

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



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

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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 25<sup>th</sup> 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.*

## Sharing Mementos of Our Children On Valentine's Day – February 14

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 on Valentine's Day as we share sweet remembrances of our dear children.

## *I'm Beginning to Know Your Children*

*I'm beginning to know your children  
From the things I've heard you tell  
From the pictures that you've brought here  
I think I know them well.  
Our hurt and sorrow is immense  
I'm not sure where to start.  
Compassion, after all, is  
Your pain in my heart.  
My thanks to you for listening  
To words wrung from my soul—  
We are The Compassionate Friends,  
That's all I need to know.*

Jack Bahm  
TCF, Louisville, KY

## 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.

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

Sorrow is like a precious treasure,  
...shown only to friends.

African Proverb 

## **CHAPTER INFORMATION**

### **What is the Yellow Slip?**

Please return your yellow renewal slip. After two years on the newsletter mailing list, those names that were added in that month of a previous year, will receive a yellow half-sheet asking that their subscription be renewed. This is simply to keep our mailing list and the information in it current. If you do not send the yellow slip back, we must assume that you no longer want the newsletter. Although you are given an opportunity to make a voluntary donation, there is no cost involved in your subscription. The newsletter is our gift to you for as long as you wish to receive it. You may request that your name be returned to the active list at any time simply by calling 356-4TCF (4823).

### **Religion and TCF**

The Principles of The Compassionate Friends state that TCF reaches out to all bereaved parents across the artificial barriers of religion, race, economic class, or ethnic group. Further, TCF espouses no specific religious or philosophical ideology. Despite our nondenominational status, many writers indicate that they have found comfort in their faith, and some have shared their anger and loss of faith. The opinions and beliefs expressed in letters, articles and poetry are those of the contributors.

### **Newsletter Deadlines**

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

### **The Birthday Table**

In the month of your child's birthday, a table will be provided at our meeting where you can share photographs, mementos, your child's favorite snack or a birthday cake, a bouquet of flowers—anything you'd like to bring. We want to know your child better, so please take advantage of this opportunity to celebrate the wonderful day of your child's birth and for us to become better acquainted.



## **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. The parent support group meets the second Thursday evening 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).

### **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.

## Think About This

You have to make your own music, sing your own song, feel your own joy and excitement, love your own peace and create your own harmony. Happy days, happy thoughts, happy feelings are decisions made by you. All that you see and feel and think is decided by you. Happiness can happen in the middle of difficulty, in the storm of life and in moments when going on is a real strain. It is a personal decision not to let disappointments whip you, not to let other people's decisions break your heart. There will be tunnels others will make for you to walk through, but if you hang on and decide everything is going to be all right, it will.

Joyce Sequichie Hifler  
TCF, Fort Wayne, IN

## To Parents Who Have Lost a Child Through Suicide

Parents and siblings of a young person who has completed suicide face an almost overwhelming burden of emotions. It is one of the cruelest tragedies that can happen to a family. To pull oneself out of the emotional wreckage is a mighty struggle. Each parent can be utterly devastated and unable to be supportive to mate or to surviving children. Other family members are shocked and unable to cope with the event. They do not know how to console or help us. Our friends wonder "how could such a thing happen?" They, too, do not know how to help us. We struggle with the "whys"...the unanswered questions and painful memories.

We who count ourselves as survivors...we've made it a year, two years; some of us are in the third year...would like to share a few thoughts.

First, you are not alone. We understand whatever you may be feeling for we have been there! Suicide can intensify the feelings of shock, denial, guilt, anger, depression...all a part of the grief process. The course of recovery is up and down. Give yourself plenty of time. You need a great deal of support, at least through the first year. The suicide of one's child raises painful questions and doubts and fears. We can find ourselves in a spiritual crisis. We question our beliefs and may feel cut off from God. Through sharing with others and listening to others who have walked the same path you may gain some understanding of your reactions, and learn some ways to cope.

But most of all, we, who are in the process of rebuilding our lives, have not forgotten the dark hours of those early days and weeks when we thought we could not live again. We cannot offer you any shortcut through the pain. There isn't any. But you can help yourself along the way to healing. We can offer you support, encouragement and the hand of friendship.

JoAnn Dodson  
TCF, Louisville, KY

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### *As Long As I Can*

*As long as I can,  
I will look at the world for both of us.  
As long as I can, I will laugh with the bird,  
I will sing with flowers, I will play to the stars, for both of us.  
As long as I can,  
I will remember how many things on  
this earth were your joy.  
And I will live as well as you would want me to live,  
as long as I can.*

Sascha. (Sascha's son Nino drowned at age 3;  
years later, her daughter Eve died by suicide at age 21.)

### *To Know Or Not*

*I wept I never had the chance  
In which to say goodbye.  
But would it have sat more lightly  
Had I known you were to die?*

*I've often pondered late at night  
About which would hurt the most,  
Anticipation of your leaving,  
Or acceptance of your loss.*

Richard A. Dew  
*Rachel's Cry*

Tears may soothe the wounds they cannot heal.

Thomas Paine

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There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than 10,000 tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.

Washington Irving



### Valentine Message

*I send this message to my child  
Who no longer walks this plane,  
A message filled with love  
Yet also filled with pain.  
My heart continues to skip a beat  
When I ponder your early death  
As I think of times we'll never share  
I must stop to catch my breath.  
Valentine's Day is for those who love  
And for those who receive love, too  
For a parent the perfect love in life  
Is the love I've given you.  
I'm thinking of you this day, my child,  
With a sadness that is unspoken  
As I mark another Valentine's Day  
With a heart that is forever broken.*

Annette Mennen Baldwin  
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen  
TCF, Katy, TX

### When I Yelled At God

*I yelled to God, "You took my child."  
He answered, "He is my child, too."  
I yelled, "How much it hurt to lose my child."  
He answered, "I know. I hurt too, for my son and yours."  
I cried, "God, my child was so wonderful."  
He said, "I know. They are all wonderful –  
I make them in my image."  
I groaned at how much I missed my child.  
God said, "Love will do that to you."*

*I loved him so much.*

*God said, "So do I.  
I've never stopped loving you or your child."  
I asked, "Why? Why did my child have to die?"  
He said, "You are not to know why,  
But know that now you understand  
how deep your love can be.  
You might not understand this now,  
But know that I have never stopped loving you  
or your child."*

Joe Ladd  
TCF, Nashville, TN

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

Leon Kennedy  
TCF, Clarksville, TN

## *For Baby*

*Like a miracle  
You happened  
You were there  
I was a flower  
Beginning to bloom  
Bursting with life  
Then you were gone  
Like music never written  
Existing only in my dreams  
And I love you still...*

Stacy Hooks  
TCF, Savannah, GA

## *What am I*

*I have only one son.  
And I am grateful to be so lucky.  
But to others that one is none.  
What am I?*

*He has a day of birth.  
But he did not move, he did not cry.  
He never had a life on this earth.  
What am I?*

*Now I have nothing.  
No dirty diapers, no midnight feedings.  
But I have the pain the death of a child can bring.  
What am I?*

*My son did live!  
For those nine long months inside of me.  
We learned because he had so much to give.  
I am a mother!*

Page Hassman  
TCF, Austin, TX

## *I had a Dream*

*I had a dream the other night  
It was a miracle, you see.  
I rocked you in my favorite chair  
And held you close to me.*

*I sang to you a lullaby  
So sweet and clear and fair;  
But then awoke, I called your name,  
And knew you were not there.*

*As darkness then engulfed me,  
I started to softly cry,  
"I love you so, my baby,  
Why did you have to die?"*

*I pray for sleep to come again,  
And hope that I will see  
Another dream just like before,  
With my son held next to me.*

Sherry Schwande  
TCF, Fond du Lac, WI

## *To My Miscarried Baby*

*Out of our love you came,  
Planned, wanted, welcomed.  
Your announcement created excitement, joy.  
Friends and family inquired,  
Do you want a girl or boy?  
Will you take Lamaze?  
What colors for the nursery?  
Then suddenly you're gone — and silence.  
No one talks about a baby that won't be.  
Were you real or a dream?  
I feel alone and empty.  
Where can I put my love that was for you?  
Now what does it mean?*

Betty Ruder  
TCF, North Shore Chapter IL

## **WHAT DO I DO WITH MY CHILD'S THINGS?**

This is a problem that faces all bereaved parents. We discuss it from time to time at our meetings. Some of us keep the child's room just as it was before the death. We don't want anything touched or moved. Some of us find solace in giving things away to close friends or relatives. Knowing that someone we love is wearing our child's clothes or playing with his or her toys brings us comfort. Some of us find we can deal with only a few items at a time: clothes one month; books another; perhaps toys a few months later. Some of us find that, as time goes on and we would have gotten rid of the things anyway, it becomes easier. For instance, after a while we realize that if the child were still alive, he/she would have outgrown the clothes. Then it's easier to give them away. Or he would have graduated from college this year and therefore would no longer use the study desk or clock radio. We can give these things away in the normal time sequence. The important thing is not to let others rush us into doing something before we are ready and not to let ourselves feel guilty about the amount of time it takes us to make decisions. When the time is right and the decision is right for us, we'll know what to do.

Nancy Mower  
TCF, Honolulu, HI

## Changes

Has anyone heard this recently? “What you need is a CHANGE” or “A CHANGE might do you good”? Easier said than done! To make a change one must first make a choice. In our situation, here are some choices we might feel the need to make:

If the radio or television plays a song or a program that reminds us of our child—CHANGE THE STATION.

If a particular room in our home is a constant reminder of our child—CHANGE THE FURNITURE.

If the church we attend only reminds us of our child’s funeral—CHANGE THE CHURCH.

If vacationing is not the same without our child—CHANGE THE PLACE.

If holiday rituals seem empty without the child—CHANGE THE ROUTINE.

So many reminders—so many choices—so many decisions. CHANGE—CHANGE—CHANGE.

We could go on and on making CHANGES, but one thing cannot and will not CHANGE. Our child has died. Nothing will CHANGE that!

So, what are we to do? Are we trapped forever, making endless CHANGES? I think not. CHANGE infers that we will take a different direction. I would hope that, through CHANGE, we will adjust our “living” to their “dying.”

We must make room for this tremendous loss we have suffered, and then, and only then, can we, in time, reverse some of our CHANGES and let some things back into our lives—a loving tribute to our child.

As totally painful as many things are now, time may eventually let them be a comfort to us, binding us even more closely to our loved one.

Mary Pilot  
TCF, North Adams Berkshire Co., MA

## Strange Words Welcome New Members

I am always amazed at the instant empathy we each feel as new members come to their first meeting.

We have the strangest welcome for these parents: “We are so sorry you have to be here.” In other organizations the questions are probing: where did you go to school, where do you work, where do you live? All designed to “size up” the newcomer, put him or her in the proper perspective of a neatly ordered world. For us, this information is meaningless. We know the world isn’t neat and orderly; we discovered that when we lost our children. We care about you, the newly bereaved parent, whose life was tossed into a cosmic blender when your child died. We care because we are you. We have been here a while, in this purgatory of pain. We have learned to live our lives in a different way, to place value on understanding and hope, the intangibles of the purest meanings of life. We have learned to value each other, to reach out and talk, to wait patiently during the silences needed to form thoughts. We listen intently as you quietly say your child’s name, tell your child’s story, speak of your heartbreak. Yes, this is a different kind of welcome. But it is the most deeply sincere welcome we will ever receive. We are kindred souls, you and I. Each of us lives in the “after death” world of losing our child. Each of us has learned gradually that the hope we have attained has made life better, lessened the pain, moderated the isolation, tears, emotional devastation and pure mayhem that once overtook us. Each of us has learned this slowly, in our own time and in our own way. Each month new parents who have suffered the most horrific loss that a human can endure are welcomed into our group. We reach out, we listen with our hearts and we remember.

Annette Mennen Baldwin  
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen  
TCF, Katy, TX



