



L O V E N E V E R L E A V E S SM

Helping Your Pet Through the Grieving Process

Do pets grieve over other pets?

Absolutely they do. In fact, many animals, including elephants and dolphins, have elaborate "funeral" rituals for members of their packs. They can also experience depression, but for animals in the wild, grief is a natural part of their life cycle. They process it and move on. They live in the moment.

Where the grief cycle gets different for pets is that they tend to take on their human survivor's emotions. Humans are comparatively afraid to go through the grief cycle, and therefore they interrupt the cycle with other events to avoid going through the needed, if painful, steps.

With pets mimicking our behavior, you will more clearly see many of the same steps of the grief cycle that we experience. Their version of anger and guilt will look like misbehaving. Cats, for example, will possibly "miss" the litter box or take to "spraying," a behavior they haven't done for quite some time, if ever. Dogs will potentially chew on something that they shouldn't, or take on a bit more of a "grumpy" attitude.

As animals move into the steps of acknowledging and acceptance of the death, they will possibly stop eating, playing, or interacting with others. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals conducted a Companion Animal Mourning Project in 1996. The study found that:

- 36 percent of dogs ate less than usual after the death of another canine companion.
- 11 percent actually stopped eating completely
- 63 percent demonstrated significant changes in vocalization, becoming either more vocal or more quiet

Furthermore, the study respondents indicated that surviving dogs changed the quantity and location of sleep. More than half the surviving pets became more affectionate and clingy with their caregivers. Overall, the study revealed that 66 percent of dogs exhibited four or more behavioral changes after losing a pet companion.

How can I help my pet through the grief process?

There are many things that can be done to help our other furry friends deal with the loss of their friend, too.

First of all, give them the opportunity to see and say their good-bye to their friend. Animals process events with their noses, and therefore they can smell the scent of death. This will confirm for the surviving animal that their friend has died. If it's not possible for the surviving animal(s) to see their friend, get a clipping of the pet's hair and allow the other pets at home to sniff this.

As an example, a client at a Pet Angel Memorial Center in Indianapolis mentioned that her surviving German Shepherd, Max, was wandering aimlessly around the house, looking for his deceased friend. Pet



LOVE NEVER LEAVESSM

Angel recommended she get a fur clipping that had provided to her as part of their services, and let Max sniff the clipping.

The result was very emotional. At first, Max became very excited to catch a scent of his friend and began to wag his tail. And then the reality of the smell hit him. His tail stopped wagging, he dropped his head, and then went to the corner and laid down with a sigh.

You can help the other pets in the household by keeping their routines as unchanged as possible. Increasing their activity, through going for walks or playing with toys, may also be helpful. This will not only benefit your pet, but help you too.

Should I get another pet right away?

Human beings would rather experience the emotion of denial than to acknowledge the death of a pet and process all of the emotions of this process. To a lot of pet owners, this may mean replacing the pet right away. However, bringing a new animal into a household that's still mourning is not a wise thing to do — for you, or for your remaining pet. When we do this, the animals become stuck in our grief and depression. If a human isn't finish grieving, the new or remaining animals are going pick up on this "weak" energy. From that very moment, that animal could possibly find itself in a position of being in control of both of their lives and becomes unbalanced.

I feel like I'm replacing my deceased pet by getting another pet.

Getting another pet is like having a second child. People have a second child to have a second child, not to replace the first child. And in another sense, getting another pet is a TRIBUTE to your deceased pet. You received so much from your deceased pet, in the form of unconditional furry love, that it's perfectly normal for you want to experience this love again. Again, what a tribute to your deceased pet!

In fact, if your deceased pet had been able to talk, this is probably what you would hear:

My Dear Family,

To have loved and then said farewell, is better than to have never loved at all.

For all of the times you stooped and touched my head...fed me my favorite treat...returned the love I so unconditionally gave to you...gave so much care to me, so unselfishly...for all of these things, I am grateful and thankful.

I ask that you not grieve for the loss, but rejoice in the fact that we lived, loved and touched each other's lives. My life was fuller because you were there, not as a master or owner, but as my FRIEND.

Today, I am as I was in my youth. The grass is always green, butterflies flit among the flowers, and the sun shines gently down upon all of God's creatures. I can run, jump, play and do all of the things that I did in my youth. There is no sickness, no aching joints, no regrets, and no aging.



L O V E N E V E R L E A V E SSM

With the rest of those who have passed on, we await the arrival of our lifelong companions and know that togetherness is forever. You live in our hearts as we do in yours.

*Companions such as you are so rare and unique. **Don't hold the love that you have within yourself.** Give it to another like me, and then I will live forever. For love never leaves, and you are loved and missed as surely as we are.*

*With much love,
Your Pet Angel*