

Lessons from Cats

I'm a mother to a fur baby (a cat), and "Jack" never ceases to teach me something new. For instance, an eye infection caused me to research cat's eyes, and I learned that cats have the ability to see shades of gray. That jumped out at me because eating disorder sufferers are notorious for thinking in extremes: black or white, all or nothing. "I'm either fat or thin; I either binge or starve; I either over-exercise or do nothing." Part of therapy involves learning to see the shades of gray in life.

When my baby continued to cry and beg and whine for food, not long after being fed, I picked him up and said, "Jackson, (his name when I am serious), you are NOT HUNGRY." And we sat down in the rocking chair and rocked in front of the fire. As he lay in my arms purring and purring his sweet self to sleep, I thought, "How like us humans. We think we are hungry and we run to food. Anxiety swells up within us and we run to food." So often, maybe we're simply cold, or tired, or need a loving touch. Maybe when we think we are fat, and do everything to avoid food, it likely signals another unmet need.

Learning to identify needs and emotions and sensations is critical to recovery. Having someone trustworthy to help a sufferer pause, slow down, and check in with him or herself is invaluable. Perhaps we could all learn lessons from our fur babies!

-Susan Landry, LPC