

Grief in surviving pets



Although grief in animals is not very well understood currently, you may recognise changes in behaviour in your cats which may be attributed to grief. Grief in animals has been reported as being as individual as it is in humans with animals showing varying degrees of grief-attributed behaviour and some showing no outward signs at all.

Changes in patterns of behaviour are natural when another pet has died as the surviving pet(s) adjust to the change in the household. Where multiple pets remain, there may be a rearranging of relationships.

In a multiple cat household, the death of a cat can lead to surviving cats showing less inhibition and new willingness to seek attention from their owner.

While we must remember that each animal will behave differently in their grief these are some common behaviours that may be seen while a cat adjusts to the death of a housemate.

- Changes in appetite
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Unsettled, restless, wandering around
- Increase or decrease in confidence

- Searching and crying
- Increased or reduced interest in other activities
- Loss of confidence or a general sadness
- Attention seeking
- In contrast a pet may not appear to be missing the deceased pet at all
- Increased use of space in the house

For most cats, sticking to a familiar routine will be helpful in their adjusting to the change in the household. It's normal to want to spend increasing amounts of time with an existing cat following the death of a beloved pet, but unfortunately the increase in attention can actually be very stressful and intense, combined with the potential stress of losing a companion.

Introducing another cat into the home in preparation for, or shortly after, a death of another isn't always a positive experience for surviving animals. It usually takes some time for cats to settle into a household and for a relationship to form between animals. Assessing the individual animals will be important when considering bringing a new member into the household – especially when the remaining animals are adjusting to the change.

Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)



Need to talk to someone?

If you're experiencing the loss of a pet you can talk to us. Our volunteer listeners can provide you with emotional support and practical information at this difficult time.

Please get in touch, we're here and ready to listen.

t: 0800 024 9494
(9am–5pm, Mon–Fri) free and confidential

