



Stanhope Park Veterinary Hospital

HELPING A GRIEVING CAT

DO CATS GRIEVE?

Following the loss of a feline companion or family member, it has been known for cats to exhibit behaviours such as increased vocalising, pacing and searching for the missing individual, followed by a reduction in appetite and becoming more withdrawn and inactive. These behaviours may last just a few days, or sometimes months, and do indicate that the cat may be grieving.

“SHOULD I GET ANOTHER CAT?”

If a closely bonded feline companion has been lost, obtaining a new “friend” may seem like the obvious solution. Unfortunately, this is rarely a good idea and may actually increase anxiety and stress for the following reasons:

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

It is often far better to help your grieving cats in other ways, rather than introducing a new companion.

CONSULT YOUR VET

If your cat is off food or lethargic for more than 24 hours, then it is important to consult your vet, as these symptoms might not be due to just grief, but could indicate that your cat is unwell.



If you have any questions about your pets, call us on 01325 620968 or ask a member of our team



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MAINTAIN A NORMAL ROUTINE

Routine and predictability are highly important for cats. Losing a companion inevitably results in some changes to normal circumstances, so it is important to try and keep everything else the same.

DON'T GET RID OF THE OTHER CAT'S BEDDING AND RESOURCES

Bedding and clothing etc that holds the scent of the lost companion, can provide your grieving cat with some comfort, and the gradually fading scent can help them cope and confirm the absence of their companion.

BE THERE FOR YOUR CAT

It is important to be around for your grieving cat and provide comfort and attention when they desire it. Always allow your cat to come to you rather than forcing your attention on them as this could also be stressful, and at times they may prefer to be left alone.

EFFECT ON OTHER CATS

As well as grief at the loss of a companion, there are other possible effects that losing a cat can have on other cats within the same household.

In a multi-cat household, the loss of one cat can sometimes disrupt the relationship between the others. This is usually a short-lived situation with things resolving over a few weeks, but if serious fighting occurs or the situation does not seem to be improving, then professional help should be sought. Initially your vet should examine the cats to ensure no underlying disease is a contributing factor, with the next step being referral to a suitably qualified behaviourist.

If your cats have outdoor access, the individual that has been lost may have played an effective role in defending the territory. This may now mean that neighbouring cats are more likely to enter the territory and cause problems for the remaining cat(s). It is important to ensure that neighbouring cats cannot enter the house, and that the resident cat(s) have ample access to hiding places; high vantage points; and escape routes, within the immediate territory (i.e. the garden), to allow them to get away from other cats and survey their surroundings for threats.

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