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How Do I Deal With A Guinea Pig Death?

The following article was written by Karen at Reading Guinea Pig Rescue as a result of a human adopting a couple of guineas after losing one of her own. Had she known about the information in this article, it would have been easier for her own guinea to move on.....

Guinea pigs are sociable animals that are aware of their friends' presence. Therefore when a guinea pig that is in their cage / hutch / group dies, they are also aware of this. Guineaas are quite sensitive about death but not to the point where it will affect their own well being. That is providing a few things are respected and observed.

When a guinea pig is ill, separating him / her from cage mates is often not necessary and will cause disruption. Where it is necessary, (for example after an operation when space is restricted to allow healing), a friend from "the group" should be moved to the hospital accommodation too. Should said guinea pig die, the others members of the group must be allowed to see the dead body so they are aware of what has happened and can move on with their lives. Similarly if guinea is put to sleep, then the others that were living with them must be allowed to see the body.

I put the dead body back in the cage until everyone has "acknowledged" it. This is anything from a sniff to a full grooming of the dead body. Eventually everyone will move away from the body. I find that where a guinea pig has died in its cage, the acknowledgement process has already started, sometimes even before the guinea has died the others will have paid a last visit and no longer go near a dying guinea pig.

The main thing to remember is that all the guineas in the cage must be given the body back so they know what has happened and can move on with their own lives. If a sick guinea just "disappears" and never returns, the remaining guinea(s) will often go looking for it. Guineaas might be small, but they do have a level of understanding about death and dying.