

# Autism & Grief Project

## Non-Death Losses Fact Sheet



A major change in a person's life—even a positive change—can trigger feelings of grief and loss, which may include stress, anxiety, or fear. Missing what was familiar and safe is normal, even if the change brings about new and positive things, and can cause, among other things, regression of skills, meltdowns, or withdrawal. Having dependable routines is essential for autistic adults, and when the people and routines of life change or are absent, loss and grief can occur.

Non-death losses can be experienced when there are changes in:

- caregivers, therapists, doctors, dentists, and others who serve in a significant role in the life of the individual;
- living environment, such as a move to a new home, which can result in the loss of familiarity and memories;
- job, day program, or changes within an existing program they're involved with, which may bring about the loss of routine, friends, and providers;
- family structure, such as divorce, which may create a loss of daily routine and frequent interaction with all family members;
- loss of a special interest or passion or lack of access to the interest or passion; or
- loss of an object to which the individual was emotionally attached.

### Helping Your Loved One Cope with Non-Death Losses

Grief responses to non-death losses are often similar to those that result from a death loss. Visit the What is Grief? section for additional information about grief and tips for supporting your loved one.

**Here are some general guidelines for supporting non-death losses:**

- Encourage the individual to identify the loss and grieve the old situation. Loss brings change, which can cause confusion, complications, and chaos; and it can take some time to process and adjust. Validate their feelings.
- Take small steps toward establishing security in the new situation, providing reassurance of physical security first. Helping them to become regulated and calm will allow them to move on to emotional security.
- Try not to rush them into enjoying a new situation that may be a positive one. Change is hard and it takes time to adjust.
- As always, communicate honestly about the changes that they will experience, avoiding euphemisms.