

# Mourning baboons seek comfort from friends

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University of Pennsylvania scientists say when baboons lose a close associate they do as humans might -- they seek support from their friends.

According to the researchers, baboons physiologically respond to bereavement in ways similar to humans, with an increase in stress hormones called glucocorticoids. Baboons can lower their glucocorticoid levels through friendly social contact, expanding their social network after the loss of specific close companions.

Penn post-doctoral researcher Anne Engh worked with Penn biologist Dorothy Cheney and Psychology Professor Robert Seyfarth who, for 14 years, have followed a troop of more than 80 free-ranging baboons in the Okavango Delta of Botswana.

Engh said while the death of a close family member was clearly stressful over the short term, the females they studied appeared to compensate by broadening and strengthening their grooming networks. As they resumed grooming, their glucocorticoid levels returned to normal.

"Our findings do not necessarily suggest that baboons experience grief like humans do, but they do offer evidence of the importance of social bonds amongst baboons," Engh said.

The findings appeared in a recent article in the Proceedings of the Royal Society of Biological Sciences.

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