



ANIMAL ANTICS

DO PETS GRIEVE?

Many people find it hard to believe that animals can form very firm attachments with each other. Even pets that outwardly seem to barely get along will exhibit intense stress reactions when separated. In fact, grieving pets can show many symptoms identical to those experienced by the bereaved pet owner. The surviving animals may become restless, anxious and depressed. There may be much sighing and excessive vocalisation along with sleep and eating disturbances. Often, grieving pets will search for their dead companions and crave more attention from their owners.

How can you help a grieving pet?

Eventually your pet(s) will return to their normal behaviour. In the meantime, it is important to keep a grieving pet to its usual routine so that it won't develop bad habits, such as becoming more dependent on treats, or extra attention, which might lead to your pet acquiring a separation anxiety. Keep exercise and feeding to a regular pattern as much as possible.

Allow the surviving animals to work out the new dominance hierarchy themselves. There may be scuffles and fights as the animals work out the new pecking or pack order. This will be mostly displayed in dogs.

Don't get a new pet to help the grieving pet(s) unless you are ready. It is sure to backfire unless you are emotionally ready for a new pet. It is likely that, whilst still grieving, you won't have the energy for a new pet.

Should you let the surviving pet(s) see and smell their dead companion?

There is no evidence that doing so will help the surviving pet(s), but some people claim that it does. Do whatever feels right FOR YOU and your surviving pet(s).

What about your grief?

Given time, healing will occur. However, there are several things that you can do to help speed up the process:

- Give yourself permission to grieve. Only YOU know what your pet meant to you.
- Get lots of rest, good nutrition and exercise.
- Surround yourself with people who understand your loss.
- Learn all you can about the grief process ... grief is perfectly normal.
- Be patient with yourself and take as long as you need to mourn. DO NOT let society dictate how long mourning should last.
- Give yourself permission to backslide. Grief comes in waves. Don't be surprised if holidays, words, smells or sounds trigger a relapse.
- Don't be afraid to get help. The Blue Cross runs the **Pet Bereavement Support Service - 0800 096 6606**. They provide advice and counselling through Telephone Befrienders who are trained to deal with pet bereavement problems.

Conclusion

Grief is probably the most confusing, frustrating and emotional experience that a person can endure. It is even more so for pet owners. Society in general does not give bereaved pet owners "permission" to grieve openly. Consequently, pet owners often feel isolated and alone.

If you know of someone that is grieving ... listen, be sympathetic and encourage them to talk about their loss.

COURTESY OF PET PATROL 365

01892 771498 / 07974 728967

www.petpatrol365.co.uk