



FLORIDA VETERINARY BEHAVIOR SERVICE

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Do dogs and cats grieve?

Fairly frequently, I am asked if pets grieve. Some animals most certainly do grieve whether it be for a canine, feline or human family member. I have also been asked if it helps with the grieving process to let the remaining pet be involved in the veterinary appointments and eventual euthanasia of the ill pet. Although there is no research to support this statement, I believe that it does help. I have seen the difference in my own patients when they are allowed to follow the process. Although we will never really know what the pet is feeling or thinking, it appears that being able to be a part of the appointments and the euthanasia makes the grieving process shorter.



How will you know if your pet will grieve when a loved one passes away?

You might be able to predict your pet's behavior based on her current relationship with the ill pet. If the animals are always together, sleep in the same bed, follow each other around, and/or take cues from each other, it's likely that one will grieve when the other passes. If the pets just coexisted or played occasionally, but otherwise spent their time apart they probably will not be upset. This is also true of dogs or cats who are closely bonded to a particular person in the family. For example, if two cats sleep in a pile and groom each other regularly, they are more likely to grieve when compared with cats who simply live together in the same household. In the case of dogs, if one dog consistently follows the other around (going to the door to go out only when the first dog is there) it is likely that the follower dog will grieve the loss of the first dog. If the pets don't get along, the remaining pet is more likely to let the event go without notice. [Click here](#) for a touching article about a dog who grieved for his owner who was lost in the Afghanistan war.



How long will your pet grieve?

It depends on the individual pet and the relationship between the loved one and the remaining pet, however most pets are back to normal in about a month. I have heard stories from other veterinarians of dogs who lay on the grave of housemate for a week after the dog's passing. One owner told me that her dog looked into the bedroom of her deceased father for a year after he had passed away.

What will grieving look like?

Sometimes grieving behaviors were already present to some extent and worsened after the housemate's death or they may appear as new behaviors.

- Change in sleep/wake cycle
- Licking or chewing
- Destruction
- Clinging to the owner
- Crying for no obvious reason
- Lack of interest in things that previously were enjoyed
- Acting lost
- Loss of housetraining

What to do:

I have heard people say that you should not cry with your dog because it will upset your dog further. I have not seen any evidence that this is the case. The extra affection that you give your dog will not make your dog grieve any more than it would make you sad if someone hugged you. However, hugging a dog and comforting it also don't help your dog to cope with her grief. The tips below will help your dog heal from the loss of a friend.

- Increase the amount of "quality time" that your dog gets with you. Set aside time specifically for your dog. This does not mean simply being with your dog. Time spent together should be one-on-one and should involve play, exercise, reward-based training or grooming. Make these sessions fun. Do not expect perfection and use lots of praise, treats and toys.
- Reward her with petting and praise when she is calm and relaxed. You want to increase this behavior so reward it.
- Keep your dog's schedule the same as it was before the loss of her housemate. For example, if the housemate received medications each day at a specific time and both dogs would receive treats, continue to give the treats at that time as if you were still administering the medication. If this is not possible, make a schedule for your dog and stick to it. The routine will help to ease her anxiety.
- Get your dog out of the house. You can increase your dog's exercise or just take her on errands with you.
- Use food toys to keep your dog occupied when you are home.
- If your dog loves playing with other dogs consider taking her to doggy day care. If she doesn't love to play, doggie daycare will probably stress her so avoid it.
- Keep the items that smell like the loved one who has passed away in your home for a month or so.
- Some dogs need a supplement or medication to help them get through the grieving process, but this is rare. If this is the case with your dog, contact your veterinarian for help.
- Don't assume that getting another cat or dog will automatically make your dog happier. It depends on the individual pet.