



## **USEFUL INFORMATION FOR YOU AND PET COMPANIONS AFTER THE LOSS OF A PET**

### **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.

If more than one pet is remaining, allow the surviving animals to work out the new social structure themselves.

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.

### **SHOULD YOU LET THE SURVIVING PET(S) SEE AND SMELL THEIR DEAD COMPANION?**

There is no right or wrong answer to this question. There is no actual 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), in collaboration with your veterinarian, and be mindful that the body may smell differently to when your pet was alive, and this may upset a companion pet and cause them to react in a way that is not as calm and 'respectful' as you might hope. Remember that animals will not have the same awareness of respect for the dead as people do.

## WHAT ABOUT YOUR GRIEF?

Given time, healing will occur, but remember that emotional ups and downs are a normal part of any grieving process. Here's the paradox: In order to get past the difficult feelings, you must experience them. Don't try to speed up or avoid the process, but certainly get professional help if you feel overwhelmed with feelings of grief. Here are several things you can do, which will help you:

- 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. Grieving for the loss of a pet, whether through death or enforced separation, can be a sad and difficult experience. Life once filled with the love and friendship of a pet may suddenly seem very empty and feelings of despair and loneliness are not uncommon. Sometimes it helps to share these feelings with someone who knows from personal experience how distressing the loss of a pet can be, and who will listen with compassion and without judgement.

**If you know of someone that is grieving - listen, be sympathetic and encourage them to talk about their loss. Below is a list of useful websites for further support:**

- Blue Cross - [bluecross.org.uk](http://bluecross.org.uk)
- RSPCA - [rspca.org.uk](http://rspca.org.uk)
- Living with Pet Bereavement - [livingwithpetbereavement.com](http://livingwithpetbereavement.com)
- Animal Samaritans - [animalsamaritans.org.uk](http://animalsamaritans.org.uk)
- The Ralph Site - [theralphsite.com](http://theralphsite.com)
- Dignified Departures <https://dignified-departures.co.uk/articles/>