

Animals Grieve Also

Part III

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Animals grieve the loss of their animal and human friends. Not all animals of one species grieve the exact same way, just as not all humans grieve the exact same way. However, just as humans go through similar grief journeys, there are species-specific grief behaviors that animals exhibit as well.

How Animals Grieve, a book by noted author and anthropologist, Barbara J. King, identifies how different species have been observed exhibiting grief. Elephants from different families will visit, smell and touch the deceased elephant. Birds bury their dead under grass and twigs, and make unique chirping noises. Monkeys have been seen cleaning their deceased offspring. Cats may pace and wail. Dogs may sleep more, not be willing to play as usual, have indoor potty accidents, or lose their appetite.

Be mindful of the right to be on one's own grief journey. If a dog is not showing grief, do not assume that the dog is not grieving. Just as people grieve differently, so do animals. Sometimes, due to anthropomorphism (assigning human traits to animals), we look for human grief actions in animals. While a dog might not seem sad, it could very well be grieving the loss of an animal or human companion in a way that a human cannot readily observe or appreciate. Pets may grieve for weeks, or even months. A prolonged grief period, however, may be a sign that a veterinary appointment is needed for a health check-up.

Just as you show compassion to your friend or family who is grieving a loss, show compassion to your pet who is grieving the loss of a human or animal companion. Give your pet affection, quiet time, exercise, and the comfort of a routine. Do more of what your pet loves to do, such as ball chasing, walks, or performing tricks for treats. Spend more time with your pet, and meet unusual behavior such as marking or chewing with compassion. Most importantly, give your pet understanding.