

Adopting While Grieving the Loss of a Cat



Coping With Grief

Anyone who has ever shared their life with a pet will understand the sense of loss you feel at the passing of a beloved family cat. Don't try to rush the grieving process. Your cat was a beloved member of the family, a cherished friend, a constant companion who gave unconditional love. It will take time to heal.

Your other pets will also most likely experience the loss and mourn the absence of their companion. Especially if the cat who passed was part of an older, bonded pair. But even if the cats weren't close, the loss can create an unstable environment. You may notice anxiety-related behavior; the cat may seem needy and follow you around, or be restless and not as tolerant. Every cat is an individual, so the important this is to watch for behavioral changes.

Animals are little emotional sponges and they easily tune into and absorb the way we're feeling and acting. They also need their familiar routine. Try to maintain your schedule – feeding, playtime, quiet time – with the surviving cat.

Should You Get Another Pet?

This is one of those personal decisions that only you can answer. When is the right time to get another pet? Again, only you can answer that. But if you have pets at home, make sure they've dealt with the loss before trying to introduce another pet. If they're still in crisis, they're likely to be more hostile towards any new additions.

If the surviving cat is older or elderly, a young cat or playful, 'in your face' kitten may not be what he had in mind for his golden years. It's not unusual for the younger ones to seize the opportunity of an older cat slowing down as their chance to rev up their agitation towards him. You also don't want a playful little kitten to have to endure the constant rejection from a cantankerous old feline.

Some elderly cats do great when a kitten is introduced, and it puts the sparkle back in the eyes of an aging cat. It can also cause constant tension and create stressful last years for the older cat. Don't add a kitten to your household if your older cat's mobility is decreased. The cat needs to be able to easily move away from a kitten.

You can also consider adopting a pair of kittens, as many animal shelters recommend. The kittens will then have companionship and a playmate at their own energy level, and you won't have to rely on your older, slower cat to 'babysit' an active young kitten.

Use your judgment, based on what your cat seems to need. If he appears bored and has lost interest in life, playtime with *you* may be all he needs. He may not be able to do the incredible leaps that were once his trademark in his youth, but he probably still has a few good moves left.

Give it time. Make sure your pets at home have dealt with the loss before trying to introduce another pet.

Excerpts from 'Think Like a Cat' by Pam Johnson-Bennett. For more information, visit catbehaviorassociates.com.