

# Autism & Grief Project Fact Sheet



## How Life Might Change

When a person dies, you may have a range of emotions or no emotions at all. You may feel emotions you can't describe or feel numb inside. Depending on your relationship to the person and how much of a part of your life they were, you could feel angry, sad, frustrated, or lonely. The pain of their absence might surprise you. Some days might be easier and others more difficult.

Over time, grief feelings usually become less intense, but there may be moments when strong feelings of grief come again, even years after a death. Usually, little by little, you can begin to enjoy each day and learn how to live without the person, while always remembering them. There's no timeframe for or predictability about your grief. Your grief is unique to you.

## Changes that May Occur After a Death

Everyone's situation will be different depending on many factors. A person's grief response, relationship to the person who died, emotional attachment to the person who died, and many other things can affect the changes that may occur after a death.

Here's are some things that may change after a death:

- You may find yourself out of your usual routine. This could be because of the many events and rituals that take place after a death. These disruptions or others caused by the death may make you angry at the person who died or at the people around you. The changes can produce feelings of anxiety due to all of the uncertainty.
- You may find yourself trying to keep busy to avoid thinking about the death. It can sometimes be helpful to stay busy, but it is important to give yourself time to think about the death and to feel your emotions. When you are ready, you may want to consider scheduling time into your routine to process the death.
- You may have trouble thinking about your future without the person who died.
- There may be times when you forget that the person died and feel surprised and sad all over again when you remember.
- You may have memories of the person or visit a place that was special that causes you have overwhelming feelings.

- On holidays and special occasions, such as a birthday or an anniversary, you may have strong feelings about their death.
- You might have strong reactions to certain sights, sounds, or smells that remind you of the person. These feelings are expected; avoiding them may cause them to stay with you longer.
- If the person was your caregiver, you might need to move to a new home with new caregivers. If this worries you, communicate with a trusted person about the changes that could occur and make a plan to manage them. To read more about the changes that may come after the death of caregiver, [click here](#).
- Depending on how the person died, there may be times when you think about your own death. If this worries you, communicate with a trusted family member, friend or professional support person about your questions and concerns.

## Helpful Suggestions to Cope with the Changes

Thinking about how these changes will impact your life and routines can be stressful. Adapting to the changes that come and creating new patterns of life can be overwhelming and bring on feelings of frustration or anxiety.

There might be times when you feel sad that the person is longer in your life. You may also have times when you don't feel sad, or the feelings seem small or far away. There could be times when you find yourself laughing and enjoying yourself. These are natural reactions, and if you feel good, it doesn't mean you didn't care about or didn't love the person. Sometimes you might feel happy when you think about times you shared with the person who died. There is no right or wrong way to grieve or feel unless it is harmful to yourself or others.

Here are some things that might help if you're feeling overwhelmed:

- Be gentle with yourself
- Do nice things for yourself
- Share your thoughts with a trusted person or professional
- Spend time enjoying a passion or interest that brings you joy
- Create something new – art, poem, music, gardening, crafts
- Listen to music or play an instrument to make your own music
- Watch some favorite videos or movies

- Move your body by taking a walk, jogging, or dancing
- Spend time in nature, near water, go for a hike, or just sit outside
- Spend time alone
- Remind yourself that these intense grief moments will not last forever

## Ways to Remember the Person Who Died

After the death of someone, many people search for ways to remember them. Remembering the person who died brings comfort to a lot of people because it helps them feel close to the person who is no longer physically in their life. Others find it too hard to think about the person who died because it makes them feel sad or lonely, especially right after the death.

If you would like to find ways to remember someone who died, you may want to try the suggestions listed below. You may find that some of the ideas work well and others don't.

There's no timeframe for when you should try these suggestions. One may not be helpful shortly after a death, but it may bring you comfort months or years later.

- Keep photos of them 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 longer in their life. Choose what works for you.
- Wear a piece of their clothing (such as a hat, shirt, sweater, or coat) that reminds you of them. This could help you feel closer to them by remembering how they smelled or remembering a time when they wore it when you were together.
- Write a letter or poem or draw a picture about them. If you like to create these forms of art, you could share the piece with family and friends to communicate a happy or funny memory of the person who died. Keeping your art to yourself is fine also.
- Share your memories about the person to let others know what was special about them.
- Visit the cemetery where they're buried or visit a place that was important to them.
- Volunteer at a church or a temple where they attended synagogue, or at a nursing home where they may have lived, or an animal shelter if they loved animals.

## Religion and Spirituality

If you are religious, spiritual, or connected to the universe through nature, your faith may help you cope after a death. If these connections were helpful to you in other difficult times, they will likely be especially helpful to you again. Now is the time to access the support your faith community has provided you in the past. If you haven't been connected with a faith community, this could be a good time to try.

Faith and spirituality matter and can:

- Help you know what's important in life
- Remind you that you are loved
- Help you not feel so alone
- Remind you of hope and that life will get better
- Being part of a church can provide:
  - A community of people to support you
  - Help with meals, transportation, childcare, etc.
  - People to help acknowledge your grief
  - Rituals at anniversaries or other special days