



**MNpets**  
gentle euthanasia at home

## Do Pets Grieve the Loss of Their Animal Friends?

*By Lisa Havelin, MA, MFA, LAMFT*

It's an important question when one is considering how the death of a beloved pet will impact their family and how best to support them—including not only our human, but our animal family members.

I recently spoke with a client whose family had two dogs. Sadly, when one of their beloved dogs had to be euthanized in a clinic, the other dog seemed to experience a profound grief. In fact this client reported that she was forever altered from the experience of losing her friend and simply was different from that point on. The two dogs had their toys in a basket and part of their “after work” routine was to go outside, have supper, and play with their toys together. “She didn’t play with her toys for two years after the death of (her friend)”, her person reported. Now her friends’ ashes are buried in the yard and when she is out there she lays on his gravesite. This is the main reason this client decided to have in-home euthanasia this time. She felt that it was important for her dogs to know, firsthand, what had happened to their beloved friend.

Evidence shows that humans aren’t the only creatures to grieve the passing of a loved one, however, it is a challenging thing to study and there is more anecdotal evidence than there is empirical study. That said, Mark Bekoff, former professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder and Author of *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, sites examples of animals displaying grief in the wild while mourning lost companions and explains that, “categorically denying emotions to animals because they cannot be studied directly does not constitute a reasonable argument against their existence..... current interdisciplinary research provides compelling evidence that many animals experience such emotions as joy, fear, love, despair, and grief – we are not alone.” Some animal behaviorists report working with pets in their practices whose animal companions have died, and whom appear to be grieving that loss. Those pets sometimes manifest their grief in the following ways: decreased appetite, changes in activity (increase or decrease), increased soliciting of attention from their family, separation anxiety, increased vocalization, and increased sensitivity to noises.

One of the positive aspects about having a pet euthanized at home is that their animal friends can be with them. Sometimes, when a pet is euthanized in a clinic setting, it can be confusing for their animal family members, who may not understand what has happened to their loved one. Animals have their own individual personalities and sensitivities and their people know them better than anyone else – it is up to them to determine how much to include them in those end-of-life experiences. Sometimes it is helpful to animal companions to have a moment to visit with their friends' body – they have their own way of sensing what has happened to their friend. Keeping to normal routines after a loss is a good way of supporting pets – walks, playtime, meal times etc... also offering extra cuddles and one-on-one time can be helpful.

*For further reading:*

*Do animals mourn:* <http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/animals/stories/do-animals-mourn>

*Mark Bekoff writes a blog for Psychology Today called "Grief in Animals":* <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/animal-emotions/200910/grief-in-animals-its-arrogant-think-were-the-only-animals-who-mourn?page=2>