



## Basic Principles for Providing Effective Grief Support

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It is not uncommon for caring, compassionate veterinary professionals to become overly involved in some of their cases. You must guard against this to avoid burning out. You will be of little help to clients if you are so exhausted that you cannot focus on their needs.

When you find yourself “in too deep,” remember the following points about how you can provide effective help for others and still preserve your own sanity and sense of well-being.

- You cannot control how clients respond to loss or how they grieve. You can only control how you respond to your clients.
- Emotional support is useful only when it is accepted. If your assistance is clearly not wanted, back off.
- People have the right to feel whatever they feel, whether or not you think their feelings are right. Never try to take away someone’s feelings or change one feeling into another in order to make your clients feel better. Simply acknowledge the feelings they describe.
- Always behave toward your clients with integrity according to a code of ethics. In other words:
  - ◊ respect your clients’ right to confidentiality
  - ◊ convey information in honest, truthful ways
  - ◊ refuse to censor, lie, or withhold information in order to protect your clients’ feelings
  - ◊ refrain from taking advantage of your clients’ vulnerable emotional state
  - ◊ always speak to clients with sensitivity and empathy
- Know your personal and professional limits and never attempt to exceed the confines of your client-support role. Seek guidance or support from other professionals you trust when you need it.



Please take care of yourself and remember that, when providing support, it is always more helpful to allow the other person to remain in control of his or her situation. Facilitate the grieving process by offering your clients guidance, structure, and honest information and by teaching them about what they can expect from the normal process of grieving. Emotional support efforts are most effective when you understand that you have a responsibility *to*, rather than *for*, your clients.

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