

Helping pets who have lost their **best buddy**

Losing a housemate can be hard on the entire family—including your other pets. Here's what you can do to help.

Sometimes when highly attached pets are separated, we see what is called a “distress reaction.”

Signs of a pet's distress can sometimes look like human grief, often characterized by changes in sleeping and eating habits, disinterest in usual activities, and a reluctance to be alone or away from human family members. Some pets will “search” for their buddy, wandering around the house. And sometimes, pet parents and veterinarians will allow surviving pets to be present during euthanasia or to see and sniff their buddy's body after death. While some who've followed this plan believe it helps, others report no reactions at all from their surviving pets.

What you can do

So what can you do if your pet seems to be grieving? Your veterinarian will be able to recommend the best course of action, but consider the following:

- **Keep routines as consistent as possible.**
- **Keep your pet's diet and mealtimes the same.**

If your pet hasn't been interested in eating for several days following the death of his or her buddy, it's tempting to offer table scraps and treats. However, if pets learn that not eating results in treats, they may become less likely to eat their regular meals!

- **Although it's human nature to want to comfort your pets, try to spend time with them when they are behaving in desirable ways.**

If pets receive more attention from you when they are depressed and inactive, these behaviors may become a way for them to get more attention from you. You can create opportunities to provide positive reinforcement by keeping your surviving pets active. Exercising together may help you feel a bit better while you're grieving, too.

- **Allow your surviving pets to work out their own relationships.**

When several animals live together, they often form very specific relationships. When a member of the



group dies, the group can become temporarily unstable. This might result in conflicts involving growling, hissing, barking and even mild attacks. If this happens in your household, talk to your veterinarian about what you can do.

Grief is not always well understood—in pets or in people. Keep close attention to your surviving pet for signs of distress, and don't feel pressure to “replace” the pet you've lost. You can always reach out to your veterinary healthcare team to discuss your concerns. For now, take a deep breath, keep your furry friend close and remember the good times with their best buddy.