

Do Dogs Mourn?

By: *PetPlace Staff*

Canine Grief

When one dog dies, owners will often notice some changes in the pets that are left behind. They may become aloof or lethargic. Some may stop eating or become clingy. Based on these outward signs, it appears that dogs do grieve when their canine companion dies.

Because our pets cannot speak, we don't really know what is going through their minds or what they are thinking. We must base our interpretations of their emotional state on their behavior – what they do in certain situations and under specific circumstances.

When a person experiences the death of a human loved one, we may know he feels grief based on what he says. Very often, however, it is how he reacts or what he does that tells us he is suffering. He loses his focus, becomes listless and disoriented, doesn't eat and becomes disinterested in what is happening around him. The person may cry or go without sleep or sleep more than usual.

An animal that is experiencing the loss of another animal companion may react similarly. "Some animals can actually become depressed when they lose a loved one," says Monique D. Chretien, MSc, AHT, Animal Behavior Consultant. "They show symptoms similar to humans such as loss of interest in their favorite activities and sleeping more than usual. However, sometimes dogs may distance themselves from the family and sleep more than usual when they are ill, so you should consult with your veterinarian before seeing a behaviorist if your dog exhibits symptoms such as these."

Your dog may lose her appetite, become disoriented, or become more clingy. If the deceased dog was taken to a veterinarian to be euthanized, the grieving dog may sit at the window for days watching for her return. Animal behaviorists commonly call this emotional state separation anxiety. On the surface, the pet's behavior is similar to that of a person experiencing grief over the loss of a loved one.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals conducted a Companion Animal Mourning Project in 1996. The study found that 36 percent of dogs ate less than usual after the death of another canine companion. About 11 percent actually stopped eating completely. About 63 percent of dogs vocalized more than normal or became more quiet. Study respondents indicated that surviving dogs changed the quantity and location of sleep. More than half the surviving pets became more affectionate and clingy with their caregivers. Overall, the study revealed that 66 percent of dogs exhibited four or more behavioral changes after losing a pet companion.

If your dog shows signs that she is grieving the loss of an animal or human family member, provide her with more attention and affection. "Try to take her mind off it by engaging her in a favorite activity," says Chretien. If she enjoys human company, invite friends that she likes to visit and spend time with her. Use environmental

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revealed that 66 percent of dogs exhibited four or more behavioral changes after losing a pet companion. Photo by Beth Bianculli

attention and affection. Try to take her mind off it by engaging her in a favorite activity," says Chretien. If she enjoys human company, invite friends that she likes to visit and spend time with her. Use environmental enrichment techniques such as toys to help keep her busy. Hide toys or treats at her favorite spots for her to find during the day.

If your dog is too depressed over the loss, she may not respond to extra activity right away. The old saying, "Time heals all wounds," has meaning for your dog, too. "Time is one thing that may help," says Chretien. Based on the results of the ASPCA study, most dogs returned to normal after about two weeks but some dogs took up to six months to fully recover.

If your dog is vocalizing more or howling, don't give her treats to distract her or you might unintentionally reinforce the howling. "Giving attention during any behavior will help to reinforce it so be sure you are not reinforcing a behavior that you don't like," says Chretien. "Give attention at a time when your dog is engaging in behaviors that you do like, such as when she is resting quietly or watching the squirrels. As the pain of the loss begins to subside, so should the vocalizing, as long as it is related to the grieving process."

You may also want to consult with your veterinarian regarding drug therapy to help decrease your dog's anxiety, advises Chretien.

If you are thinking about adding another dog, wait until you and your surviving dog have adjusted to the loss. Forcing your dog to get to know a newcomer will only add stress to her already anxiety-ridden emotional state. And be patient. Your dog may miss her canine companion as much as you do.

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If your pet is showing any signs of distress or you suspect your pet is seriously ill, CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN immediately.

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Dr. Jon Rappaport, Chairman of the Board, Chief Executive Officer, and Founder – Dr. Jon Rappaport, is the founder, CEO, and Chairman of the Board of Intelligent Content Corp. He received his Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine from the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine in 1982. In 1983, he completed an internship at Angell Memorial Animal Hospital focusing on small animal medicine and surgery and in 1985 he completed a residency at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine in small animal internal medicine specializing in fiber optic scoping and ultrasound. Since 1985, Dr. Rappaport has developed a number of state-of-the-art animal hospitals in the South Florida area. His clinics are among the largest providers of quality veterinary care in the Southeast and have succeeded through a combination of quality, trust, ethics and understanding the human-animal bond coupled with the highest degree of customer service, convenience, and one-stop shopping.

Responsibilities: Dr. Rappaport is responsible for ensuring that the vision of the company is achieved.

Diego Saenz, President / Partner - For the last 20 years Diego Saenz has worked as a consultant, corporate executive and Internet entrepreneur. Diego worked with Accenture where he consulted for a number of Fortune 500 clients including Burger King, Knight Ridder, Great Western Financial Services. After leaving Accenture, Diego served as the head of technology for Pepsi-Latin America where he oversaw multi-million dollar technology projects throughout South America, Central America and the Caribbean.

Diego joined Petplace in April of 2000 as an early stage start-up and oversaw the launch of partnerships with AOL, Netscape, CompuServe and People Connection. For the last 7 years Diego has provided overall business, ad-sales, marketing and technology leadership for the company. Diego was also responsible for negotiating the sale of [Vetsuite.com](#) to Novartis Animal Health in 2005. In addition to his business and marketing responsibilities, Diego provides creative direction and operational oversight for [Petplace.com](#)

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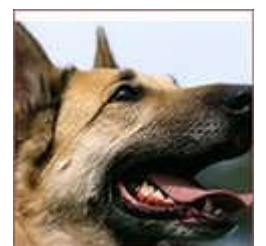
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Day-to-day oversight of our editorial team is the responsibility of Debra A. Primovic, BSN, DVM, Managing Editor.

Debra A. Primovic, BSN, DVM, Managing Editor - Debra A. Primovic is a graduate of the Ohio State University School of Nursing and the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine. Following her veterinary medical training, Dr. Primovic practiced in a general small animal practice. For the past eight years, she has been staff veterinarian at the Animal Emergency Clinic of St. Louis, Missouri, one of the busiest emergency/critical care practices in the United States. Dr. Primovic divides her time among veterinary emergency practice, editing, writing, and updating articles for PetPlace.com, and editing and indexing for veterinary publications. She has three cats, Sammy, Pepper and Beanie.

Karin U. Szust, DVM, Web Content Administrator - Karin Szust has over 25 years experience in the field of Small Animal Veterinary Medicine. She earned her degree in veterinary medicine from the University of Buenos Aires, College of Veterinary Medicine, Argentina in 1985. She moved to the United States in 1986 and worked in general small animal practice as Clinical Supervisor and Practice Manager for 14 years. Dr. Szust's interest in small animals carries over into her home, which she and her family share with four boxers; one cat and an aviary containing canaries, conures, finches, cockatiels and parakeets.

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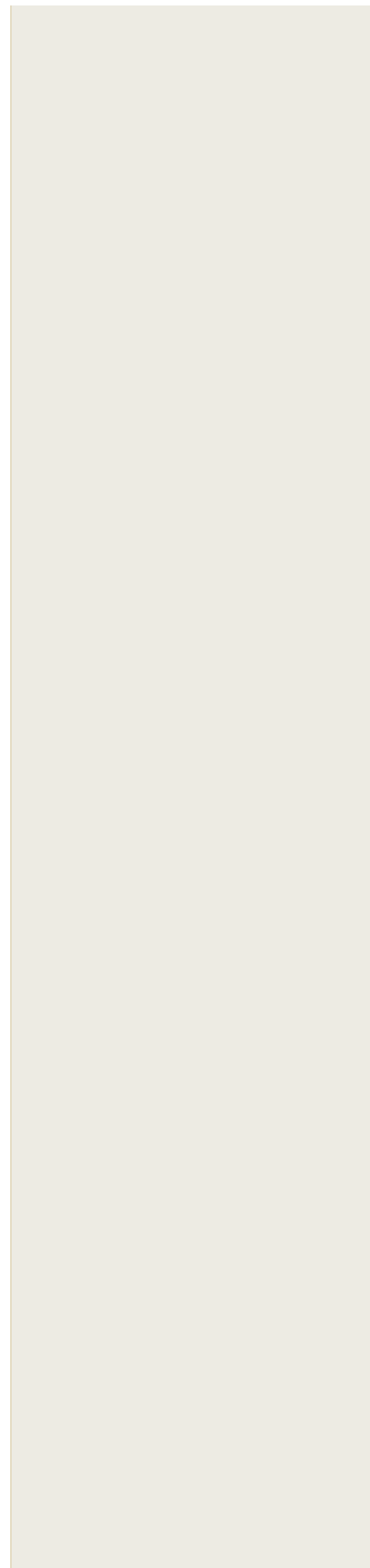
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