

# Appendix 6

## Helping a Grieving Cat

### Do Cats Grieve?

Following the loss of a feline companion or a family member it is sometimes reported by owners that their cats exhibit behaviours such as increased vocalizing, pacing and searching for the lost individual, followed by a reduction in appetite and becoming withdrawn and inactive. This reaction, which may last for just a few days or sometimes months, does seem to indicate that the cat may be grieving.

### How Can We Help?

#### Getting another cat might not be the best idea

If a close feline companion has been lost, providing another ‘friend’ can seem to be the obvious solution. But unfortunately, this is not always a good idea and may add to, rather than reduce, the stress and anxiety experienced by the grieving cat for the following reasons:

- Despite having lived with another cat, the resident cat may not be so accepting of a stranger, especially whilst grieving for the lost companion.
- If the newcomer to the household is another adult it is possible that he may regard the resident grieving cat as a rival and act aggressively towards him.
- A kitten may be more accepting of your adult cat but a lively and boisterous kitten can often be too much for a grieving cat to cope with.

It can be far better to help the grieving cat in other ways and consider the introduction of a companion later, when he may be more able to cope.

#### Consult your vet

It is especially important to contact your vet if your cat is off his food or lethargic for more than 24 hours because these symptoms might not just be due to grief, but could indicate that your cat is unwell.

#### Try to keep to your cat’s normal routine

Routine and predictability are very important for cats. The loss of the companion will have already resulted in some changes to normal circumstances, so it is important to make sure that everything else remains the same.

## **Don't throw away the other cat's bedding, etc.**

Bedding, clothing, etc. that contains the scent of the individual who is no longer around can provide the remaining cat with some comfort, and the gradually fading scent can help the cat to cope and confirm the absence of the companion.

## **Be available for your cat**

It is important to be around for your cat, especially when he wants comfort or attention from you, but always allow him to come to you rather than forcing your attention on him as this could also be stressful for him and at times he may prefer to be left alone.

## **Other cats**

As well as grief at the loss of a companion, it is also important to be aware of other possible effects that losing a cat can have on other cats that live in the same household.

## **Other household cats**

In a multi-cat household the loss of one can sometimes disrupt the relationship between the others. This situation is often short-lived and the cats will usually sort things out for themselves within a few weeks. But if serious fighting occurs or if the situation does not appear to be improving, it can be best to seek professional help, initially from your veterinary surgeon to check that underlying disease is not a contributory factor, and then from a suitably qualified feline behaviourist via veterinary referral.

## **Neighbouring cats**

If your cats are allowed outdoor access, the individual that has been lost may have played an effective role in defending the territory. Now that individual is no longer around, other cats might be more likely to enter the territory and cause problems for the remaining cat(s). If this occurs it is advisable to ensure that neighbouring cats cannot enter the house and that within the immediate territory, i.e. the garden, there is ample provision for the resident cats to access places to hide, places to get up high and be above the other cats, and escape routes so that they can get away from other cats.

## **Further Reading**

Carney S. and Halls V. (2016) Feline bereavement. In: *Caring for an Elderly Cat*. Vet Professionals, pp 113–117.

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