

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



P. O. Box 50833 • Nashville, TN 37205 • (615) 356-4TCF(4823) • Nashville Website: www.tcfnashville.org

Chapter Leaders: Joe and Melanie Ladd (615) 727-3284, email: joeandmel@comcast.net

Newsletter Editor: Melanie Ladd, (615) 513-5913, email: joeandmel@comcast.net

Treasurer: Jayne Head, (615) 264-8184, email: alanandgraysonsmom@comcast.net

Regional Coordinator: David Gibson, (615) 356-1351, email: davidg14@bellsouth.net

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.

August 8 Meeting Program: Surviving the First Five Years

The pain a family endures the first years after the death of a beloved child, grandchild, or sibling can seem overwhelming. Many others have traveled this same grueling road and learned there are many possible choices we can share with one another to make the mountain seem less steep. Join us at the August meeting as a panel of our members share the choices that helped them through the first few birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, events, and through everyday life. There will be time for questions and sharing in the large group before we break into our regular small group sessions.



SAVE THE DATE!

The date for our annual
TCF Nashville Family Picnic is September 25, 2010 at 3:00
in Fannie Mae Dees Park.
Watch for the details in next month's newsletter.

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.

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|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Accidental Death | Mike and Paula Childers | 646-1333 |
| AIDS | Joyce Soward | 754-5210 |
| Illness | David and Peggy Gibson | 356-1351 |
| Infant | Patti Drexler | 834-8892 |
| SIDS | Kris Thompson | 931 486-9088 |
| Suicide | Ruth Edwards | 353-8547 |
| Small Child | Kenneth and Kathy Hensley | 237-9972 |
| Drug/Alcohol Overdose | Ed Pyle | 712-3245 |
| Murder | Joe Ladd | 727-3284 |

You Are Not Going Crazy

One of the most common things we hear from bereaved parents is that they think that they are going crazy. If you feel this way, let us assure you that you are not. Grief and the resultant depression, fits of crying, and the feeling you are going to pieces may lead you to these feelings or often to the feeling you no longer want to continue living. It is not uncommon to have these feelings.

But most grief-stricken people do not go crazy or commit suicide. It is most important at these times for you to have someone to talk to – to share your feelings – and for you to be able to verbalize your pain. We of The Compassionate Friends want to help. We encourage you to call on us. We have all been where you are now, and we understand your pain.

Fay Harden
TCF, Tuscaloosa, FL

For our newcomers:

I Honor You

*I honor you
for coming here.
I know how much
you're grieving.*

*Coming here,
joining us,
you look to life
and living.*

*You have received
life's cruelest blow,
feel crushed
and left in tatters.*



*And here we talk
and here we cry
and share what
really matters.*

*The burden of
our grief is told,
the heartache
that each faces,*

*and brings to light
our truest hearts
and friends to lonely places.*

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
From *Catching the Light*

Questions and Answers

Q: How long will it take to get over this feeling of sorrow?

A: A lifetime.

Q: How long will I continue to feel guilty?

A: As long as it takes you to realize that you did nothing wrong.

Q: How long will it take me to get over my anger?

A: As long as it will take you to drop the blame on yourself and others and realize that it was the combination of unpredictable happenings that occur in one's lifetime.

Q: Why do friends give such horrid advice?

A: To cover up their own inability to handle the situation.

Q: Will I ever be happy again and be able to laugh?

A: An emphatic YES.

Q: How long is long?

A: As long as it takes you to go through the process. Each has his/her own time schedule, but you must make the decision to start healing.

TCF will try to help you find your answers by listening, hugging, and caring to give you support during this period and after. Give it a try. I don't think you'll be sorry.

Irv Schwartzberg
TCF, Ft. Lauderdale, FL

“Time heals our grief, but the need to have our child remembered, intensifies.”

Leon Kennedy
TCF, Clarksville, TN

The brain is a wondrous organ. The decisions we make with our brain also influence the function of that very same organ! A part of our brain, the amygdala, generates 'negative' emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness. But, as you may have learned in your grief journey, keeping ourselves busy helps suppress those emotions. It has been found that involvement in non-emotional tasks such as hobbies or even mundane tasks of our job, inhibits activity in the amygdala. That explains why keeping ourselves busy can actually cheer us up when we are feeling down.

Melanie Ladd
TCF, Nashville, TN

Beginning to Live Again

The facts surrounding the death of my daughter are painful to recall. Early in my grief, my world was in a shambles. I lived with doubts, became careless about money, my general health. . . everything. I refused to make plans to improve my lot.

How long did this phase last? I think a change began about two years later, in 1980. I began to see other things in the world and decided to try to pick up the pieces of my life. Would a move to new surroundings help? I proceeded slowly

on this idea and did not leave my old home until early 1982. Yes, it did help. I busied myself with my new home. I began to have entire days or entire nights without that awful statement, "gunshot wound to the head," echoing in my mind.

Last year a favorite sister died and that was after I had begun to enjoy life again. Sometimes I feel that I can't take any more sadness, but as long as I live and care about people something painful will happen. Something else will happen. But here I am. I am a survivor. I try to roll with the punches, look for new experiences and search diligently for cheerful situations. People I know only casually may also have a pain, an agony, they have not shared with me. I try to avoid saying or doing anything that may hurt others.

Losing my daughter will not get any easier. I miss her as much today as I did when she first went away to North Carolina to finish her graduate degree. Some days I am extremely depressed, but other days I am almost happy. Can this be? Is it possible for me to be happy? Yes. I must enjoy the moment: a delicious meal, the pleasure of conversation with friends, the joy of dancing, singing, walking, traveling. I must, for I do not know what is in my tomorrow.

Florence Godfrey
TCF, Camden Co., NJ

To Most People School Means:

*The kids out from underfoot, caps on,
Buying a new lunch box.
New clothes and the usual school supplies;
fixing breakfast and trying to get it eaten;
getting to a school bus on time.*

**WHAT DOES SCHOOL MEAN TO A MOTHER
WHO HAS LOST A CHILD?**

*Watching other children filled with excitement.
A little boy who should be in kindergarten.
A brother who must go off to school by himself.
A teacher who must reach out to a class,
when her little one won't be in school this year.
A mother sending two children off, when there should
be three.*

Many tears, behind smiling faces!

Patsy Hedges
TCF, Maryland



Re-Entering School After the Death of a Sibling

Going back to school after the death of your brother or sister is a hard thing to go through. At first there are three groups of people to deal with: people who give you a lot of support, people who don't know what to say, and those who give you weird looks and stay away from you. This lasts for a little while.

After a short time changes with each group occur. Those who didn't know what to say start to speak or begin to talk. The group who kept away stop ignoring you. The people who gave you a lot of support slowly return to their own affairs. After about a month and a half, everything goes back to normal and is over to everyone except you. This is very difficult to accept and makes you feel all the more alone.

After a long while the shock for you goes away and it is then when you need the support from your friends, peers, and teachers. This month is the first anniversary of the death of my brother. Most people will have forgotten and everything is right with the world. But it is not! Certainly not to my mother and me.

Jordan Ely, Sibling
TCF Albany/Delmar Chapter

Grief and Marriage

When our son was killed, I remember thinking through the haze of pain that this most horrifying of life experiences would somehow bring us closer. Sharing the loss of a child created and loved by both of us for twenty years would surely deepen the bond between us. I was in for a surprise.

We clung almost blindly to each other until the shock began to give way to ugly reality. As we each moved to our individual pattern of grieving, differences began to emerge. I felt like a time bomb about to explode. I needed desperately to talk about our son. My husband refused to verbalize his feelings and became angry at my overtures. I stopped trying to communicate.

This was beyond my comprehension. Where was my helpmate, my best friend? I felt rejected, unloved and terribly alone. Anger overwhelmed me as I bitterly realized that I wasn't going to be able to share my grieving with the person who meant the most to me in the world. I knew that many marriages fail after the death of a child.* Dear God, how could we possibly survive an additional tragedy?

We attended a few Compassionate Friends meetings, and then I continued alone. The gentle acceptance of others who had lost children permitted me to talk or cry without guilt. Our problem was definitely not unique; many other parents expressed similar frustrations. So many couples experience marital difficulties after the death of a child that it is now considered the norm. We weren't going crazy; and just because our grieving styles were different didn't mean that our whole marriage would fall apart. My anger began to dissipate as I slowly faced the fact that I had been placing unrealistic expectations on my husband. Hurting at least as much as I, he simply could not meet my needs for support.

Much later, the knowledge that support had been there all along from my friends—if I had only asked for it—saddened me. I had to admit that I simply had been too proud to reveal myself as a suffering person in need of help. I will be forever grateful to The Compassionate Friends for being there with loving, open arms.

We began to have some honest discussions, agreeing that we needed each other's nurturing in order to survive and find meaning in life. We learned to respect each other's feelings. We tried to please each other in little ways: a hug, a special meal, anything that expressed caring. Patience with each other smoothed over many rough moments. Time spent alone together was very healing. It took a conscious decision from both of us to try harder. Some days, we didn't have any energy left when grief was particularly painful. It wasn't always easy as we couldn't talk about our son for a long time.

As I look back, I see that ignorance of grief and the impact it can have on a marriage was the basis for our problems. But in retrospect, how could we possibly have been prepared for the onslaught of paralyzing emotions that overwhelmed us? Anguish of this intensity can reveal a spouse you've never seen before. Deeply wounded, both of you will inevitably be changed from the experience of losing a child. Back then, understanding these simple facts would have immeasurably helped us.

Pat Retsloff
TCF, Oshkosh, WI

**Editor's note: A survey conducted by the TCF national organization in 1999 found that the divorce rate among bereaved parents is no higher than that of the general population.*

The Space Between Thoughts

You are no longer in my thoughts constantly.
You are now dwelling in the space between thoughts,
a part of my every moment whether joyful or sad
or in between, or both simultaneously.
I walk, talk, work, play, and you surround me.

You are in the sparkle of my smile
the wisdom in my thinking
the rainbow circles in my life.

As long as I live, you will live.
As I learn, you are teaching, not only me
but all those who are in my life today.
You are a blessing, dear child, for all you were
and all you are and all you forever will be.

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
From *Catching the Light*

CHAPTER INFORMATION

Newsletter Deadlines

In order for donations, articles, poems and other material to be included in the newsletter, we must receive them by the 15th 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.

Are you Moving?

Each time a newsletter is returned to us with an incorrect address, it costs us 44 cents to retrieve it in order to find out where you've moved; then we pay another 44 cents to mail it back to you. This is in addition to the original bulk mail cost. 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 right away. You may call, write or email the chapter leaders or the newsletter editor. 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.



BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

Survivors of Suicide

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings and receiving their helpful newsletter, you may call the Crisis Center at 615 244-7444.

Sharing

Sharing is a community organization interested in helping parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn infant. Call 615-342-8899 to find out meeting time and place.

Alive Hospice Support Group For Bereaved Parents

The first Thursday of each month, an ongoing support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. For details, please call John Baker at 615 963-4674. For general grief (loss of parents, adult siblings, etc.) call 615 963-4732, leave a message and a counselor will return your call.

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.