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How To Know It's Time: Tools for *Anticipatory Grief*

Deciding what's best for a beloved pet with declining health can feel overwhelming. You might ask yourself:

- *How will I know when it's time?*
- *Am I doing enough?*
- *What if I make the wrong choice?*

These questions come from love and from a normal emotional experience called *anticipatory grief*. It's the grief that begins while your pet is still alive and declining. The tools below are meant to help you feel supported, more grounded, and more confident in your decisions.

TRACK YOUR PET'S QUALITY OF LIFE	Keeping a simple daily record helps you see patterns over time, not just the isolated hard moments. Consider tracking: • Appetite • Mobility • Signs of comfort vs. discomfort • Moments of joy or contentment • Calendar of good days vs. tough days This isn't about turning your pet into data. It's about reducing fear with information.
INCLUDE YOUR WELL-BEING TOO	Your limits matter: emotionally, physically, and financially. Trying to do everything can lead to burnout. Acknowledging your capacity isn't selfish. It's *compassionate*. It helps you make decisions with intention instead of exhaustion.
THINK GENTLY ABOUT THE KIND OF ENDING YOU WANT FOR YOUR LOVED ONE	Planning ahead doesn't make loss happen sooner. It helps you avoid *crisis decisions*. You might reflect on what feels right for your pet and for you by considering: • Palliative or comfort-focused care • Hospice-supported natural end-of-life • In-home or clinic euthanasia options Thinking about these ahead of time can provide emotional space when the moment arrives.

DEFINE A "LINE IN THE SAND"	Some families find comfort in identifying a point at which comfort has become more important than prolonging life. This isn't a rigid rule. It's a reference point to ease the fear of "What if I miss it?" Examples include: • Pain that can't be managed well • Loss of interest in favorite activities • Repeated crises with little recovery • More suffering than comfort on most days
USE GROUNDING TOOLS WHEN EMOTIONS SPIKE	Strong emotions can make decisions feel impossible. When you start to feel overwhelmed, try a simple grounding practice before making choices. Naming what you're feeling in that moment, or try the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise: notice five things you can see, four you can touch, three you can hear, two you can smell, and one you can taste. This helps bring you back to the present and into a clearer headspace.

A Gentle Reminder

There's no such thing as a perfect decision, but there are decisions made with love, compassion, information, and steadiness. Many pet parents look back with more peace and fewer regrets when they know that choices were made from intention, rather than panic. You are doing the best you can with the love and information you have. *That is enough.*

For more information, support, and resources to guide you through grief, visit www.jaspergrief.com or use the QR code below.

You don't have to navigate this alone.