Introduction:

- Death and disabilities, two taboos people do not want to talk about. As advocates for our patients, we have a duty to help and provide resources.
- Loss and grief are part of life. All people, including children on the autism spectrum, grieve in their own unique ways.
- The focus of this research project is to share how children, adolescents, and teens on the autism spectrum may experience loss due to death and how we as providers can provide support through the grieving process.

Objective:

The objective of my project was to create a realistic and meaningful guide for caregivers of children, adolescents, and teens experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one.

Support Strategies for the Health Care Provider:

1. As advocates for our patients we have a duty to help and provide relative and appropriate resources.
2. Grief is very individual, like a fingerprint, as is each child with autism. Being aware of where the child is on the spectrum, as well as their cognitive and emotional IQ are all important to keep in mind. Available support systems, including the child’s social and ethnic culture should all be considered.
3. Always use literal language. Avoid euphemes and use actual words (i.e.: died rather than passed)
4. Talking and teaching about death before a loss occurs
5. Short picture stories or social stories. The story should be created from the perspective of the child. Break down the components of their specific experience with their loved one in pictures
6. Create meaningful tangible ways in which the child can memorialize the deceased.
7. Encourage the child’s caregivers to watch for any changes in everyday behavior which may represent grief and anxiety. If behaviors persist, become violent, or the child becomes a recluse, remind caretakers to notify a mental health expert.