

WHEN OTHER PETS GRIEVE

Peaceful Passing for Pets: A Caregiver's Guide To Pet Hospice Care, Chapter 7,
"When Other Pets Grieve" - Ruth Stryker, RN, M.A.

One often forgets that other family pets are likely to grieve. Research has demonstrated that animals mourn the loss of their family members. Apes, elephants, dogs, birds and other species have been studied extensively. Cross-species mourning, such as an elephant mourning a dog, is not unusual either. Some animals show an initial reaction by crying, screaming, or other utterances. Some will be quiet at first, but then search for the lost one and become apprehensive later on. Dogs may become depressed, listless, stop eating, or become clingy. Some choose to sleep where their companion slept and some may start to eat out of the companion's bowl. We have all seen a pet mourn the loss of its human friend, but we sometimes forget that a pet can mourn its animal companion also.

The ASPCA Companion Animal Mourning Study found that two-thirds of dogs exhibit behavioral changes when a household companion dog dies. The negative behavior sometimes lasted six months and even up to a year or more in some cases.

Like people, animals grieve differently. It is recommended that other household pets see their friend after death. Some may nudge the animal as if to see whether there is a response. Another may lie down beside the animal while another may just walk away. Afterwards, the behaviors that might arise include loss of appetite, wandering around aimlessly, being clingy, or being less friendly. These changes are usually temporary but occasionally they become permanent.

Judith Lewis Mernit reports that after her dog, Seamus, died, her dog Spud was never able to recover from the loss. Spud was given a clean bill of health just days before he died, apparently of a broken heart.

My uncle had a standard poodle, Cocoa, and a beautiful collie, Ronnie, who were inseparable. Before the days of leash laws, they played together in their neighborhood while my uncle was at work. One day Cocoa walked in front of a

car and was killed. Ronnie was a witness to the accident. For a week, Ronnie stayed in his back yard, and howled for hours. After expressing his grief, he was gradually able to return to his new life without his best friend.

It is a helpless feeling to watch a pet grieve, but there are a few things you can do to be of help. First of all, give the companion some extra attention. It is also recommended that the grieving pet spend time with toys they played with together. Finally, extra exercise may also help. In extreme cases, an antidepressant may be indicated.