



Loss Inventory

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 and interventions.

Given the wide range of the autism spectrum, professionals should employ techniques that enable effective assessment (see section on talking with someone with autism). With nonverbal clients, for example, clients can be asked to respond to pictures or other visual prompts. If there is no other option to communicate directly with the adult with autism, clinicians may need to seek assistance from family members or others in the person’s network.

A loss inventory should gather the following type of information:

- What is the current loss? What reactions does the person exhibit to that loss?
- Were there prior death losses and when did they occur?
- How did the individual respond to those prior losses?
- Are these previous losses affecting response 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?
- 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.
- Pet/animal companion loss – including not only death but separation.

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. Loss that is traumatic often influences grief responses. Has the person experienced any loss or change, or has the person endured bullying, ostracization, or rejection that now makes the individual lose faith in other persons, beliefs, or makes the person feel more vulnerable?