



Making Referrals to Mental Health Professionals or Support Groups

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If you're committed to helping your clients cope with the deaths of their pets, this means doing your best to connect them with credible, experienced mental health professionals who are trained to counsel them through their grief.

But, how do you do that without making your clients feel like you are suggesting they need "psychological help?" Here are three proven strategies with a sample script for each one. These strategies are ways to frame information and help your clients focus on a solution. They are not meant to be manipulative.

1. Personal-Disclosure

This technique allows you to share a bit of your own personal or professional experiences with pet loss. Revealing your own feelings can help your clients feel "normal" for having intense feelings of grief.

Margaret, I can see how difficult Bo's death is for you. Many of us here, including me, have grieved deeply for the pets we've loved. We often refer clients to a support service that specializes in helping people with the grief they feel after their pet has died. Many of our clients talk with these folks at least once and tell us that it has really helped them. In fact, I called one of the counselors when my father was dying and found her suggestions to be very helpful. The name and number of the service is here in this brochure (or business card, etc.)"



2. The Perception of Choice

When people feel they can make some personal choices during difficult times, they feel they have a bit of control over their own fate. When people believe they are in control, they are often more cooperative. This technique allows your clients to feel they have a choice about accepting the referral you make. Yet, as the last sentence demonstrates, you are really just giving them a choice about how the connection is made. This technique can be used when you have genuine concerns about a client's well-being or safety and it is your goal to connect them to a professional who can help them in ways that you can't.

"Margaret, I sense that you are feeling overwhelmed by the treatment information we've discussed and somewhat confused about how to decide what is best for you and Bo. I'd like to have you talk with someone at our referral support service. Would you like to call them now from my office and arrange a time to talk or would you prefer that I call now and make the appointment for you?"

3. The One-Down Approach

This technique allows you to establish clear boundaries around your own professional time and expertise while, at the same time, offering an alternative solution for providing a "continuum of care" for your client.

"Margaret, I wish there was a way I could be of greater help to you as you sort out your feelings about Bo's death, but providing on-going grief support is simply beyond my capabilities and expertise. I would like to refer you to a support service that helps many of our clients. Here is a brochure with the service's contact information. Would you like me to make an appointment with them for you?"

For more information, visit the Veterinary Wisdom[®] Resource Center at www.veterinarywisdom.com