

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.

Annual Balloon Release Set for June 13

The June meeting is a special one, for it marks the date of our annual balloon release in memory of our children. Families and friends of TCF are cordially invited to gather at our regular meeting place for this very special event.

Please plan to arrive early in order to have time to write a message to or about your child. (Paper, pens and biodegradable balloons will be provided.) The notes will be attached to the balloon's ribbon.

At 3:00pm we will walk to Centennial Park as a group for a brief ceremony. Following this, the balloons will be released and we will watch as they sail to the heavens until they are finally out of sight.

Immediately following the release, refreshments will be served. Any snack or treat that you can bring to share will be most appreciated. Don't miss this wonderful event!

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 |
| Murder/ Suicide | Joe Ladd 727-3284 |
| Small Child | Kenneth and Kathy Hensley 237-9972 |
| Drug/Alcohol Overdose | Ed Pyle 712-3245 |

Spring

*Where has my son gone?
Where is the blue of his big blue eyes,
The gold of his freshly washed hair,
And the warmth of his laughter?*

*Then I notice that in the spring, it seems
The sky is a little bluer, the sun a little
More golden and the breezes a little warmer,
And it's then that I know.*

*For a few days in the spring when I see
The sun rise, glance at the sky and enjoy
The warm breezes,
I feel his presence and not his absence.*

How I wish those days would last forever.

Kenneth Hensley
TCF Nashville, TN

CHAPTER INFORMATION

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.

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.

We Need Your Help

If you know a family outside the immediate Nashville area who has experienced the death of a child, regardless of age or cause of death, and you have access to the address (and phone number) of the parents, it would be most helpful if you would call us with that information. Our mission is to reach every bereaved family in Middle Tennessee, but we have to know about them in order to give them the support we ourselves have received. If you know the child's name, birth date, date of death and cause of death, so much the better. David Gibson, our outreach chairperson, will send a warm letter of sympathy and information about TCF along with appropriate brochures and articles. There will be no harassment, no phone calls, and no demands made upon the parents, and the information you provide is strictly confidential.



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.

Liftoff

*Colorful, shimmering spheres,
We send you in tearful devotion
To fly with the music of always
Into the kingdom of hope.*

*Though death tried his best to divide us,
Life and love keep the children beside us.
Our hearts fly along to the place beyond tears
With the colorful, shimmering spheres.*

*Rise gently, you glistening orbs—
You carry a precious freight—
All the love our hearts can command,
All the courage and hope that we can own.*

*Drift onward, you radiant envoys—
You carry with you much grief,
But laughter also, and smiles
You carry the memories of parents
You carry the thanks of sad hearts
Who relished their child's life
For a while, not for long—
Not nearly for long enough ...*

*We send you to fly to the sky,
To rise like the magical sun—
Tell Heaven about our loss
Declare it again and forever:
Our love for the children lives on.
Shimmering spheres, be released
As a symbol of deep celebration
Helping us to remember again that we—
Our children and we—
Are together enfolded by Spirit.*

*Though death tried his best to divide us,
Life and love keep the children beside us.
Our hearts fly along to the place beyond tears
With the colorful, shimmering spheres.*

Sascha

(Composed for the closing ceremony of the 1999 In Loving Memory conference for parents without surviving children.)

**Be sure to join us June 13 for the Annual Balloon Release
in memory of our children.**

It's June

It might have been her wedding. It was supposed to be his graduation day; his friends are there—he is not. You had always planned to take them to Disneyland, but it is too late for that, now. When they died, they took some of your future as well; they took your dreams for them. They left a hole in your life and you will never feel completely whole again.

Should you accept those invitations to weddings and graduations? Only you know what is comfortable for you.

Give yourself all the room you need, no matter what anyone else says. Perhaps this year, you will want to send a card or gift instead of attending the event.

One mom said she left a graduation with mixed emotions. She ached for her son's place in line, getting his diploma; but she also felt honored to have been invited by her son's friend and proud when they brought her flowers "for Jim," and she loved hearing all the stories about her son that they shared.

What you have left is the love you feel for them, the memories that they left you—these will always be a part of you. In this way, they are a part of your future.

This is a very sad and difficult time for you, so do something nice for yourself today. Isn't that what your child would have wanted?

L. F. Skagit
TCF, Mount Vernon, WA

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.

Helen Steiner Rice

This Mixed-up Grief

Have you ever noticed the many mixed-up, confusing emotions involved in grieving?

On the one hand, you feel restless; on the other hand, you feel like you don't want to move at all. You feel desperately alone, yet you don't want anyone around. You feel scatterbrained, forgetful, and yet frantically meticulous. You feel like crying at nothing, and sometimes laughing at anything. (Or do I have that backwards?) Being in a crowd of people is fine as long as they don't talk to you. And yet, if they don't talk to you, you feel as if nobody cares. You want so desperately for someone to mention your child, to remember the life that once was. And yet it can make you furious if ALL they want to talk about is the dead one, and never even mention the living ones.

Grief settles over you like a hot blanket. You're as cold as the winter snow. Grief presses on you like a steamroller. You're floating in a bubble above yourself. Grief boxes you in on four sides and introduces you to a pain no one should have to know.

But then, once again, you begin to feel compassion. You relate to other parents who have had an experience similar to your own. And eventually, with a light as sharp as a sunburst, you hear yourself saying your child's name with an unfamiliar smile on your face. You remember some of the funny times and feel laughter building in your throat. One morning you notice the sun is shining. Many days, months, and possibly years have passed unnoticed ... and somehow, you are still here. Even though your child is still...there. You feel your heart swell with a love you never even knew could exist. And you find a place in your life for something called (dare I say) peace.

And then, ever so gently, the memories enfold you in a warmth as soothing as a cool shower on a hot summer day, so you find you WANT to remember. And tender memories of love lift you to unreachable heights, to the brightest of stars, to the loveliest touch of your child.

Dana Gensler
TCF, Louisville, KY

A Bereaved Grandparent

I am powerless. I am helpless. I am frustrated. I sit here with her and cry with her. She cries for her daughter, and I cry for mine. I can't help her. I can't reach inside and mend her broken heart. I must watch her suffer day after day and see her desolate.

I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back. I can't bring Emily back for her. I can't even buy her a better Emily than she had, like I could buy her a better toy when she was a child. I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away. I can't even kiss a small part of it away. There's no Band-Aid large enough to cover her bleeding heart.

There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend and tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart that in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him. Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when I know it will never be okay, that she will carry this pain of "what might have been" in her deepest heart for the rest of her life?

I see this young woman, my child, who was once carefree and fun loving and bubbling with life, slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony. Where is my power now? Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better? Why can't I join in the aloneness of her grief? As tight as my arms wrap around her, I can't reach that aloneness. Where are the magic words that will give comfort? What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this? He has told me everything else I needed to know. Where are the answers? I should have them. I am her mother.

What can I give her to make her better? A cold wet wash cloth will ease that swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears. What treat will bring joy back to her? What prize will bring that "happy child" smile back again?

I know that someday she'll find happiness again, that her life will have meaning again. I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? This hour? This day? I can give her my love and prayers and my care and my concern. I would give her my life. But even that won't help.

Margaret Gerner
TCF, St. Louis, MO

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

The Grief of Fathers

Strength

*In the early days of my grief,
a tear would well up in my eyes,
a lump would form in my throat,
but you would not know—
I would hide it,
And I am strong*

*In the middle days of my grief,
I would look ahead and see that wall
that I had attempted to go around
as an ever-present reminder of
a wall yet unscaled.
Yet I did not attempt to scale it
for the strong will survive—
And I am strong.*

*In the later days of my grief,
I learned to climb over that wall
step by step—
remembering, crying, grieving
And the tears flowed steadily
As I painstakingly went over.
The way was long, but I did make it,
For I am strong.*

*Near the resolution of my grief,
a tear will well up in my eyes,
a lump will form in my throat,
but I will let that tear fall—
and you will see it.
Through it you will see
that I still hurt and I care,
For I am strong.*

Terry Jago
TCF, Regina, Canada

*When your mind
cannot find
an answer,
open your heart
and ask
for peace.*

Sascha

A Father's Prayer

I am a man, God, and I have been taught that I should be strong and show no weakness. My wife needs me to be strong; I cannot and must not be weak and lean on her. It is only with you that I can be honest, Lord, and even with you I am ashamed to admit it, but I want to cry. I can feel the tears securely dammed up behind eyes that want to burst.

There is a voice in me that shouts, **Be strong! Be a man! Show no weakness! Shed no tears!** But there is another voice inside that speaks softly and somehow I feel it is your voice, Father. Is it you who tells me that I am also a feeling human being who can cry if I need to? Is it your voice that tells me that maybe my wife needs the tenderness of my tears *more* than she needs the strength of my muscles?

You are right, Lord, as always. My wife needs to see my grief. She needs to feel the dampness of my tears and know the aching in my heart. Then, just as we became one to create life, we become one in our grief which mourns this death. I think I understand, Lord. It is in *sharing* the awful pain of my grief that I become an even stronger man. It is in sharing my tears that I share my true strength. Oh, God, help me to communicate my deepest and most sensitive feelings to my wife so we may become whole together.

Norman Hagley
TCF, Palestine, TX

Voices of a Mother and Father

“He held me in his arms and he made me share it and accept that his sorrow was as great as my own. He simply wouldn't allow my grief to divide us...push us apart, which is what happens so often where there is a loss like that.

And for as long as I live, I will respect and appreciate my husband for the strength of his understanding.”

Barbara Bush, Bereaved Parent
1988 Republican National Convention

“Barbara was our source of strength at that difficult time...We were heartbroken, but we tried to find comfort in God—to accept and learn from our sorrow.

You know, the death of a child can be a family maker or breaker. As we shared our loss, Barbara and I grew stronger together.”

George Bush, Bereaved Parent
McCall's Magazine, September 1988

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

Healing Waters

*rapids
of life rushing on
into the greater river
and eternal sea*

*feeling
the water flow past
my outstretched hand
causing no pause in the flow*

*trying
to force the water
to pay me the attention
I am due*

*still
it rushes by
and its force moves my hand
instead*

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
From *Catching the Light*