

## Strategies and Resources: **Loss**

Loss is a universal human experience. It is a significant change where something we value or is a part of our lives is taken away. Grief is the feeling of pain that comes from loss but can expressed many other emotions.

The most known type of loss and grief is caused by death, but it isn't the only type, including others such as loss of friendship, relationships, marriage breakdown, job or financial loss etc.

There are lots of reasons why someone may grieve. Many Autistic people find change and adapting to it to be a particularly difficult and stressful experience, and may struggle with loss, or need additional support during these times.



## Types of loss:

### Loss from Death

Grief from bereavement is commonly understood and will have a major impact on a person's mental wellbeing and time will be needed to mourn and process the loss, and this can be the case whether it is the loss of family, friends, colleagues, or pets.

### Losing a friendship

Loss of friendships may happen for a variety of reasons and in many cases, this will be a disruption to your life, both socially and emotionally, and potentially may mean the loss of support networks. These changes can be difficult and unpleasant to deal with, and you may take time to rebuild friendships or gain others.

### Relationship Break Up

Collapse of a relationship can have a severe impact on your life, as even an amicable split will represent a major change and it may affect your finances, living situation, and friendships along with it.

Time will be needed to mourn the loss of that relationship, and if there were adverse circumstances leading to it this, then they may also need to be fully processed.

### Financial and Property Loss

Loss of property or financial stability is a significant event that can potentially affect all areas of your life and can have a serious emotional impact while you are making changes to adjust to this.

Examples may include losing a job, losing access to finances, losing access to accommodation.



### Loss of Health

Decline in physical fitness or health, or diagnosis with a long-term illness can have a major impact on your mental wellbeing as well as causing changes in your daily life, and executive function.

### Loss of Ability

Relatedly, long term illness and loss of ability in areas that you may previously not have struggled with can have a profound effect on your mental wellbeing and usual routine; you may need time to adapt to these changes and they may prevent you from fully engaging in activities you used to, and can have an impact on work as well, creating further instability. An example could be a loss of ability due to autistic burnout and needing time to recuperate.

### Loss of Support

Changes to support, formal or informal, can also disrupt your daily life and long-term planning, and add additional barriers to access that were previously removed. For example, if you have Universal Credit, or Access to Work funding that is lost when switching employer, or working hours then this could be detrimental to the accessibility of your workplace.

## Types of Grief:

Grief may be expressed and processed in several ways and will vary from person to person; many find they experience grief suddenly and acutely, while others may find



it stays with them over a long period of time. You may also find that you have no conscious experience of grief at the time, or that it isn't felt until months or even years after the fact, as you become able to process the emotions and weight of the loss.

It is also important to reiterate that grief can be felt, or emotionally expressed in numerous different ways, whether that is sadness, frustration, relief, denial, risk-taking, numbness, creativity, guilt, or anxiety.

## Autistic experiences of loss

Autistic people can process loss in many ways, and loss can add additional stress of change, along with the difficulty recognising one's own emotions and possible delays in emotional response to loss. This can sometimes be known as alexithymia, which is struggling to recognise or put to words our own emotions.

Autistic people may also exhibit grief in ways that differ from Allistic/Neurotypical people, which has potential to lead to misunderstandings or lack of needed support. For example, you may show little outward expression of grief to others while struggling to manage it or may engage in more self-soothing behaviours and have greater occurrence of sensory overload, meltdown/shutdowns, and emotional dysregulation.

You may also find that you struggle to manage emotional responses, that you are more irritable or angry, and experience physical responses of stress and grief such as difficulty sleeping, attending social engagements, or managing self-care tasks e.g. brushing your teeth. Autistic people can also experience emotional mirroring.



## Coping with loss:

There are many ways that people may find best to grieve and deal with loss, and these will vary on the individual, how one person manages may not suit another, and this must be recognised.

The feelings of pain that come from loss can be difficult to manage. Finding healthy ways to cope with these emotions can be helpful. It is good to find coping mechanisms that work for you. Here are some examples of ways you can cope with loss:

- **Talking to someone close to you or a professional:** Expressing how you feel can help you feel understood and can take some of the load off you. It is better to talk to someone who isn't directly affected by the loss, as they may be grieving in their own way. If you do want to talk to someone who is affected by the loss, it is important to check they are in the right headspace for the conversation.
- **Structure and Routine:** When you have experienced a significant loss, it can feel like everything is out of balance. This is why it can be important to try and keep a good routine. The structure can provide comfort and help you keep up with practical tasks, but please do not feel pressured to keep a routine or know that you can update yours to meet specific needs at the time.
- **Creative outlets:** Art, music, writing and other forms of creative expression can be a non-verbal way for you to externalise your feelings. These practices can be soothing and mindful as well; however, it is important to note that people may disengage from hobbies during times of loss.
- **Crisis Support and Phonelines:** These can offer a short-term and immediate support service in times of crisis, someone to listen to your needs or feelings and sometimes they can help you to be signposted to relevant local support networks.
- **Peer Support:** 1-1, Online, or in a group setting where lived experiences are shared, and you can find ways to process your own emotions through discussion with others who have related experiences of loss.
- **Adjustments or Compassionate Leave:** If you are processing a loss and are in education, or employment then it may be important to discuss the implications with your relevant organisation and seek support via adjustments, or compassionate leave.
- **Formal Counselling or therapy:** which could be autism specific if available, or with specific adjustment made to existing therapy to meet autistic needs.
- **Mental health and support resources** (linked on the page below)

## Support Resources:

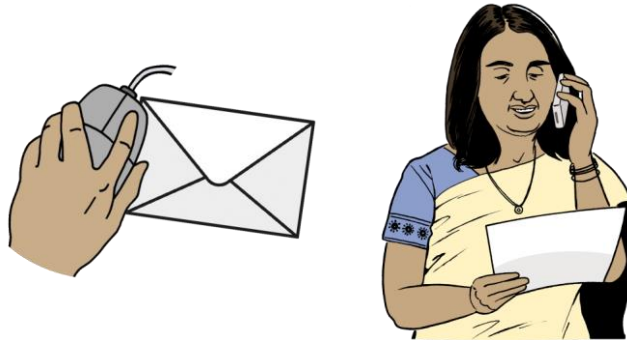
A number of resources are available for those who are dealing with bereavement, along with some resources that may be useful for managing other forms of loss

- [AtaLoss.org is the UK's signposting and information website for bereaved people](#)  
Signposting for bereavement support, including useful resources and a phonenumber for bereavement counselling
- [Leeds Bereavement Forum \(lbforum.org.uk\)](#)  
Signposting to resources for bereavement specific to Autistic people
- [Bereavement - Mind](#)  
Information on bereavement and available support including self-care and care for others who are grieving
- [Home | Relate](#)  
Providing counselling, mediation, and information for relationships and breakups, including friendship breakups
- [Tackling Financial Insecurity Together | Turn2us](#)  
Offering information and support for those facing financial insecurity, including benefits calculator and links to local advisers for a variety of topics including mental health, bereavement, and disability
- [Home – The Good Grief Trust](#)  
Providing information on bereavement, including links to helplines and local services
- [Grief and loss | Dealing with your cat's death | Cats Protection](#)  
Information on loss of a cat, whether they are missing, rehomed, or having passed away, including a support line to listen to you
- [Blue Cross Pet Loss Support | Pet Loss](#)  
Support for loss of a pet, including helpline and online chat with trained volunteers
- [Samaritans | Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy | Here to listen](#)  
Primarily a crisis support line for those who are struggling with suicidal ideation, or bereavement due to suicide, also providing support by email and in person centres.
- [Get support - Cruse Bereavement Support](#)  
Providing support for bereavement, including a helpline and 1 to 1 support, along with an email mailing list



# Contact Us

This guide was produced by the **Autism AIM – Mental Health Equity Project**, part of The Advonet Group. We are a free service co-led by and run for autistic adults (aged 18+) in the West Yorkshire area.



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