

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.

Our May 9 Meeting: Honoring Mothers

Mother's Day is a special day and it can be a difficult day for grieving mothers.

TCF will honor all mothers with special readings and there will be a picture board to display your child's photo. (Please bring a photo 5"x7" or smaller.)

Also, in what has become a tradition in the Nashville Chapter, miniature yellow carnations will be given to everyone who attends. We hope you will be there.



Circles

*How do you bear it all?
The cry came from a mother
Whose son had died only weeks before.
We were in a circle, looking at her,
Looking around, looking away.
Tears in our hearts, in our eyes.
How do we bear it?
I don't know,
But the circle helps.*

Eva Lager
TCF, Western Australia

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
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

The tears are fewer
The sadness less often
But the memories are strong

Georgina Kuwalek
TCF, Livonia, MI

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.

Picture Name Tags

If you will bring a clear picture of your child, wallet size or larger, to a TCF meeting, Lamar Bradley will make a beautiful permanent name tag with your child's picture on it for you to use each month. You will also have an opportunity to select your own butterfly to accompany the photograph. The original photo will be completely safe with Lamar and will be returned to you at the following meeting. The best part of this is that **there is no charge**. A big thank you to Lamar for unselfishly giving his time and talent.

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.

**'Reflections of Love Visions of Hope'
Describes 33rd TCF National Conference
July 2-4 in Arlington, Virginia**

One of the most healing experiences for bereaved families is a Compassionate Friends National Conference. If you're planning to attend The Compassionate Friends 33rd National Conference in Arlington, Virginia July 2-4, 2010, easy online registration is now available by visiting www.compassionatefriends.org. We also now have more details on what will be included in the conference. With 1500 expected to attend, four outstanding keynote speakers have been lined up for the conference. Registration for the conference is: (early registration through May 31) \$85 for adults ages 18 and older, \$35 for siblings and full-time college students; (late registration June 1 to June 15) \$125 adults and \$60 siblings and full-time college students. No refunds after June 15. For all the latest information, to register (download a conference packet), and to reserve a room at the host hotel Hyatt Regency Crystal City, visit TCF's 2010 National Conference Page at www.compassionatefriends.org. Registration packets will also be available at the next local chapter meeting.

Annual Balloon Release

Scheduled for June 13

The afternoon of June 13, 2010 marks the date of our regular June meeting and the sixteenth annual balloon release in memory of our children. Family members and friends are invited to participate. Each person will be given a bio-degradable helium-filled balloon to which you may attach a handwritten message (paper will be provided.)

Following a few moments of remembrance, the balloons will be released. The balloons are quite beautiful as they drift heavenward together. Afterward, the group will gather for refreshments and fellowship, so it would be helpful if you would bring a snack or treat to share.



Donations to TCF—How they are used

As a bereaved parent, there is so little we can do to commemorate the life of our child, but by giving a contribution to The Compassionate Friends in loving memory of a child or someone else, you are honoring the memory of that person and at the same time, helping to fund the work of your TCF chapter.

Why does a grief support group need financial help? In order to find the newly bereaved and to provide the kind of caring that the Nashville Chapter of The Compassionate Friends gives to bereaved families in this community, there are expenses of which you may not be aware.

Here are some of the ways your donations are used:

1. Brochures and articles concerning grief and TCF are supplied free of charge for the newly bereaved as well as professionals (hospitals, therapists, first responders, clergy, teachers and school counselors)
2. Stationery, envelopes, labels, donation acknowledgement cards, bookplates
3. Postage and P. O. Box rental (letters, reports, and the monthly newsletter)
4. Paper for the newsletter (Allegra Printing provides the printing of our newsletter free of charge)
5. Helpful books for the chapter library
6. Meeting supplies—name tags, registration cards and pens, birthday table setups, basic refreshments (drinks, snacks, cups, plates, napkins)
7. Telephone/Answering service
8. Program expenses such as videos, balloons and helium for the June meeting, candles and supplies for the December memorial service, bookstore gift cards for special speakers
9. Annual Membership fee and extra support given to the national organization

Your donations are very carefully used, and we thank you very much for helping to keep your TCF chapter one of the strongest and most successful in the nation.

Month of May Brings Tears, Fond Memories

The month of May is a time of many memories and many tears for mothers who have lost a child to death. The memories are tied to our natural association of May as being the “Mother’s Day” month. We can’t escape the reminders. Second only to the Christmas season in commercialization, Mother’s Day is thrust at us in television commercials, billboards, radio spots, magazine and newspaper ads and special features, local and national news shows and each store we enter. Heart breaking, emotional, touching movies or television shows are aired in May in big part because of Mother’s Day. The reminders are endless. Our emotions build and build until we think we will snap.

Most of us have memories of happier Mother’s Days, time spent with our children opening their gifts and reading their special cards, talking, laughing and enjoying the moment. The counterpoint to our memories is that Mother’s Day intensifies the deep void that will always remain in our lives. In the words of one mother, “One day after my son had been gone for several months, I realized that this nightmare life is my life forever.” May is doubly difficult for this mother because of Mother’s Day and because her son died in May. May is doubly difficult for me as my son was born in May.

Even without a birth or death anniversary, May can be extremely stressful and sad. We enter the countdown on the first day of May. Some of us begin to improve after Mother’s Day passes, some of us can’t let go until the month ends. Some of us suffer lingering effects for several weeks or months. My first Mother’s Day without my son was a horrifying time. No gifts, no cards, no call. I took all the cards he had given me for Mother’s Day and put them on my piano....the time honored place in our home for special occasion cards. My second Mother’s Day was different. I simply refused to acknowledge it. My husband gave me a card and a small gift, and we left it at that. A few tears, but we decided to relax and do things that would keep us away from the Mother’s Day celebrations.

This will be my third Mother’s Day without my son. I do miss him terribly; there will be no replacement for that relationship in my life. Unlike losing a parent, a spouse, a grandparent, a sibling or a friend, the loss of our child means the loss of a big part of ourselves. That is our new reality.

What will I do this Mother’s Day? I don’t really know, but it will dawn on me that I should do one thing or another. What you do this Mother’s Day is your choice. You owe no explanation to anyone. As we walk through this grief of losing our children, we owe no explanations. Our love for our dead children lingers, and in that love is a goodness and purity that allows us to gently be ourselves. Our emotions are not intended to offend; but sometimes the pain is so overpowering that we must block out the world. And sometimes, we are able to overcome it. I will handle it the best way I can. So will you.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
TCF, Katy, TX

In memory of my only child, Todd Menne

A Mother’s Touch

My husband Jeff grew up in a family of hugging, kissing, foot-rubbing, back scratchers. Affectionate folks! In my family, on the other hand, we only scratched mosquito bites, and certainly not each other’s. Although we loved one another fiercely, we weren’t very demonstrative. A wink, a squeeze, a peck on the cheek, a poke in the ribs — that was mushy stuff for us. Touching another person was not something that came easily to me; that is, until my first child was born. When the nurse placed that chubby cherub in my arms, the floodgates of my heart opened, and a torrent of overwhelming love poured out. I couldn’t keep my hands off the little dumpling! I learned first-hand what it means to “smother with kisses.” Caressing my precious baby came as naturally as breathing.

Other children came along, and I was reborn a certified, card-carrying cuddler. I learned how many of a mother’s day-to-day interactions with her children require her touch. Touching became a way of life for me as I fed, bathed, dressed, tamed cowlicks, and kissed ouchies. Its funny, but one of the things I missed most after my son Blake died was tying his shoes. When he was alive, that chore was the bane of my existence. Blake’s shoes were perpetually untied or hopelessly tangled in knots that would have defied Houdini himself. I rejoiced when the shoe designers came up with velcro closures, seeing an end to my nemesis. But would Blake wear those simple, convenient shoes? No way! Big boys wore shoes with laces, and most of all, he wanted to be like the big boys. So I armed my teeth, and kept tying and bending every fork in the house de-knotting. After Blake died, how my fingers ached to tie those little shoes one more time!

For most bereaved mothers I know, not being able to touch, to hold, to embrace our child is the most painful reality we have to face. The emptiness of our arms, the indescribable longing to have those arms filled again with our precious child, are almost more than we can bear.

At first, when our grief is fresh, it may be hard for us to touch anyone. We may close ourselves off emotionally, unwilling to touch or be touched, or to run the risk of being hurt so badly again. But mothers are touchers. With time, when the pain isn’t so intense, we may want to reach out once more. None of us ever outgrows the need to be touched, no matter how old we are. And what can be so comforting as a mother’s touch! Today, if you can, touch someone. Do it in the memory of your beloved child.

Patricia Dyson
TCF, Beaumont, TX

Yesterday is experience.
Tomorrow is hope.
Today is getting from one to the other
as best we can.

John M. Henry

We Who Were Left Behind

*We who were left behind
To know the shadows,
We who were left behind
To touch the night,
We who were left behind
To find each other,
To heal the darkness and
To share this day*

*We who have turned once more
To hope and loving
Though we were given graves
And lifeless children—*

*We hear them now
These children and their song
Reminding us
Reminding us again
That we must fill the time
We spend in life
With understanding
Tenderness and peace.*

Sascha

Spring

*I'm afraid of the spring
I'm afraid you might say
Of other children's voices
As they come out to play.*

*I'm afraid of the feelings
Deep down in my heart;
With all the pain and the hurt
I may fall apart.*

*Shall I shut all the windows
So I don't hear a thing?
Shall I shut my eyes
So I can't see the spring?*

*Shall I let winter live
The whole year through?
And feel safer inside
And a lot colder too?*

Penny Leneham
TCF, Brookside, NJ

The Penny Jar

During a recent local TCF meeting, one man said that he has developed some “quirks” since his son’s death, and one of them is to save pennies. He refuses to use his pocket change to pay for things, giving instead whatever larger denomination he may have and waiting for change. He says people wonder sometimes what’s wrong with him, but it’s only this: his son used to save pennies in a jar. Now the father puts pennies in that same jar. His wife explained further that the jar is emptied and refilled, and the accumulated money goes to a fund they’ve established to send boys to summer camp.

I like to hear stories like that because they illustrate the many ways people have found to memorialize their own child. Last summer our family went to Ontario, and at a campground on the outskirts of Brantford, I met a woman who lives in Brantford but spends much of her summer in her motor home at the park. We struck up a conversation over morning coffee, during which I mentioned my involvement with TCF, resulting from the deaths of my two little girls; and she told me that she had quite recently lost a grandchild. In fact, she said the family had had a tree planted in that very park as a memorial to that child. It was a project meant to encourage reforestation, and as we sat enjoying the beautiful morning in that lovely place, I was pleased and grateful that someone had established the project.

Another family regularly sends a contribution in their late child’s name to a children’s charity drive. And more than one family of our acquaintance supports a child through Foster Parents Plan, or a similar organization, that sends the family a picture and periodic progress reports on the health and education of one child in a disadvantaged area.

I know there are many ways of memorializing our children, and when we set out to do something, we needn’t mean to build a university. A simple jar of pennies growing into a sum of a camp tuition is just as real as a memorial, even though it begins with just a handful of change.

Faith Murray Ewald
TCF, Hindsdale, IL

Those of us who have worked through our grief...and found there is a future...
are the ones who must meet others in the valley of darkness and bring them to the light.

Simon Stephens, Founder
The Compassionate Friends
United Kingdom, 1969

Filling Holes

Today my husband and I went to the plant nursery and bought some flowers and bedding plants to go in our gardens. Spring is here and the weather is beautiful. Not cold at all...but also not so hot that the thought of puttering in the garden brings a groan of dismay.

I remember my first spring in this house. We were so excited. Our family was nearly complete. Our third son was on his way and we had just had a house built. We were at the plant nursery at least once a week. Our life was busy, bright, untainted by grief.

I remember our second spring in this house. How winter hung on, tenacious, unyielding, both outside and in our hearts. I remember the first warm spring day. I came home from work early determined to make SOMETHING grow in my life. Maybe I couldn't get my son to live, but I was going to make something live.

Grief was a raw, open wound then and my anger was deep. I was angry at the world, at God...at everything. And so I approached my yard, shovel in hand. I decided I had to have a garden in the middle of my yard. I began furiously digging out the grass, making an oval in the center. It took me hours digging out that oval. But I wasn't through. I then decided I wanted a garden right by my doorway, so I dug out that area too. And then I made big holes and tore out all the roots and stones and other junk.

I made big holes in my yard that day. And in the weeks to come I DID fill them with things. Funny thing, as I dug those holes and pulled on the grass, my anger drained away. My salty tears mixed with the sweat of exertion and the dirt and ran off my arms undetected to the outside world. Digging those holes provided an outlet for my anger and my hurt.

Today I dug some more holes. But this time my holes were smaller. And I filled them...with small, delicate flowers, purple and white. I put bulbs in the ground, too, filling other small holes. And I reflected back on another hole...the hole in my heart. No, I can't ever fill it with what "should" be there...my son "should" be almost seven now, full of energy and wanting to plant flowers with Mom. But I have filled that hole with other things...with love and healing and memories and with the lessons and the gifts my son gave me. I never saw those gifts that spring as I was digging out holes in my yard. And though I would rather have that hole filled with my son's presence, I am grateful for the gifts he gave. And so I will go on, filling holes.

Lisa Sculley
TCF Jacksonville/Orange Park, FL