



AuSM's highly trained, certified therapists have committed their careers to helping individuals with autism understand their diagnosis and address both the challenges and gifts that it can bring. The AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team sends out a monthly e-mail to answer questions submitted by the autism community. This is one of the past issues of the column. Visit [www.ausm.org](http://www.ausm.org) to sign up to receive the e-mails.

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### **Dear Therapist:**

December can be a month full of heightened emotions for many people – one of which can be grief. Please share advice for dealing with grief, particularly for people with autism.

– **Asking for a Friend (OK, me)**

### **Dear Friend:**

Grief can include a spectrum of feelings and all reactions are valid. Autistic people may show classic signs of grief including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Autistic people's initial reactions may be more rational and based on logic. They may also show what looks like a failure to grieve or delayed grief, difficulty connecting to or naming their feelings, decrease in executive functioning or increase in ASD symptoms.

Things to remember as you navigate grief:

- Take care of your physical health including getting plenty of sleep.
- Know your triggers as best you can and have a plan for if they come up. It's okay to have boundaries that help you protect your mental health.
- Take time to talk with someone. Meeting with a counselor or a trusted person in your life can help you feel less alone and help navigate your personal grieving process.
- Create a routine or ritual to honor where you're at in the grieving process and who/what you're grieving.



Take care of yourselves this month and know that your feelings, your ways of processing, and your ways of getting through are just right.

## **Grief, a poem.**

*Whether grief is a mountain range  
towering high above you,*

*or an unsettling hum  
in a desert  
you didn't know  
as it wildly erupts,*

*or an earthquake  
that never prepares you  
before it breaks everything up,*

*a storm of waves that turn the ocean  
into an inescapable dome*

*a starless void of silence  
millions of light years from home,*

*for whatever shape grief takes,  
its presence claims space,  
unapologetically pushing the boundaries  
of logic, time, and place.*



*You are not a failure  
when you cannot  
make the grief just  
“go away”.*

*It'll take time to move through this landscape  
and I hope you know  
that's okay.*

– Poem by Morgan Harper Nichols (autistic artist and author)

– **Maura McDonald, MA**  
**Therapist, Autism Society of Minnesota**

If you would like to submit a question for the AuSM  
Counseling and Consulting Services team, please e-mail  
[autismcounseling@ausm.org](mailto:autismcounseling@ausm.org) or contact us at 651.647.1083.