

# Grief Support Groups



Autism & Grief Project

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Grief support groups can be highly useful for people experiencing a loss. The groups provide an opportunity to talk with others who have experienced loss, and they can validate the variety of ways that people experience grief. As participants in the group share the ways that they cope with their loss, others may learn new coping techniques. And as group members hear the stories of others coping with loss, they may feel hopeful that they, too, can cope with their loss. Additionally, grief support groups may offer their members respite from the loneliness that often accompanies loss. Research has demonstrated that in helping others, members of support groups help themselves; their self-esteem increases as they see that their responses and experiences are helpful to others.

It is important that a grief support group facilitator be well-trained in both grief theory and group dynamics. To be effective, grief groups should focus on all the manifestations of grief—physical reactions, spiritual issues, behavioral responses, cognitive manifestations, and emotional reactions. Groups should offer not only a way and a place for members to process manifestations of grief, but also help them with adjusting to life after loss, assessing the bonds that are retained with the deceased, and attempting to make sense of the loss. Effective groups assist members in identifying their personal strengths, which often involves both focusing on problems *and* developing strategies for resolving such difficulties. When groups are provided in settings that allow members to congregate for activities other than the support group, such as a provider organization or a faith-based setting, they increase the viability of longer-term connection and support.

## **Helpful Resources**

Resources for facilitating a grief group for those in the IDD community can be found on L'Arche Canada's Aging and Disability website at: <http://www.aging-and-disability.org/en/grieving>.