1) **Slow down--give up expectations of yourself or others for having the “Perfect Christmas”**
 - a. One of the things that is so important our relationships with our pets is that they accept us as we are. Feeling the loss of that acceptance during the holidays can create additional stress and grief. Cultivate the “acceptance” of yourself and others during the holidays by slowing down and giving up the need to have a “Perfect Christmas” or Holiday. Let everything be “Good Enough”
- 2) **Create time to remember your beloved animal companion-**
 - a. One of the things we do in the holidays is stay really busy. When thoughts come into our mind about missing our animal companion, we likely deal with it by “putting it out of our mind.” Instead, take some time to just remember your companion by writing a letter to him or her, lighting a candle for him or her, putting a picture up of your companion, among all the decorations.
- 3) **Create a new ritual-**
 - a. Many times what we experience most in grieving the loss of our pets is the change in routine we had with them. Each time we do not dole out a treat or get a morning lick, we experience the sharp pain of our broken heart. Try and establish some new habit to: a) remember your pet, b) acknowledge the change that has happened in your life, and c) provide tenderness to yourself in a true time of grief. For instance, if entering your home is difficult (missing the welcome home offered by your beloved companion), then when walking in the door make a habit of turning on your favorite music or lighting a candle first thing in honor of your pet. Changing routines and habits to regularly honor your beloved companion, acknowledge that a change has happened, and nurture yourself is helpful in getting through the holidays with a broken heart.
- 4) **Reach out-**
 - a. Not everyone understands how devastating the loss of a companion animal can be. Be sure to reach out to people who understand and will listen. You may call Veterinary Social Work at 865-974-8387.

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865-974-8387 <http://www.vet.utk.edu/socialwork/>

<http://www.grief-recovery.com/>

This is a website about effectively navigating grief. It has several helpful articles that can help answer questions about how to compassionately respond to grief for yourself and for others.

<http://www.petloss.com/>

This website has many, stories, poems, and resources specific to grief over the loss of an animal companion.