



## **Sudden Death**

When a loved one dies suddenly, we are often unable to prepare ourselves for the loss. Sudden death might be the result of a medical emergency or the result of an accident. You may not have all the information surrounding the circumstances of the death right away, leaving difficult questions that cannot be easily or quickly answered. These issues can be particularly challenging for a person with autism because there is significant comfort in routines and known, predictable experiences.

- Repetition of the known facts and acknowledgement of the unknown will be key in sharing the news. Keep the message direct: “Last night Uncle Bob had a heart attack. His heart stopped working, and he died. We don’t know why this happened.”
- News may need to be shared over and over throughout the course of a day or week (or longer) to reinforce the information as the individual processes it: “Remember how we talked about Uncle Bob’s heart attack yesterday? His heart stopped working and he died. I’m still feeling sad about it. What do you think about what happened? Do you want to write about what you feel or draw what you feel?”
- If your faith tradition includes an afterlife or belief in Heaven, keep statements about that as concrete as possible. Using phrases such as “Your uncle is in Heaven, but we can’t go there right now” can be confusing, unless the individual understands the concept of Heaven. Use concrete phrases, rather than abstract phrases or those that refer to something that living people do, such as “he fell asleep in the Lord.”