

My Cat Is Depressed After Loss of Companion

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, discusses ways to help your feline adjust.

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Q: Two weeks ago I lost my 5-year-old male Ragdoll to Chronic Renal Failure (CRF). I have another Ragdoll, Johnny, who is also 5 years old. The two were together since they were 4 months old. Johnny seems very lonely; his frantic meowing is calming down (after lots of holding and petting), but all he does is sleep now. He was great with my other cat. They were constantly together – playing, watching birds, cleaning, sleeping and eating. I think he needs another cat, but I'm afraid he may withdraw. What do you think? Would you suggest a kitten or an older cat? How long should I wait before introducing another cat into his household? If I do get another cat, I would only get another male Ragdoll.

A: I am so sorry to hear about the loss of your Ragdoll to CRF. Cats often go into a depression after the loss of a buddy they are bonded to. Mourning can be exhibited in a variety of ways. Johnny is displaying his grief through his frantic vocalizations and his intense sleeping. Right now the priority is to make sure that Johnny is eating and drinking. If he stops eating, it's essential that you take him to your veterinarian.

At this stage, a new friend will not help him through his grief. Bringing a new cat friend home for him, compounded with adjusting to the loss of his buddy, will needlessly escalate his stress level and can compromise his immune system. Wait until he and you have worked through the grief before bringing home a new friend for both of you.

Help him through this tough time by engaging him in activities he enjoys on a consistent schedule. If he enjoys grooming, groom him every day at the same time. Make sure to feed him at the same times every day. Additionally, clicker training is a fun activity that can help a cat through grief since it focuses and challenges a cat. Keeping a fixed schedule will help Johnny adjust to the loss of his buddy.

Consider bringing a new cat in only after Johnny is behaving as he did before the loss and is showing no signs of grief. Give him time and don't rush into bringing a new cat friend into the household. If you do decide to bring another Ragdoll buddy in, consider a cat around the same age as Johnny instead of a kitten. Kittens have an abundance of energy and want to play just about every waking minute. Older cats are usually annoyed by the constant kitten play.

When you do bring a new cat home, please introduce them slowly. It may take a month or longer to properly introduce Johnny to the new friend with a minimum of stress.