

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

Part Two of an article on grieving pets. Parts taken from an article by Lynn Buzhardt, DVM for VCA Animal Hospital

### **How can I help my grieving pet?**

As an important member of the pack, you can help your pet through the grief cycle. Try some of these tips to lift your pet's spirits.

Provide closure. Pets have a limited understanding of death as finality. It's tough, but if possible, let your pet see the body of his deceased friend. He may not totally grasp the situation, but one last visit may help him understand that his pal is gone. Some behaviorists think that a dog's grief response may be reduced by having an opportunity to investigate the deceased.

Control your emotions. It's instinctive to lean on your pet for comfort as you process your own grief, but try not to become too emotional in front of your pet. Your pet is sensitive to your feelings and your grief may add to his distress. It's fine to allow your pet to console you, but try to be aware of his response to your emotions. Try to talk to your pet in an upbeat voice even when you are sad.

Allow time for adjustment. With the loss of a family member, the pack is disrupted and the household dynamic is temporarily unstable. In multi-pet households, it is important for the remaining pack members to establish a new social structure. Let your pets work things out for themselves. Only intervene if their restructuring becomes dangerous. No fighting allowed! In households with two pets, the sole survivor may be lonesome, but you should avoid your natural tendency to immediately get another pet. A new pack member may only add more stress. It's best to adjust to the new normal first.

Spend quality time with your pet. Spending time with your pet during the grieving process is important, but as you and your pet comfort each other, be careful not to reinforce unwanted behaviors. As hard as it is, you need to fight your parental instinct to soothe your pet as he whines or paces incessantly or mopes around. It's best to ignore these behaviors and choose times when he is quiet to shower him with TLC.

Try something new. The pack has changed, so now is a good time to introduce new things. Find a new challenge that will distract your pet from his sadness and teach him something at the same time. Buy an interactive feeding toy. Walk on a different trail. Visit a new dog park.

Respect the old. New things are fine, but pets like basic routines. Try to keep the household on track despite the disruption by keeping daily schedules as consistent as possible. Regularly scheduled meal time, exercise time, play time, and bed time will help your pet feel more secure. There's comfort in familiarity.

Seek outside help. If your pet doesn't eat for several days, call your veterinarian to avoid major health problems. Continued behavior changes like depression or anxiety should also be addressed. A behavior consultant can provide methods to facilitate the re-establishment of a happy household. There are also medical therapies and pheromones that may improve your pet's attitude.

This Too Shall Pass...

Losing a pet is difficult for the entire household. It's especially hard for loving pet owners because they have to deal with their own sense of loss while watching their remaining pet grieve. Double whammy!

There is a silver lining to this sad cloud. Caring for your grieving pet may help you process your own loss and find quicker healing. It may also strengthen the bond between you and your furry friend as you walk this sad path together. Pet owners have shed many tears over the loss of a furry family members but we have also shared many loving and joyous times with them.

Dates to Save:

August 7 – Tag Day – Marketplace

August 26 – Been There Done That Band – Flat Creek Saloon – 7 p.m.