



The Grief Journey

Grief and loss can be painful, disorienting, and difficult, but the experience can also result in increased resilience, opportunity, and achievement.

We can grow stronger because of loss and achieve personal growth.

Helpful Tips for Providing Support

Below are suggestions to help you support an autistic who is navigating their grief experience. Some of the tips may be helpful to you if you are grieving as well.

Learn from Past Success

Even if the person with autism has not experienced a death before, it can be helpful to focus on coping skills that have helped them in the past. You may want to ask, “What or who helped you feel better last time you experienced a loss?” or “Which techniques worked when handling past crises and how could those be useful now?”

Recognize the Value of Choice

Sometimes what may seem like a small choice can bring a great sense of control and comfort. After a death, there are many options for attending memorials, participating in a service, visiting with other people, etc. Having some ability to choose which activities to participate in, or not, may help the autistic person in their grief process.

Find Ways to Remember

People often seek ways to remember someone who has died. Sometimes remembering a loved one who died can bring comfort because it helps the bereaved feel close to the one who is no longer physically present. Others may find it too hard to think about the deceased because it makes them feel sad or lonely, especially right after the death.

Below are some ways any of us can remember someone who died. Share these ideas with the autistic you support; something here may bring them comfort. Some of these ideas may work well for someone and others may not find any of them helpful. An idea may not be helpful shortly after a death, but it may bring comfort months or years later.

- **Keep photos of the deceased person nearby.** Some people find this is a good way to remember the happy times spent together. For others, it could be a painful reminder that the person is no longer in their life.
- **Wear a piece of their clothing or jewelry.** A hat, shirt, sweater, coat, or favorite

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necklace or ring may help a bereaved person feel closer to their deceased loved one by remembering how they smelled, or by remembering a time they wore it when they were together.

- **Write a letter or poem, or draw a picture** about the deceased. If the autistic likes to create these forms of art, they could share their creation with family and friends to communicate a happy or funny memory of the person who died. Alternately, it may be helpful for them to keep their art private.
- **Share memories** about the person who died to let others know what was special about them.
- **Visit the cemetery** where the person is buried or visit a place that was important to them.
- **Volunteer** at a house of worship the deceased attended, or at a nursing home where they lived, or at an animal shelter if they loved animals.

Some people find social stories helpful. Visit www.autismandgrief.org for social stories about grief, including one on “Remembering My Loved One” that you can read, print, or share.



[Watch Video](#)

Rachel Minnaar shares about her grief journey.

Provide for Inclusion

For some people, being physically present and able to see the body at a funeral or other ritual event, or in the home if the deceased had been receiving home care, is critically important. The decision should be the autistic's choice, as should that of whether to participate with others in all the rituals surrounding a death. Being excluded without the opportunity for choice usually impairs the grief journey significantly. Visit [Rituals After a Death](#) for helpful suggestions to allow for inclusion.

Keep Sight of the Future

Remember that while life after a death or a loss will be different, someday there again will be moments of joy and happiness. Consider setting small goals for next week, next month, or next year, and plan for manageable daily changes that can help achieve those goals.

Provide Reassurance

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Continue to provide reminders that the bereaved one's responses to grief are expected and will be supported. While there may be disruptions to daily life or schedules, let them know their routines will return. Help them understand that during times of grief, people often come together and express grief in ways that may not feel comfortable to them, but this is part of how others show concern and love for each other.