

# Loss Inventory



Autism & Grief Project

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Grief assessment often includes conducting a personal history of previous losses experienced by an individual. This “inventory” of prior events involving loss can help to identify ways that former losses are influencing a person’s grief. In addition, an inventory may reveal an individual’s coping behaviors, styles, and adaptations to prior loss, which can help guide the most useful responses, supports, and interventions.

Given the wide range of the autism spectrum, professionals should employ techniques that enable effective, individualized assessment. Non-speaking individuals, for example, can be invited to respond to pictures or other visual prompts. If this is unsuccessful and there is no other option to communicate directly, clinicians may need to seek assistance from family members or others in the person’s network to conduct the inventory.

A loss inventory should gather the following types of information:

- Were there prior death losses and when did they occur?
- How did the individual respond to those prior losses? What type of support was helpful, and what was not?
- Are these previous losses affecting responses to the current loss?
- How are secondary losses that resulted from the previous loss affecting the individual? For example, did the prior death lead to any changes in the individual’s life, such as loss of other relationships, changes in daily routine, loss of treasured activities or objects, or a change in living situation?
- Have there been non-death losses and when did they occur? Non-death losses can include divorce; relocation; loss of relationships with parents, siblings, caregivers, partner, spouse, friends, or housemates; or loss of an object or cherished activity.
- Have there been pet/animal companion losses or separations? These losses are especially profound for many autistics.
- Based on these experiences, what type of support would be helpful with the current loss?

When taking this inventory:

- **Account for inconsistent responses.** Attempt to understand underlying factors if the individual’s way of coping with a current loss seems different from the ways they have coped in the past.
- **Assess for trauma.** A traumatic loss often influences grief responses. Has the person experienced any traumatic losses or changes, including bullying, ostracization, or rejection that now contribute to a loss of faith in other persons or in beliefs, or makes them feel more vulnerable?