



# Exploring Grief in Felines

Emerging studies reveal that cats may experience grief when they lose a companion animal in their household. This insight marks an exciting breakthrough in feline behavioral science, showing that cats possess a profound emotional capacity. They form bonds with both humans and other animals, and, like humans, they can feel a sense of loss.

## How Cats Bond with Other Pets

Cats are often stereotyped as solitary animals. However, research increasingly shows that they develop close relationships with other pets, whether another cat, dog, or even small animals. These bonds vary, as some cats become highly social with their furry companions, engaging in play, grooming, and shared sleeping spaces. This social bonding, though sometimes subtle, sets the groundwork for a grieving response when that connection breaks due to the loss of a companion.

## Recognizing Grief in Cats

Observing grief in cats can be challenging, as their emotional expressions differ from human expressions. Nonetheless, studies and anecdotal evidence from cat owners highlight behaviors that may signify grief. A grieving cat may become withdrawn, sleep more, or lose interest in activities it once enjoyed. Changes in appetite are common, too, as grieving cats might eat less or even refuse food. Increased vocalization—like persistent meowing or crying—is another potential sign. Cats may also display clinginess, seeking comfort from their owners to fill the void left by the deceased pet.



# Scientific Insights into Feline Grief

A growing body of scientific literature on feline emotions supports the idea that cats experience complex emotions. Researchers theorize that, like humans, cats' emotional responses stem from the presence of certain neurotransmitters and hormones, such as oxytocin, which is often associated with bonding and social behavior. When a cat loses a close companion, its oxytocin levels may drop, potentially triggering feelings of loss.

Studies on animal grief generally focus on larger mammals, but more attention is turning to felines. For instance, research comparing cats with species known for social behavior, such as dogs and primates, reveals similarities in bonding and grieving patterns. This suggests that cats may process loss similarly to other social animals, adapting to life changes with noticeable shifts in behavior and routine.

## Coping with a Grieving Cat

When a cat grieves, pet owners can help it cope in several ways. Maintaining a stable routine offers the cat comfort and familiarity, which can ease its anxiety. Providing extra affection, playtime, and enrichment can also help divert its attention from the absence. In multi-cat households, introducing new toys, interactive games, or even a new companion after a reasonable period might help fill the emotional void. However, patience is essential; cats, like humans, need time to adjust.

Recognizing and addressing grief in cats adds depth to our understanding of their emotional lives. This knowledge enriches the human-cat bond, reminding us of the responsibility to provide emotional support when they experience loss. As science progresses, our appreciation for the emotional complexity of cats—and animals overall—continues to grow, reinforcing that grief knows no species boundary.



# References

Here are some references for you to get more information about the article on cat emotions and grief:

1. ASPCA's Study on Pet Loss and Companion Grieving: ASPCA provides insights on how companion animals grieve and the behaviors they display during this period. Their research notes that behavioral changes in cats following the loss of a pet companion include withdrawal, changes in appetite, and altered vocalization patterns, which align with signs of grief in humans. ASPCA on Pet Loss.
2. The Animal Grief Project by Jessica Pierce: This project explores the phenomenon of grief in animals, including cats. Pierce's work emphasizes the emotional bonds cats form and how these bonds lead to mourning behaviors when they experience loss. Her research discusses the similarities between human and feline grief, highlighting neurotransmitters like oxytocin in the bonding process. Animal Grief Project.
3. International Cat Care: A resource that discusses how cats develop bonds with each other and how owners can support a grieving cat. Their guides also provide practical advice on managing a cat's emotional needs during the loss of a companion, focusing on maintaining routines and giving the cat time to adjust. International Cat Care on Grieving Cats.
4. Alley Cat Allies on Community and Social Bonds: Alley Cat Allies, an advocacy group, discusses the social behaviors of cats in community settings, which contributes to understanding their capacity for emotional bonds and grief. They highlight how social ties in colonies support the notion that cats have complex emotional lives and can experience loss. Alley Cat Allies.
5. Study on Feline Oxytocin Levels: Research on oxytocin levels in cats shows that this bonding hormone plays a crucial role in social interactions and emotional connections. Although most oxytocin studies focus on dogs and humans, recent feline research indicates that cats' oxytocin levels impact their social behavior and might be involved in their responses to loss.



PLOS ONE study on Oxytocin in Cats.

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