



National Apostolate for  
Inclusion Ministry

**Helaine C. Arnold**  
helainearnold@catholicehealth.net

*Coordinator of Spiritual  
Services/Volunteers and  
Mission Leader For Over  
Twenty Years.*

FRIENDSHIP, INC.  
Fargo, ND

Friendship, Inc. provides  
residential and vocational  
services to children,  
teenagers and adults with  
developmental disabilities.

National Apostolate for  
Inclusion Ministry  
P.O. Box 218  
Riverdale, MD 20738  
Phone: 800.736.1280  
Email: qnafim@aol.com

www.nafim.org

*Promoting the Full Participation of People with Intellectual/ Developmental  
Disabilities (IDD) in the Life of the Catholic Church*

## Impact of Loss on People with IDD

---

*By Helaine C. Arnold*

### **Loss is a Part of Life**

We experience many kinds of loss throughout our lives. Our losses can include: losing a pet, losing a job, losing home and things we cherish due to wind, fire, water and earthquake; losing a friend who moves away; losing a friend due to disagreements; losing a spouse to divorce; losing our familiar community when we ourselves must move to a different place, and loss from illness and accidents.

When we learn to understand and accept our various losses in healthy ways, we prepare ourselves for facing one of our greatest losses: the death of a loved one. Assisting people with IDD to deal with losses great and small in their daily lives will in the long run prepare them for those times when they too are confronted with life's most serious loss.

### **Loss and Grief in Children and Adults with IDD**

People with IDD also experience losses such as described above. In addition they suffer loss due to changes over which they have little control or understanding but which call forth deep feelings. For example, those not living with family in another residential setting such as an apartment, house or institution can experience loss when a familiar staff person leaves or when their room or residence changes due to provider decisions. Loss may be experienced in school or day programs when familiar faces are no longer involved or when familiar activities suddenly end.

Grief often follows change or loss. Grief can bring about new behaviors ranging from becoming too quiet, silly, scared, worried or frequently angry without apparent cause. People with IDD may not be equipped to understand, express or speak of their grief. When a changed mood is observed, we need to ask ourselves if our relative, friend or client has recently suffered loss and is grieving.

If new behaviors make us suspect change or loss has occurred, we need to find the cause. We should ask pertinent questions such as "Do you miss your old teacher, your old home, your old bedroom, are you sad because (name of staff person or friend) left, etc.?" Once alerted to the loss or losses our relative, friend or client has suffered, we can begin to help him or her by giving a name to feelings brought on by loss. Then we need to help our friend or relative walk through the grieving process, which may come and go from time to time.

© 2007 National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry. All Rights Reserved. Exact copies of this Information Sheet may be made for personal use or for distribution in a diocese or local congregation provided the material is distributed free of charge. For all other uses, permission must be obtained from the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry.