>> Bill Gaventa: Grief is a journey - helping people mourn. Mourning means all the different ways that people express and live out grief and loss in their lives. If we deny it or delay it, it makes it worse. Too often we've thought that neurodiverse people and others with intellectual and developmental disabilities didn't understand grief or other losses, or at the opposite end, we sometimes thought that they couldn't handle the intense feelings that might come with grief, such as anger, sadness, guilt, fear, loneliness, and anxiety. Remember the people you support live in a world of relationships, and losses of those relationships cannot be ignored. Two years ago, the Hospice Foundation of America launched an autism and grief website. It has a portal for autistic adults, and other portals there for families and caregivers of many kinds, including direct support staff. While it was meant for the adults and the staff around them -- people around them, remember that the autism spectrum includes people with a wide variety of intellectual abilities. So it can be used by other adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the staff working with them. The suggested strategies for helping people mourn apply to many others, and really, indeed, to all of us. So let's take a look at this short little video, which you will see was done by autistic adults.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

>> Bill Gaventa: If you've watched this video as a group, I hope you'll spend some time talking about it. But one of the key things to remember is, while everyone shares the experiences of grief and loss in their lives, not everybody does it the same. The differences may be shaped by someone's ability or disability, but more often by family, by culture, by faith, by nationality sometimes, by friends. So that can be a challenge in service systems, where you have people from many different backgrounds, both as people who are supported, and staff from many backgrounds. Thus it makes it even more important that you think about supporting people who are grieving in person-centered ways. How do we do that? If our job is not to fix grief or to ignore it, here are some key things to think about. First, be honest with families and individuals about death and grief and loss, coming from a conviction that grief has to be faced with honesty and care to help someone deal with it in their own way. If possible do that before an experience of loss or grief may be coming up. Second, our job is to be present with people. Listen. Listen with ears and listen with your eyes. Words or actions that express feelings [coughs] need to be recognized and affirmed by others who care. They need a place to go. For most of us when we grieve, we want people around us whom we trust, people we know care about us. So figure out who those people are in your setting and support those people as they support a person who may be grieving. It's hard for supporters as well. Third, give people choices about what they want to know, about how they want to be helped, and what they might like to do. Grief can make all of us feel helpless and lost, so our job is to help people find their way. We want to convey, "we know this is hard for you, for everyone, but we know you can do it and we are here to go with you. We can help you make the decisions that you need to make." But you can also help people find ways to express their grief that are appropriate to their culture and faith. Think about the ways [coughs] that all of us act out our grief. We do it by sending flowers, writing cards, lighting candles, going to visiting hours at a funeral home, sometimes in people's homes, participating in funeral rights, going to the cemetery, and other kinds of activities that may vary widely among different cultures and people from different backgrounds. But those are all ways of acting out the feelings and the grief -- that we feel in ways that are accepted and traditional and appropriate. If people can't act that grief out, they'll find other ways to do it that may not be as well accepted. So if a family is uncertain about including somebody in a funeral or a ritual of a family member who's died, talk with them about that, about the dangers of being left out and left alone, and offer to provide support staff who can go with an individual to participate. And finally, help people find ways to mourn and grieve on anniversaries, on holidays, and other important occasions. In the first year or two, you can never tell when a feelings of grief may surface again, so it's important to be aware that those can happen especially at critical times, and to be willing to listen and to go through that again, because otherwise, it still going to be there and it needs to be heard. Mourning's a journey. Help people mourn by respecting and honoring grief when it appears, rather than ignoring it or trying to fix it. Trust that comfort will come to them if you walk that journey with them, and encourage other people to do the same. It's not all up to you.