

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



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The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

Welcome: The Nashville chapter meets at 3:00 P.M. on the second Sunday of each month in the HCA building on Park Plaza just north of Centennial Park off of 25th Avenue, North. Inside, you will see our sign and someone will greet you. We truly regret that we have no accommodations for young children, but teenagers and older siblings are welcome to attend.

February 12 Meeting

Sharing Mementos of Our Children

We all have things that are precious to us, that either belonged to or remind us of our beloved children. At this month's meeting, we invite you to bring any one thing that can be shared briefly with the rest of the group. This memento can be something that your child treasured, something your child gave you or you gave to him, or something that simply reminds you that your child lived and was loved, even if his or her life was very short (a footprint, baby blanket, hospital bracelet, etc.) Please join us February 12 as we share sweet remembrances of our dear children. Small sharing groups will follow this program.



Phone Friends

We have all experienced the pain of losing a child. We understand and would like to listen. If you can't reach one of us, feel free to call another person on this list.

- Accidental Death**Mike and Paula Childers
615-646-1333
- AIDS**.....Joyce Soward
615-754-5210
- Illness**.....David and Peggy Gibson
615-356-1351
- Infant**.....Jayne Head
615-264-8184
- SIDS**.....Kris Thompson
931-486-9088
- Suicide**.....Ruth Edwards
615-353-8547
- Small Child**.....Kenneth and Kathy Hensley
615-237-9972
- Alcohol/Drug Overdose**.....Ed Pyle
615-712-3245
- Murder**.....Joe Ladd
615-727-3284

Someone has said that it is in the winter—then the trees have dropped their leaves, “revealing the diversity and uniqueness of each ridge and valley,” when the hills bare their innermost selves—that we get to know them—what is really out there.

And so it is with people. Most of the time we wear our masks. But it is during the difficult times, during the winters of our lives, that there is the strong need to shed our masks and be able to reveal the hurting and turmoil that is really there.

It is in these moments that friendships are formed and we experience one another as few others ever will. So it is among The Compassionate Friends. WE CARE!

Mary Wildman
TCF, Madison, IL

Believe me, every heart has its secret sorrows,
Which the world knows not;
And oftentimes we call a man cold
When he is only sad.

Longfellow

*We need to wait patiently and the time
will come—and each person
will know—when reaching out to others
is the surest way to comfort one's self.*

Sue Catherine Holtkamp
Grieving with Hope

A Cure for Sorrow

There is an old Chinese tale about the woman whose only son died. In her grief, she went to the holy man and said, "What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?" Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, "Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life."

The woman set off at once in search of that magical seed. She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door and said, "I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me." They told her, "You've certainly come to the wrong place," and began to describe the tragic things that had recently befallen them.

The woman said to herself, "Who is better able to help these poor, unfortunate people than I, who have had a misfortune of my own?" She stayed to comfort them and then went on in search for a home that had never known sorrow. But wherever she turned, in hovels and in palaces she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune. Ultimately, she became so involved in ministering to other people's grief that she forgot about her quest for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that it had in fact driven the sorrow out of her life. Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

George Baldwin
TCF, Alva, OK

Let's Go Home

Let's go home –
My eyes pleaded to my husband.
We don't belong here.
This is crazy – these people are still hurting.
Two, five years later and they are still coming here.

Let's go home. We don't belong here.
We won't, we can't be like that. Perhaps –
If I don't speak,
If I don't tell them why we came –
It won't be true.



But wait... Why are they laughing?
They all lost children, yet they are laughing
at something somehow.
And wait... Why am I nodding at what he's saying?
Why do I feel I must say something to that couple
who are in this nightmare even less time than we?

They all seem to know what I'm feeling –
without my even saying it –
Just not flinching at my tears.
That steady, endless stream of tears that seems to
never stop.
Perhaps – One day I'll join their laughter –
Let's wait – Perhaps we shouldn't leave just yet.

Sandy Fein
TCF, Manhasset, NY

Old Grief

*It is a milder storm
and not so dark.
It lets you see the shore
where life goes on.*

*Old grief finds words of peace,
and brings us gifts
of memories and joys
from treasured living.*

*But nothing takes away
the emptiness
of all those years,
of all those haunted nights,
of all those lost embraces.*

*It is a milder storm,
but just as grave.
Old grief does hover
over soul and mind;
a heartbreak song
of timeless disappointment.*

Sascha



The Image of Winter

When February comes there is finally an end in sight to the long winter. Sometimes, melting snow reveals the green tips of an early crocus or even the exquisite blossom itself, soft flower of hope invading a harsh landscape of graying snow and biting wind and ominous sky—a small promise of new life to come. My heart, grieving for my son who died, was like that image of winter. For somehow, even during the darkest, coldest moments, an unexpected sign of hope would intrude. And as the hours and days and months dragged on, my heart finally learned, once again, to be open to the promise of new life. Painful memories melted into loving ones. Life that seemed forever dormant once again sprang forth from my heart. In living hopefully and lovingly, the seasons of the heart can change. The loving memories of your special child, like the flower in the snow, can be the beginning of the end of winter.

Maryann Kramer
TCF, Arlington Heights, IL

Getting On With Life

Making the decision to live again after a major loss is not easy. It requires putting your will power and thought power ahead of some very powerful emotions.

You cannot wait until you feel better and then decide to live again. You must make the decision because you know it's right, and then wait for your feelings to catch up. They will.

Bob Deits
From *Life After Loss*

One evening at a gathering of men, Sir Harry Lauder was speaking of the influence of a human life. He told of his boyhood memories of the lamplighter in London who moved down his street each night with a long taper. "I could not see the old man himself; it was entirely dark at the foot of the lamp posts; but I knew where he was by the row of lights he left behind him. In their own way, each child leaves behind a light to shine, although we can see them no more..."

TCF, Abilene TX

Spring Will Return

*Cold winds blow across frozen ponds.
Snow lies deep upon the fields.
But the change has begun.
Daylight hours increase slowly.
With each passing day later sunsets are more
apparent.
Winter is ending.*

*For bereaved parents,
The change is painfully slow,
The progress not always apparent,
But the promise is the same.*

*Winter will end.
Spring will return.*

Betty Stevens
TCF, Baltimore, MD

Just For Today

Just for today I will try to live through the next 24 hours and not expect to get over my child's death, but instead learn to live with it just one day at a time.

Just for today I will remember my child's life, not his death, and bask in the comfort of all those treasured days and moments we shared.

Just for today I will forgive all the family and friends who didn't help or comfort me the way I needed them to. They truly did not know how.

Just for today I will smile no matter how much I hurt on the inside, for maybe if I smile a little, my heart will soften and I will begin to heal.

Just for today I will reach out to comfort a relative or friend of my child, for they are hurting too, and perhaps we can comfort each other.

Just for today I will free myself from my self-inflicted burden of guilt, for deep in my heart I know if there was anything in this world I could have done to save my child from death, I would have done it.

Just for today I will honor my child's memory by doing something with another child because I know that would have made my own child proud.

Just for today I will offer my hand in friendship to another bereaved parent, for I do know how they feel.

Just for today when my heart feels like breaking, I will stop and remember that grief is the price we pay for loving and the only reason I hurt is because I had the privilege of loving so much.

Just for today I will not compare myself with others. I am fortunate to be who I am and to have had my child for as long as I did.

Just for today I will allow myself to be happy, for I know that I am not deserting him by living on.

Just for today I will accept that I did not die when my child did. My life did go on and I am the only one who can make that life worthwhile once more.

Vicki Tushingam
For Bereaved Parents

I Wish

I wish we could have finished the dollhouse.

I wish I had bought you a new sandwich instead of just taking off the onions.

I wish I had bought you that new car for your graduation.

I wish I could have taken your place when you found out you were sick.

I wish I could have kept my promise that everything would be all right.

I wish I had said something to the doctor to make him try harder.

I wish we could have put up the Christmas tree together.

I wish I had taken you and your Mama to a fancy restaurant once more.

I wish I had brought you home from the hospital before you left us.

I wish I wasn't responsible for using the rest of my lifetime for the both of us.

I wish I hadn't said good-bye.

I wish you were still here with us.

Terry Sparks
TCF, Lawrenceville, GA

Holding Hands

No one held my hand as I held yours.

*My tears formed silently in solitude,
flowing openly only when you fell asleep.
We sat alone and counted down your life.*

Neither your love nor mine could save you.

*I could offer only my arms full of love as
I held your frail body, my sweet child.
Others sent candies and pretty flowers,
but you could no longer swallow the yummy sweets.
Our love tried so hard to hold you to this earth.*

As we clasped hands, we sadly walked together.

*We ventured down that long tunnel of light.
I went as long as it took for you to adjust.
When you felt safe in the glorious light,
You then released my rigid grip and let me go back—
leaving me with only your heart in my empty hand*

Mary Jane Cronin
Scottsdale, Arizona
From *Bereavement Magazine*, May/June 1999



Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you knows how great the hurt is. No one but you can know the gaping hole left in your life when someone you know has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.

Valentine's Wishes

Our Valentine Cookies

*The Valentine's Day Cookies
won't taste so good this year.*

*I stirred in the sugar, but you were not here.
Frosting – pink on the tip of your nose.
Days spun too swiftly – my biggest woe!*

*Did the time have to come so very soon
When you weren't here to lick the spoon?
My heart would dance and I would sing
To feel you tug at my apron strings.*

*But instead I'll toil with the rolling pin,
And rely on mind's eye for your silly grin.
When the heart shapes are baked, mine will still ache.
But I'll always love you, for goodness sake!*

Kathy Slief
TCF, Tulsa, OK

*I thought I heard your laugh today,
While watching children run and play.
You chuckled in that special way
And then you were gone.*

*I thought I saw your gentle face,
That look which time cannot erase.
Then it was gone without a trace,
And then I was alone.*

*I thought I heard your voice today
And suddenly my world was gay.
I thought I heard you softly say,
"I love you, Mom,
Happy Valentine's Day."*

Oh how I wish

TCF, North Hollywood, CA

My First Five Years as an Only Child

I've been without my brother for five years. I guess the hard part is over now. Sometimes I think I've aged thirty years in the past five. In a strange way, these past five years have been the best and worst years of my life. I've accomplished the many things of a typical young adult—learning to drive, graduating from high school, going to college, and starting a career. Every one of my accomplishments has been clouded by the fact that my brother, George, is not here to share each milestone and is not achieving any more milestones for him- self. He was cheated of so many things. He will never graduate, get married, have children, or travel. He will never grow old, and I will never have a brother to grow old with. I'll never have nieces and nephews. The sibling relationship, usually the longest relationship of one's life, has been cut short for us. In these five years, although I've learned to accept that he's not coming back, the difficult part is dealing with it day by day.

My relationship with George ended just when we started to become friends. The childish fights and other annoyances of having a big brother were changing to real conversations and to having an occasional ally. I'm angry about all of the things that we've missed and all of the things that will never be, and I guess I always will be. Five years heals a lot of wounds, but the hurt will always be there, no matter how many years pass. In these past five years, I've been forced to grow up too fast. I've been forced into a new outlook on life. I've felt lonely and alone. I now realize that I will never be the same person as before. That person is locked away and is gone forever. Maybe I'm a better person now because of what I've been through. Five years ago I never thought I'd survive, but I'm still here dealing with it every day. I don't know what the next five years will bring, but at least I've made it this far.

Kristina Steiner
TCF, Staten Island, NY

We are alike; at the same time we are very unlike. Our stories are different, our solutions are different, our ways of handling our grief are different, but we are alike in that we all hurt to the depths of our capacity to hurt. We experience many of the grief symptoms alike and we are alike in our need for help. While we cannot give each other definite answers or take away each other's pain, we can help each other by simply being there and listening to each other.

Dennis Klass
TCF, St. Louis, MO

CHAPTER INFORMATION

Are you Moving?

It would help a great deal in both time and money if you would notify us immediately of any address change so your newsletter can reach you on time. You may call, write or email the chapter leaders or the newsletter editor. This information is at the top of page 1. Thanks for your help.

PLEASE NOTE: Children at TCF Meetings

It is always painful for newly bereaved parents to be with babies and small children, but it is even more difficult to see them at a TCF meeting where grief is heightened. The presence of a baby can be very disturbing and distracting to others, especially to those who have themselves lost one, and a TCF meeting is not an appropriate place for youngsters where they see visible pain in their parents and other members. We want you to be with us, but since we promise each parent who has lost a child a safe place at our meetings, we urge you to make other arrangements for your little ones.

Newsletter Deadlines

In order for donations, articles, poems and other material to be included in the newsletter, we must receive them by the meeting day of the month prior to publication. We welcome original material as well as copyrighted pieces; however, no material may be used without giving complete credit to the author. Please keep in mind the fact that space is limited. Also, since TCF espouses no specific religious or philosophical ideology, we ask that in your writing, you show respect for others whose beliefs might be different from your own.



BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

Survivors of Suicide

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings, you may call Samantha Owen at 615 244-7444, or go to the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network at TSPN.org, and you will find a list of all Tennessee SOS locations.

Sharing

SHARING is a community organization interested in helping parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn infant. SHARING meets the second and fourth Thursday evenings of each month at 7 p.m. in the Administrative Board Room at The Women's Hospital at Centennial Medical Center located at 2221 Murphy Avenue (between 22nd and 23rd Ave). The phone number is 615 342-8899.

Alive Hospice Support Group for Bereaved Parents

A support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. For details, please call John Baker at 615 963-4674.

Other TCF Chapters

There are several other chapters of The Compassionate Friends you might want to know about. Anytime you are in their vicinity or feel the need to talk with other bereaved parents, feel free to attend their meetings. Also, when you personally know a newly bereaved family in one of these towns, please call the chapter number and give them the information so they can make contact with the family. To locate a chapter, you may call the TCF National Office at 1-877 969-0010, or go to www.compassionatefriends.org and click on chapter locator.