

# Helping Other Pets Grieve

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*A Gentle Guide to Supporting Surviving Pets After a Loss*

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*For the animals who loved them too.*

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*Hearts & Halos Photography  
Legacy, end-of-life & memorial photography · Nova Scotia's South Shore*

# Introduction

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When a beloved pet dies, it is natural to wonder how the other animals in the home are coping.

Many pet owners notice changes in their surviving pets after the loss of a companion. Some animals seem unaffected, while others appear quieter, clingier, less interested in food, or more unsettled than usual.

While we cannot know exactly what another animal is thinking or feeling, veterinarians and animal behavior professionals do observe behavioral changes in some pets following the loss of a companion animal.

This guide explores common changes you may notice, practical ways to support your pet, and signs that warrant a conversation with your veterinarian.

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# Do Pets Grieve?

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Researchers continue to study how animals respond to the loss of companions.

What we do know is that some pets show noticeable behavioral changes after another animal in the household dies. These changes may be related to:

- *disruption of routine*
- *loss of social interaction*
- *environmental changes*
- *owner grief and stress*
- *changes in household activity*

*Some pets show little change at all. Every animal is different.*

## **Gentle Reminder**

*There is no “normal” response.*

*Some pets adjust quickly. Others may take weeks or months to settle into a new routine.*

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# Common Changes You May Notice

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## Appetite Changes

Some pets temporarily eat less after a loss. You may notice:

- *reduced interest in meals*
- *slower eating*
- *skipping meals*
- *decreased enthusiasm for treats*

## What You Can Do

- Maintain normal feeding schedules
- Offer favourite foods when appropriate
- Avoid frequent food changes unless advised by your veterinarian
- Monitor food and water intake

## Contact Your Veterinarian If:

- your pet refuses food for more than 24 hours
  - drinking changes significantly
  - weight loss becomes noticeable
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## Searching Behaviors

Some pets appear to look for a missing companion. You may notice:

- *checking favourite sleeping spots*
- *investigating rooms*
- *waiting by doors*
- *searching the yard*

*These behaviors often decrease over time.*

## What You Can Do

- Allow exploration
- Maintain routines
- Offer reassurance without creating additional anxiety

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## Increased Vocalization

Some pets become more vocal after a loss. You may notice:

- *barking*
- *whining*
- *howling*
- *meowing*
- *calling behaviors*

## What You Can Do

- Respond calmly
  - Avoid punishment
  - Offer comfort and engagement
  - Monitor for signs of pain or illness
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## Clinginess

Many owners report that surviving pets seek more contact after a loss. You may notice:

- *following you around*
- *increased cuddling*
- *seeking physical contact*
- *difficulty settling alone*

## What You Can Do

- Provide reassurance
  - Spend quality time together
  - Maintain predictable routines
  - Encourage confidence-building activities
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## Withdrawal or Quiet Behavior

Some pets become less socially engaged. You may notice:

- *sleeping more*
- *reduced play*

- *less interaction*

- *decreased interest in activities*

### **What You Can Do**

- Continue offering opportunities for enrichment

- Invite participation without forcing it

- Allow extra rest when needed

## Routine Matters

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One of the most helpful things you can do is maintain consistency. Pets often find comfort in predictability.

Try to keep the following as consistent as possible:

- *feeding schedules*
- *walking schedules*
- *bedtime routines*
- *play sessions*
- *training activities*

### Gentle Reminder

*Routine provides security during times of change.*

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## Supporting Emotional Well-Being

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Simple enrichment can help many pets adjust. Focus on quality rather than quantity.

Consider:

- *sniff walks*
  - *food puzzles*
  - *training games*
  - *gentle play*
  - *car rides*
  - *favourite activities*
  - *quiet companionship*
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## Should My Pet See the Body?

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This is a question many families ask. There is no universal recommendation.

Some veterinarians and behavior professionals believe that allowing a surviving pet to briefly investigate the body may help them understand that something has changed. Others may show little interest.

**Gentle Reminder**

*If this option is available and feels appropriate, discuss it with your veterinary team.*

*There is no evidence-based requirement that surviving pets must see the body in order to adjust successfully.*

## When To Contact Your Veterinarian

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Behavior changes should gradually improve over time. Schedule a veterinary visit if you notice any of the following:

- persistent refusal to eat
- significant weight loss
- vomiting or diarrhea
- severe lethargy
- signs of pain
- ongoing distress
- sudden behavior changes
- concerns about overall health

*Medical issues can sometimes appear similar to grief-related changes. When in doubt, a call to your veterinary team is always worthwhile.*

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## Taking Care of Yourself Matters Too

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Pets are sensitive to household changes. They may notice altered routines, increased crying, changes in activity, and emotional tension.

*Caring for yourself is also a way of caring for your surviving pets.*

### **Gentle Reminder**

*Your pet does not need you to be perfect.*

*They need consistency, patience, and time.*

*Some animals adjust quickly. Others need a little longer. Both responses can be normal.*

*The goal is not to rush the process. The goal is simply to move through it together.*

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