Do Other Pets Grieve When a Pet is Lost?

Life can change drastically for a pet who has lost the companionship of another pet. We don't know exactly how animals understand death, but it is likely that surviving pets feel the loss in ways similar to humans. Many pet lovers have experienced a companion pet becoming lethargic, upset, or even ill after a pet had died. It can be heart breaking, just when you are struggling to cope with your own grief.

**How will my other pets respond to the loss of their friend?**

Your other pet(s) will very likely have a time of “mourning” when they lose their friend. Depending on how close the pets were, there may be a time of adjustment for the remaining pet(s). Watch for behaviors that may indicate that a surviving pet is grieving:

* Searching for the missing animal, wandering aimlessly
* Taking over – or avoiding - the places and routines of the deceased pet
* Unusual vocalizations, sighing or an unusual silence
* Anxiety: clinginess, unusual frightfulness or aggression, restlessness
* Depression: lethargy, decreased appetite, decreased play, decreased or excessive social interactions with humans and other animals, excessive sleeping
* **Beware! Any of the behaviors listed above could also be a symptom of illness!**

**How Can I Help my Grieving Pets?**

When pets grieve, they need support and compassion, much like humans do.

There are several things that you can do to help your pets through this difficult time:

* Spend additional time with them
* Encourage activity by engaging in play, going for walks and other favorite activities
* Allow them to cuddle, sit or sleep with you
* Allow them to work out a new social hierarchy in the new reality after the loss
* Maintain normalcy, keep things as predictable and consistent as possible
* Consult your veterinarian frequently to determine if a visit is necessary to rule out health issues.
* Avoid the kind of attention that may reward acting depressed and inattentive. Instead, encourage activity by playing with toys, going for walks, etc.

When a pet is lost, the family dynamics change and everyone has to adjust to a new reality. With time and your support, surviving pets can find a new balance and happiness even after a very painful loss.