

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.

August 11 Topic:

What's In a Name?

The ancients believed names had special meaning or significance. Sometimes a child was given a name as a prediction of what the child might become. Boys might be named Victor, or girls named Joy. In the Jewish community children were and still are often named after the great heroes of the faith, like David, Abraham, or Moshe (Moses) or Ruth or Miriam (Mary). Does your child's name hold special meaning? Was your child named after a favorite family member? Was your child named in honor of someone famous? Come and share the story of your child's name with us this month at 3:00 and help us get to know your child better.



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	Ron and Darlene Henson	615-789-3613
Small Child	Kenneth and Kathy Hensley	615-237-9972
Alcohol/Drug Overdose	Ed Pyle	615-712-3245

Attending your first TCF meeting can be difficult. Feelings can be overwhelming. We have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Please attend two or three meetings before deciding if TCF is right for you. There are no dues or fees. If you choose, you need not speak a word at a meeting. We are an international, non-denominational group, offering support and information to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. We need not walk alone.

Summer

On the beach, cool breezes blow across the water, but the sun's rays feel warm upon my face. The ocean laps gently at the shore. I see one golden haired lad with shovel and pail filling the moat around his carefully constructed sand castle. I remember another golden haired boy of years long past, wearing his bright red swimsuit, busy at his task and oblivious to all around him. Carefully, patiently, he fills and empties his pail again and again, molding and shaping the sand until he has it just right, until his perfect castle is completed. He runs to me, eyes aglow with pride, his dimpled smile stretched from ear to ear.

He dances around me. "Mommy, come see! It's finished! It's perfect!" We stand and admire it together. One bucket of sand turned upside down, a tiny trench encircling it. To us, it is a perfect castle. But then it happens. A wave, much bigger than the rest, washes away his labor of love. His green eyes fill, his lip quivers momentarily and then he squares his shoulders and announces, "Oh well, I'll begin again tomorrow." And now recalling that other sunny summer day, my own eyes brimming with tears, my own lip quivers until I remember that I, too, can square my shoulders and "begin again tomorrow."

Betty Stevens
TCF, Baltimore, MD

Memories

*The certain special memories
That follow me each day,
Cast your shadow in my life
In a certain way.*

*Sometimes the blowing wind
Or the lyrics of a song
Make me stop and think of you
Sometimes all day long*

*Memories are good to have
To share and keep in my heart,
Just knowing that you're still inside
Makes sure we'll never part.*

Collette Covington
TCF Lake Charles, LA

Dear Sis,

I remember the day you got sick and not being able to talk to you. I remember the day the doctor told us your tumor was malignant, and the days you got sick from the radiation and chemotherapy. You didn't like staying at the hospital. The last time I saw you was the day before you died. You were fine one minute, and the next minute you almost died. I wasn't around on the day you died, for I wasn't able to handle it at the time. I became angry at you for dying and I became angry at God, but I thought I had to be strong for the family, I thought I could not let my emotions show.

From time to time, I remember happy things. I remember your laughter and your smiles, which hinted at a bit of mischief, or of a joke you knew but wouldn't tell. I remember your wanting to put soap in one of those big fountains, and later, when I saw a fountain bubbling over with suds, I started laughing, looked up and said, "Paige, you got your wish." There were other days when we would go shopping, or you would take me on some adventure, and the time we got lost and wound up at the gates of the state penitentiary. You made me feel so special by telling me things that you wouldn't dare tell Mom and Dad.

How can I go on with life when you cannot? I know you are in Heaven, but I still hurt. My emotions struggle with my mind. Sometimes I am sad for me because I miss you so, but someday I will spend more time being happy for you and less time being sad for me.

Some people say that I commemorate your death when I go to the cemetery, but that isn't true. I go to the cemetery so that I can recall some of the emotions I felt when you were here. I don't want your memory to be dry and emotionless. Visiting the cemetery helps me focus on that emotion.

I know I cannot put this letter in a mailbox, but I hope that somehow, you can still read it.

Love always,
Your Sister

Claire Gibson
Sibling, TCF, Nashville, TN



Compassion

A heavy silence falls over the room.

*As I look up from my private sorrow
I notice each head is bowed;
Each parent lost in their own thoughts.
And we are all thinking about the same thing:
Our Precious Children.
Do they remember laughter,
Or a sweet tiny face?*

*Do they remember eyes that twinkle,
Or eyes that are eternally closed?
Do they remember a warm embrace,
Or a kiss on a too cool cheek?
Are they thinking about the first time they
saw their child or the last?*

*Tears fall silently down a father's cheek
as a friend hands him a tissue.
Sobs tear through a mother's body, while
someone moves closer to hold her
Now I discover my tears are not only for
my child, but also for yours.
And as you weep for your child,
you also weep for mine.*

*Arms reaching out...
Hearts reaching out...
To those who mourn the death of a child.
This is compassion.
These are the friends.
This is where our healing begins.*

Dana Gensler
TCF, South Central, KY

Challenge and Change

As I look back over the past six years since our son died, I realize how much I have changed. When we talk about grieving, we often forget to mention that we grieve, too, for the person we were before our child died. We might have been energetic and fun-loving, but now are serious and absorbed.

Our friends and family miss the *old* us too, and their comments show it. "Don't you think it's time to return to normal?" "You don't laugh as much as you used to." They are grieving for the person who will never be the same again.

Like the caterpillar that shrouds itself in a cocoon, we shroud ourselves in grief when a child dies. We wonder, our families wonder—when will we come out of it? Will we make it through the long sleep? What hues will we show when we emerge? If you've ever watched a butterfly struggle from the safety of the cocoon, you'll know that the change is not quick or easy—but worth the effort!

We begin to mark our struggle from the cocoon of grief when we begin to like the *new* us. When our priorities become different and people become more important than things; when we grasp a hand that reaches and reach in turn to pull another from the cocoon, when we embrace the change and turn the change into a challenge, then we can say proudly: "I have survived against overwhelming odds." Even though my child's death is not worth the change in and of itself, the changes and challenges give me hope that I can be happy. I can feel fulfilled again. I can love again.

Sherry Mutchier
TCF, Appleton, WI

Getting Better

*My tears feel warm on my cheeks now—
Not burning hot.
Is this a sign I'm "getting better"?
When I cry now I am almost often alone.
In the car, in the shower.
Or sometimes taking a walk.
I do not cry in public or feel as much panic.
Is this a sign I'm "getting better"?*

*I sleep the night through sometimes
And awaken without tears—for awhile.
They come now while I'm brushing my teeth.
Or making coffee
And are always gone before I say "Good morning."
Is this a sign "I'm getting better"?
Yes, I think so—but when does the pain end?
Perhaps when I no longer ask
Is this a sign I'm "getting better"?*

Shirley Blakely Curle
TCF Central Arkansas

Where Do I Go?

Now that you're gone, where do I go

*to see your fair smile
to hear your tingling giggle
to smell your dank hair after a swim
to listen to your questions
to touch your gentle cheek
to feel your bear hug?*

Where do I go

*to share all my years of wisdom
to find someone who'll tell me truth
to answer the phone that won't ring
to tell you I'm sorry
to know that I am loved and
to pour out my love and my tears?*

I shall go

*to the pictures that hold you forever
to the books we shared
to the music you taught me to love
to the woods we explored as one
to the memories that never fail
to the innermost reaches of my heart*

to where we are always together.

Marcia Alig
TCF, Mercer Area Chapter, New Jersey



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, Missouri

Today I Didn't Cry

Today I didn't cry. The pages of your scrapbook stayed dry. As I turned the pages, you came back to me, and we played in the park and I laughed at the ducks. I pushed your stroller down the sidewalk and we giggled at the birds. We had birthday cake and chased the fall leaves together. As I turned the pages, you and I lived again...we were brother and sister. I used to be afraid of closing the scrapbook. I thought the memories might fade if I didn't keep them fresh. But, I haven't opened your book in a long time, and today, when I did, you came back and I didn't cry.

I can't believe that it has been so long since you died, Austin. I was only a little girl then. And now, when I look at your pictures, it's like a very long time ago a whole different lifetime. I've grown up without you, little brother. You are pictures in the scrapbook, memories in my heart, and music in my flute. You are a part of me, and I don't need the scrapbook to remember you. Maybe that's why there aren't tears any more, I didn't lose you, baby brother. You really are a part of me. You are the part of love that never goes away.

Alicia Sims
From: Am I Still a Sister?

*The passage of time alone does not cause our grief to end,
but its softening touch helps us to survive.*

Wayne Loder

For many of us, there are few people with whom we can share our innermost feelings; yet these very feelings may be nearly exploding to get out! Perhaps for the first time in your life you are really angry — angry at God? —angry at your dead child? — just angry?

Are any of you bereaved parents going about your daily routines, appearing to those around you to be “doing well?” Yet, in your “alone moments” you hurt so badly you think you may never feel better again? Or perhaps you're not even resuming a routine, lack motivation, are barely functioning. Many bereaved parents have shared these feelings with each other.

Who would understand if you told them you started sobbing when you passed your dead child's favorite food in the grocery store? — Or that you had an urge to yell at the crowds nonchalantly walking in the shopping center, “Don't you know my child has died?”

Another bereaved parent would probably understand.

To how many of your friends could you tell that you kept some of your child's clothing “handy” and experienced a bittersweet feeling when you smelled these clothes?

Another bereaved parent would probably not think this unusual.

How fortunate you are if you can share these and other feelings with your spouse, family members, your minister, or good friends. However, many times, these people from whom you would expect the most support aren't equipped or can't handle your normal feelings of grief. One of the most often mentioned benefits of The Compassionate Friends, whether that be by attending the meetings, using the available listeners by phone or through the newsletter, is hearing that your feelings are not that unusual after all. It is also most comforting to hear from bereaved parents for whom it has been three, four, six, or seven years since their child died that they experienced many of these same feelings, worked their way through their grief and can now say, “I don't feel that way anymore. I really laugh and not feel guilty. I'm leading a productive life again. I may think of my child almost every day, and still miss him/her, but I no longer review details of the accident or illness, or circumstances surrounding their death. I'm no longer angry or feel guilty. Most memories are pleasant memories.”

This is why we “old-timers” continue to attend meetings, remain available by telephone and try to meet peoples' needs through the newsletter.

Carolyn Roincke
TCF, Ft. Wayne, IN

CHAPTER INFORMATION

Are you Moving?

Each time a newsletter is returned to us with an incorrect address, it costs us to retrieve it in order to find out where you've moved; then we pay again 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.

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 second Sunday 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 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. Call 615 342-8899 to confirm dates and times of meetings.

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.