

Feline Grief

Dr. Dani McVety & Dr. Mary Gardner

The loss of a feline companion is not confined to the bond between cats and humans; the sense of loss extends to other feline family members as well. As cats are more naturally independent than humans or dogs are, they may not show signs of grief in the same way that humans do; however they certainly grieve in their own feline way. Differences in behavior depend on the personality and character of the cat. For example, more independent cats may require more attention and affection. Conversely, social cats may become more introverted. These changes in behavior may only be temporary as the cat adjusts and copes with the loss of their feline companion.

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals conducted the Companion Animal Mourning Project in 1996. The study found that 46% of cats ate less than usual after the death of a companion cat. Around 70% showed a change in vocalization pattern (they meowed significantly more often, or significantly less often, than normal). More than half of the cats became increasingly affectionate and “clingy” with their owners. Many of the cats also slept more, and changed the location of where they usually slept. Overall, 65% of cats exhibited four or more behavior changes after losing a pet companion. It's important to also consider that many of these cats could have been reacting to their owners' emotions in addition to the fact that the reporting of these changes could be weighted based the owner's individual perception of the grief.

In feline grief there are stages that can be classified by how the cat is behaving. The first stage is Activation. Your cat may be vocalizing, pacing and searching, sitting in the window and watching. The second is Depression. The cat might be listless and disinterested in whatever is going on. The final stage is acceptance, not in the human sense however, this is where we'll find cats truly “coming into their own” in their character; becoming friendlier, more active, more individual, especially if the passing cat had previously dominated him.

The death of a cat leaves not only a change, but a hole in many cats' lives. On average, the healing process takes between two weeks and six months. What you can do to aid in the healing is to understand what, if any, differences the cat may be exemplifying. A grieving cat will need reassurance and attention. If your feline companion is reverting to a more introverted state, do not force unwanted attention on a withdrawn cat. Offer food treats, catnip or new toys to draw a withdrawn cat out of its shell, or to reduce a suddenly clingy cat's over-attachment. Try to take her mind off the loss by engaging her in a favorite activity. And remember, some cats may not show any signs of grieving.

If you are concerned about your feline friend or if the grieving behaviors are not subsiding after a few weeks consider seeking other means of medical support. Take your cat to a veterinarian who can better assess what, if any additional measures need to be taken. Remember, time heals all wounds.

LapofLove.com